PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

SIXTH SERIES—VOLUME 382

HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FIFTY-FIRST YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 2001–02

COMPRISING PERIOD
18 March 2002—3 April 2002

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18 March 2002

THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 13 JUNE 2001]

FIFTY-FIRST YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 382**

THIRTEENTH VOLUME OF SESSION 2001–2002

House of Commons

Monday 18 March 2002

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

DEFENCE

The Secretary of State was asked—

Procurement (North-West)

1. **Mr. Lindsay Hoyle** (Chorley): If he will make a statement on the impact on the north-west of planned MOD procurement projects. [40897]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): The north-west was successful in winning defence business worth about £1.2 billion in 1998–99—some 14.5 per cent. of total defence equipment expenditure—sustaining in the process an estimated 11,000 jobs. The current equipment programme offers significant opportunities, such as the joint strike fighter and the future carrier, for companies in the north-west to compete to sustain that level of business.

Mr. Hoyle: I welcome my hon. Friend's answer. What consideration is he giving to the important contract for which Leyland Trucks is tendering, involving an important part of supply to the armed forces? The company has held the contract in the past and it is coming up for renewal. What support can he offer for the thousands of jobs that depend on it?

Dr. Moonie: I am well aware that Leyland Trucks Ltd. is one of five companies invited to tender for the role of prime contractor for the supply of approximately 8,500 support vehicles over a 10-year period that is planned to start in late 2004. It is too early to give an indication of the specific industrial implications of the planned programme, but there will certainly be opportunities for subcontractors at least in the north-west.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): May I point out to the Minister the cuts in defence announced by the Government since the last defence questions? They scrapped HMS Fearless nearly nine months early, so there will be no assault ship in the British Navy until the end of 2003. They scrapped HMS Sheffield, which was due to remain in service until 2012. They scrapped the Navy's Sea Harriers, which were due to remain in service until 2015. Those announcements followed the decision to scrap 5 Squadron—the Tornado fighters due to remain in service until the deployment of the Eurofighter.

The Government have delayed, cut or cancelled the Tracer ground reconnaissance vehicle, the future offensive aircraft system, the Nimrod maritime patrol aircraft, Brimstone—

Mr. Speaker: Order. Some of those delays or cancellations should have taken place in the north-west.

Mr. Jenkin: I regret that the list is long, Mr. Speaker, but how can the Minister give any assurances to manufacturers in the north-west until he has the money that the Treasury has so far refused him? Or is it to be cuts, cuts and more cuts in defence under this Government?

Dr. Moonie: I suppose that I should have started by requesting your permission to make a statement, Mr. Speaker. However, I shall attempt to make my answer rather shorter.

I do not recall that any of those points had much to do with the north-west. However, on HMS Fearless in particular, while the ship has given sterling service, it is not considered financially worth while to spend more money on maintaining her in service for the short time that she will be needed. We have adequate assault capability through HMS Ocean and other ships at our disposal. It is not true to say that the early scrapping of HMS Fearless will have any constructive effect on our ability to deploy.

Russia-NATO Relations

2. **Dr. Phyllis Starkey** (Milton Keynes, South-West): If he will make a statement on steps to improve the relationship between Russia and NATO. [40898]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): The United Kingdom has taken a leading role in encouraging a step change in NATO's relationship with Russia. A confident and co-operative partnership between the allies and Russia, based on shared democratic values and the shared commitment to a stable, peaceful and undivided Europe is essential for stability and security in the Euro-Atlantic area. The alliance and Russia are working towards the creation of a new NATO-Russia council to identify and pursue opportunities for joint action at 20. NATO will maintain its prerogative of independent decision and action at 19 on the alliance's fundamental objectives.

Dr. Starkey: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. Will he outline some of the more practical measures to encourage joint working between Russia and NATO on issues of mutual interest?

Mr. Hoon: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her interest in this important subject. We are keen to develop the relationship with Russia as an essential further element of building stability and security in the Euro-Atlantic area. The practical measures that we have in mind include co-operation against terrorism, dealing with the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, peace support operations and new threats. Those are areas where NATO can seek to deepen its involvement with Russia immediately.

Mr. Mark Prisk (Hertford and Stortford): My question relates to the NATO-Russian council. Given the sensitivity of new members from eastern Europe that are now part of the alliance, will the Secretary of State confirm that he sees no danger of possible conflict between the existing North Atlantic Council and the NATO-Russian council? What is the Government's position on the council's remit?

Mr. Hoon: There cannot be a conflict because the existing council will have to agree to any areas of deeper consultation with Russia.

Having recently met my Czech counterpart both in Prague and in the United Kingdom, I certainly recognise that there are different perspectives on this important issue, which is, welcomed by countries such as the Czech Republic as a means of ensuring closer contact and deeper consultation with Russia.

Mr. John Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): I welcome my right hon. Friend's reply and the fact that NATO and Russia will work much more closely together, but can he assure the House that that closer relationship will not have any bearing whatever on the decision to enlarge NATO at the Prague summit?

Mr. Hoon: I can give my hon. Friend that assurance. Having recently visited three of the candidate countries where that issue is obviously extremely important and sensitive, I assure him and the House that there will be no relationship between the two issues.

Mr. Paul Keetch (Hereford): I, too, welcome what the Secretary of State has said about improved relations between NATO and Russia, but, following on from the question asked by the hon. Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Mr. Smith), can he tell the House whether that improvement is, in effect, dependent on the expansion of NATO? What happens at Prague will be an important test for NATO's relationship with Russia, so does he agree that any proposed enlargement of NATO presents no threat to Russia? Are Her Majesty's Government supporting all the applicant countries, especially the three Baltic states?

Mr. Hoon: Working backwards on those questions, no decision has yet been taken by Her Majesty's Government on which of the candidates should be offered an invitation. As I have said already, there is no relationship between this issue and enlargement. Although this is clearly also subject to the views of allies, it is certainly the preferred view of Her Majesty's Government that this matter should proceed quickly—that is, before enlargement is resolved.

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): Will the Secretary of State confirm that one of the bodies working for a closer understanding between NATO and Russia is the NATO Parliamentary Assembly? Indeed, the largest-ever conference and seminar between NATO parliamentarians and Russian elected representatives will take place in Moscow later this week. Does he agree that Russia is apparently growing towards a feeling that it is in its own interest to be surrounded by prosperous and democratic countries and that, if the Baltic states wish to join NATO and that wish is accepted, NATO could even play some part in improving the situation in the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad?

Mr. Hoon: I pay tribute to the work conducted by the NATO Parliamentary Assembly. It is important to have a range of contacts at every level between the democratic elements of Russia and allies in NATO, and I am delighted that that process continues. Having recently visited the Baltic states, and having discussed Kaliningrad at length, I recognise that there are issues, but that they can be resolved—if the House accepts this—not necessarily in the context of NATO, but certainly in that of the European Union and the free movement that the

EU requires of member states. However, I was assured that that issue was being regularly discussed and that it presented no difficulty whatever to the accession of the Baltic states to NATO or, indeed, the EU.

Forces (Manning Levels)

3. **Mr. David Cameron** (Witney): What progress has been made in reaching full manning levels in the RAF; and if he will make a statement. [40899]

5. **Mr. Robert Syms** (Poole): If he will make a statement on trends in manning levels of regular forces since 1997. [40901]

The Minister of State for Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): At 1 May 1997, the deficit for the Royal Air Force stood at 4.8 per cent. At 1 February 2002, that deficit was 2.4 per cent. By any standard, that is good progress. Turning to trends overall, there continues to be a shortfall in trained strength against trained requirement. However, I am pleased to report that, across the services overall, recruitment is favourable and retention is holding steady.

Mr. Cameron: I thank the Minister for that answer, but perhaps the raw figures should be considered instead of the percentages, and they show that the RAF was short of 1,149 personnel in January. Is he aware of the widespread concern that the Government plan to reduce the shortfall between actual and total manning strength by closing bases and scrapping squadrons, rather than by improving recruitment and retention? What assurance can he give to the many thousands of my constituents who work at or around the RAF base at Brize Norton that the Government will make an effort with recruitment and retention, rather than closing the squadrons in which they serve?

Mr. Ingram: I am surprised at such criticism from the hon. Gentleman about the RAF base in his constituency. In the past few weeks, we have made a major announcement that will have a significant impact at Brize Norton. Clearly, we have to ensure that all our recruitment and retention strategies are as well focused as possible. He will be aware of the significant effort that is put into that, particularly in relation to RAF aircrew retention packages, about which a major announcement was made on an improved enhancement structure. We are conscious of all those issues and considerable effort will continue to be made to ensure that we not only retain our skilled crews, but recruit people into the RAF.

Mr. Syms: Overstretch and undermanning seem to be the most serious problems. We know that the Army is 8,000 under strength and will perhaps only reach full manning by 2008, yet we are taking on new commitments daily. What new initiatives do the Government have to recruit more troops now?

Mr. Ingram: Again, we recently announced a significant uplift in the remuneration package for the services. Having said that, part of the assessment of how we intend to encourage people to join the forces is not necessarily based on remuneration. There are many other pulls and draws to encourage people to join the different services, including the Army. A wide range of initiatives is in place, including the remuneration and operational welfare packages. We are also considering how to deal with family welfare. The taskforce that I chair, which goes across Government, is examining ways to improve on some of the stresses and strains experienced by service families. As I said, recruitment is doing well in current circumstances with a significant increase in Army strength of 800 in the past six months alone.

Mr. David Crausby (Bolton, North-East): In light of the changing nature of the threat facing us, what consideration has my right hon. Friend given to stationing regular forces in different parts of the country, such as the north-west, which is a major recruiting ground for the armed forces?

Mr. Ingram: That is one issue that we need to address. It is important to consider the imbalance throughout the country in terms of the footprint of where bases are located. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is on record as saying that the problem needs to be tackled. The focus has been on the south-east for a variety of historical reasons. As we rationalise and improve the focus of some of our basing activities, we are considering how to improve that footprint across the whole country, including the north-west.

Mr. Stephen Hepburn (Jarrow): I share some of the concerns expressed by the hon. Member for Poole (Mr. Syms) on recruitment. South Tyneside has traditionally been a great area for armed forces recruitment. Is the Minister aware that there were 826 recruits from the region in 1997 and 902 in 1999, but that last year the figure plummeted to 420? Is that because youngsters think that they are more likely to be shot in Baghdad or Kabul, or is there a budgetary crisis? If there is not a budgetary crisis, will the Minister work with the Secretary of State for Education and Skills to discover why recruitment is so low?

Mr. Ingram: It is for neither of those reasons. People who serve in our armed forces do so with great pride. They recognise that they may have to make the ultimate sacrifice in defence of their country, and they do so. I said that overall Army strength has increased by 800 in the past six months alone. Substantial recruitment is taking place in some parts of the country, although we are not doing so well in other areas. That is why we are involved in various initiatives to discover why there is a recruitment shortfall in some areas and, if recruitment has dropped off, why. We also want to know what additional commitment we could make to particular areas to increase the levels to at least what they were before. I referred earlier to the range of initiatives in place to encourage people in the north-east to join all parts of the armed forces, not just the Army.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): The Minister is putting what could be described as either a brave face or a complacent face on an extremely worrying situation. The truth of the matter is that we are short of 131 pilots in the RAF, 8,000 soldiers and hundreds of people in the Royal Navy. We simply do not have enough soldiers, sailors and airmen to carry out the difficult tasks that they already have, and the statement this afternoon by the

Secretary of State may, for all we know, add more tasks to that list. When does the Minister intend that all three services should be fully manned? Will he put his job on the line and guarantee that they will be fully manned so that they can carry out their difficult tasks?

Mr. Ingram: It would be a brave Minister who put his job on the line over such a question. I have indicated the range of initiatives that we are taking. We could spend considerable time looking at some of the RAF's problems with the training of pilots and at the reasons for the shortfall, which goes back several years to when the hon. Gentleman's party was in power. There was great demoralisation in the 1990s. This party addressed that in 1997, and we have given greater focus to the armed services. We have now embarked on major procurement strategies to lift the quality of equipment, some of which is inadequate for the job. We inherited that problem too, and we are having to address it, so any criticism from Opposition Members is grossly misplaced.

The whole strategic defence review and the operations to which we have committed our troops in recent years have proved highly successful. The hon. Gentleman should know that his party was critical of our Macedonian deployment. We said that we would be in and out in 30 days, and we were. Not once did we hear from the Conservative party any acknowledgement of that success; not once did Opposition Members say, "Well done. The Government got it right." All we get is carping and criticism—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. David Kidney (Stafford): At RAF Stafford, there are more civilian workers than services personnel. Will my right hon. Friend keep a watchful eye out for opportunities to base more service personnel at Stafford? Will he acknowledge the tremendous contribution of the civilian work force, who enable our services to complete their full range of duties?

Mr. Ingram: The civilian staff, who number about 100,000, against an overall strength of about 200,000, clearly make a major commitment to the wide range of services that our armed forces are called on to deliver. I pay tribute to all who serve, either in the armed forces or in support of them, and to their efforts, especially when our forces are deployed in the dangerous circumstances that apply in Afghanistan and elsewhere in the world.

Afghanistan

4. **Hugh Robertson** (Faversham and Mid-Kent): If he will make a statement on troop deployments in Afghanistan. [40900]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): Around 1,600 United Kingdom service personnel are currently deployed with the international security assistance force in Kabul. I will make a statement to the House later today on our plans for future deployments.

Hugh Robertson: Given the difficult security situation, which is likely to continue for some time, and the desire of the Afghan Government and their people for troops to remain in Afghanistan for a protracted period, does the Secretary of State foresee an extension to the deployment beyond July? Will British troops be part of that? What will trigger a withdrawal?

Mr. Hoon: As the hon. Gentleman will be aware, the current United Nations mandate is scheduled to last only until June. However, I would be being less than honest with the House if I did not anticipate an extension. It is a matter for the UN, but any reasonable person looking at the situation in Afghanistan would have to say that there was a likelihood—I put it no stronger than that—of the UN wanting to extend the mandate. Obviously, any British participation will be contingent on the situation of our armed forces at the time, and on whether we feel that we can make a contribution to what will still, I am sure, as the hon. Gentleman has conceded, be a dangerous, difficult situation.

Mr. Michael Clapham (Barnsley, West and Penistone): My right hon. Friend will be aware that it is reported that President Bush said last week that there is no place for politics in fighting the war. Does my right hon. Friend agree that politics is integral to fighting the war against terrorism because it ensures that military action is directed towards justice and not revenge? In that context, does he agree that there should be no extension of hostilities towards Iraq, and that an attack on Iraq should not be countenanced without further authorisation—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The subject is Afghanistan.

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): The Secretary of State will recall that when he made his statement to the House three months ago announcing the original deployment, he intimated fairly strongly that, with the exception of headquarters troops, three months would be the maximum period. We are now told that it will be six months, and he has just intimated that it could be even longer. When will the Ministry of Defence take effective action to make sure that other European partners bear a fair share of the burden, because our armed forces are overstretched enough as it is?

Mr. Hoon: I apologise to the House and to the hon. Gentleman if I gave him that impression. If he reads my comments more carefully, I am sure that he will see that I did not commit the United Kingdom's armed forces to anything at all. I indicated the importance of considering the situation at the time. If he had to deal with those situations, I am sure that, being fair-minded and reasonable, he would come to precisely the same conclusion.

Syd Rapson (Portsmouth, North): Would the Secretary of State consider visiting Royal Marine headquarters in Portsmouth in my constituency to pass on the nation's grateful thanks for what the Royal Marines are doing, with our special services, in Afghanistan? Their contribution is unheralded and unpublicised, but efficient and very effective.

Mr. Hoon: I will certainly be willing to do that. I am sure that if my hon. Friend has the time to stay for my statement to the House later, he will learn still more about the plans for the Royal Marines.

Arms Exports

6. **Dr. Vincent Cable** (Twickenham): If he will make a statement on the role played by his Department in the promotion of arms exports. [40902]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): The Defence Export Services Organisation, within the Ministry of Defence, is responsible for co-ordinating Government support to industry in promoting legitimate defence exports. Other areas within the Department provide assistance as required.

Dr. Cable: Is the Minister aware of the work done by senior economists in his Department, as well as by independent academics, that suggests that the economic benefits of such export sales are negative? In particular, is he aware of the York study's conclusion that if arms exports were cut by half within the life of a Parliament, the national income would be unchanged, and there would be a net gain of jobs from civil redeployment? In view of that, why are the Government promoting arms exports in highly inflamed situations, such as with the export of Hawks to the Indian subcontinent?

Dr. Moonie: An independent study by two leading academic economists and two MOD economists into the economic costs and benefits of defence exports was published on 11 December last year. The Government broadly agree with its findings. It concluded that, rather than being subsidised, defence exports represented a significant net benefit to Government and to the UK economy more broadly. The study reported that defence export sales averaged about £6 billion in 1998 and 1999, and supported almost 100,000 jobs, many of which are high-quality jobs in cutting-edge industry. Its conclusions suggested that the ending of defence exports from the UK would involve a one-off adjustment cost of between £4 billion and £5 billion, which is equivalent to about 0.5 per cent. of one year's gross domestic product. In addition, there would be a continuous net cost to Government of between £90 million and £200 million.

European Defence Co-operation

7. **Dr. Nick Palmer** (Broxtowe): If he will make a statement on progress in multinational defence co-operation in Europe. [40903]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): Both the NATO defence capabilities initiative and the European capabilities action plan encourage nations to co-ordinate their efforts and work together in enhancing military capabilities.

The United Kingdom participates in a wide range of successful multinational co-operative arrangements, such as the UK-Netherlands amphibious force and the European air group. We also operate daily in multinational formations in the Balkans. We are actively seeking to build on such experiences and initiatives. The United Kingdom and France reviewed recently the work conducted under the letter of intent on naval co-operation signed in 1996, and further useful progress has been made.

Dr. Palmer: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his reply. Anyone except the most fanatical of Europhobes would accept that progress in this area is valuable. Can he give further concrete examples of projects on which we work with our European allies, and of the impact on our defence capability?

Mr. Hoon: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his interest in this subject. As he indicates, this is hardly an area where there ought to be any kind of criticism at all. By improving our joint capabilities, we are clearly enhancing the ability of European nations to contribute not only to their own defence but equally to the defence of others through the NATO alliance. One practical example is our work with Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden to develop a Nordic brigade under the Nordic co-ordinated arrangement for military peace support. I shall attend the conference of NORDCAPS Ministers in April.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): Does the Secretary of State recall the advice that his office gave to No. 10's foreign policy adviser that, if an EU-led force goes into Macedonia at this stage,

"the fledgling European Security and Defence Policy mechanism is not ready to undertake an operation of this magnitude and risk".

The advice continues:

"An EU-led operation in Macedonia would not be 'premature' but simply wrong."

I congratulate the Secretary of State on the forthright position that his Department took and remind him that, by contrast, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office said:

"if we do look like becoming isolated, we would do better to accept an EU mission".

What was the outcome of that disagreement in view between his Department and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office?

Mr. Hoon: Of course, there are never any disagreements between different Departments, or between hon. Members. However, I have to note the exception to my earlier comments about Members taking a sensible view of European initiatives.

To bring the hon. Gentleman completely up to date, I refer him to the outcome of the Barcelona summit that considered the possibility of European Union operations in Macedonia. It was a very good outcome that reflected the prudent British approach to the issue. It allows the European Union to make decisions later in the year on the basis of military advice and after agreement has been reached on permanent arrangements for EU access to NATO capabilities and staffs.

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): I remind my right hon. Friend that the regular forces at Faslane in my constituency will, as ever, wish to play their part in the multilateral defence force. However, the need for harmony at the naval base is important and the concerns of the civilian work force should also be considered. He knows that my colleagues from Portsmouth, Plymouth and Rosyth have been pressing the case for the civilian

work force in the naval warship modernisation programme. Does he recognise the loyalty and the commitment that the work force have shown and accept that the status quo is not an option? Will he allow them to play their full part in any proposals regarding multilateral defence force co-operation?

Mr. Hoon: My hon. Friend and I have had regular discussions about the excellent work conducted at the Ministry of Defence naval yards. He and I recognise that the working arrangements and practices of those places cannot remain at a standstill, and I pay tribute to the work force's efforts to try to find new ways of organising their work. The Government have yet to take a decision about how the matter will go forward, but I assure him that we will take fully into account the views of the work force concerned.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): May I point out to the Secretary of State that the document quoted by my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) was an account of the military advice that had been given? It said:

"Military advice is that the fledgling European Security and Defence Policy mechanism is not ready to undertake an operation of this magnitude and risk . . . There would be a real risk that the EU's first mission would end in failure".

By agreeing in Barcelona to an EU operation, has not the Prime Minister chosen to ignore the military advice for reasons of politics and nothing else?

Mr. Hoon: Before the hon. Gentleman asks questions of that kind, he should read the text of the Barcelona summit statements. It says that it will allow the EU to make decisions later in the year on the basis of military advice.

Mr. Jenkin: I put it to the Secretary of State that we have the military advice already. Besides, the Government have always given the assurance, in the words of the Prime Minister, that

"European defence would operate only when NATO chooses not to be engaged".—[*Official Report*, 11 December 2000; Vol. 359, c. 349.]

NATO has not been given any right of first refusal in this case, so why has the Prime Minister betrayed that assurance?

Mr. Hoon: Again, all I can do is refer the hon. Gentleman to the details of what was agreed. He is trying very hard to suggest that something other than what was actually agreed was decided upon. However, if he looks very carefully, he will see that the EU said that it could take decisions later in the year on the basis of military advice. That seems to me to be a wholly sensible, practical reaction to the very difficult situation in Macedonia. Had he read the text carefully, I would have thought that he would have strongly supported that view.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): The Secretary of State mentioned the importance of the amphibious capabilities of the United Kingdom and its co-operating allies. Naval capacity is fundamental to that, so when will the two new carriers, HMS Bulwark and HMS Albion, enter service? Given that there is only one bespoke helicopter carrier—HMS Ocean—has any thought been given to permanently converting one of the old carriers for rotary-wing use in the way that one was deployed recently?

Mr. Hoon: The timetable for procurement is proceeding according to previous announcements; there has been no change to it. We certainly look consistently at the range of capabilities, including platforms required for military operations. However, I am entirely confident that the present plans and proposals meet the needs of the United Kingdom, as expressed in the strategic defence review and as part of the work currently being conducted in response to the appalling events of 11 September.

Territorial Army

8. **Mr. Gregory Barker** (Bexhill and Battle): What his policy is on the Territorial Army. [40904]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): The strategic defence review concluded that the main role of the Territorial Army should be to provide an essential reinforcement for its Regular Army counterparts when deployed on operations. In keeping with that, both volunteer and regular reservists have contributed significantly to operations at home and overseas in recent times.

The strategy for the Army, announced in March last year, identified a number of areas where further study was required to ensure that it can undertake its role as effectively and efficiently as possible. Those studies are ongoing and include how to maximise the contribution of the reserves in an expeditionary environment. In parallel, work on a new chapter of the strategic defence review, following the 11 September attacks, is exploring the role that the armed forces, including the reserves, have in defending and protecting the United Kingdom.

Mr. Barker: I thank the Minister for his answer. Will he now admit that it was a catastrophic mistake by the Government since coming to power in 1997 to slash the Territorial Army by more than 18,000 men? Now that it has 2,000 fewer members than his own target of 41,000, how does he expect the hard-pressed TA to cope with the additional responsibility of homeland defence?

Dr. Moonie: The cut in TA numbers was entirely appropriate, given the end of the cold war and the reconfiguration of reserve forces.

Mr. Jenkin: The Secretary of State said it was a mistake.

Dr. Moonie: No, it was not mistake. To put the record straight, the Secretary of State said that initial assumptions involved a much larger cut than the one that was in fact made; the number of reserves therefore remains much higher than might otherwise have been the case—*[Interruption.]* I am sorry to have to point out to the Opposition that the cold war ended some years ago and that armed forces, even reserves, configured for the cold war have no relevance whatsoever to the situation in which we find ourselves. Reserve forces today are appropriately trained and are of an appropriate number to

handle the many tasks that we give them as forces much closer to the regulars than they ever were under the previous Administration.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex): Uncharacteristically, that was a less than frank answer from the Minister. It may have escaped his notice that the previous Administration made a serious cut in TA numbers at the end of the cold war; the cut made by the hon. Gentleman's Government was indeed a cut too far. Are you aware, Mr. Speaker, that the hon. Gentleman wrote me a letter on 4 March in which he said, in reply to a parliamentary question, that he was unable to provide the

"strength and establishment of the TA by unit and location"

as that information was not available? May I suggest to the hon. Gentleman that he now reassess the stance of the TA, finding out where it is and what it does, thus producing for Parliament an altogether more coherent, responsible and sensible plan on the deployment of the TA?

Dr. Moonie: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that we are well aware of the structure, function and roles of the TA. The fact that it may be inappropriate to provide a reply on the grounds of cost is well recognised in the civil service; the answer that the hon. Gentleman received was no exception to that. I point out again that our TA forces today are better trained, have higher morale and are far more appropriate than they ever were under any Administration to whom the hon. Gentleman belonged.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): I have to say that it is perfectly clear from the Minister's answer that the Government are in a shambles when it comes to our reserve forces. Not only is he out of step with his Secretary of State, who at least had the courtesy to acknowledge that we were right all along in warning that drastic cuts to the TA would damage our armed forces, but he was unable to tell my hon. Friend the Member for Mid–Sussex (Mr. Soames) where those reserve forces are located. It is high time that the Government answered the question that my hon. Friend put to the Minister. Will the Minister tell us when the cuts will be reversed, and give the House an assurance that any extension of TA responsibilities to homeland defence will not be at the expense of its valuable role reinforcing our regular troops?

Dr. Moonie: I suppose that, by convention, I must welcome the hon. Gentleman to his position on the Opposition Front Bench. I hope that, during future questions, he will perhaps be better informed than he is just now. Let there be no doubt—I am well aware of where our units are and of what they comprise. It is hardly surprising that I am unaware of the exact numbers in each unit, given the amount of work that we in the Ministry of Defence have to do.

A key part of the new chapter work is exploring the role of the armed forces, including the reserves, in defending and protecting the United Kingdom. The SDR aims to make the TA more relevant, more usable and more integrated with its regular counterparts. The fact that Opposition Members seem to think it appropriate to return to the old TA, consisting of static infantry battalions that would be of no use to anyone, reflects very much to their discredit.

Joint Strike Fighter

9. **Ross Cranston** (Dudley, North): What progress has been made in advancing United Kingdom participation in the joint strike fighter project since the selection of Lockheed Martin as a contractor. [40905]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): A number of UK companies are already closely involved with the joint strike fighter project as part of the Lockheed Martin team. Work is in progress on arrangements for placing lower-tier contracts, for which a range of UK companies are expected to tender. The Ministry of Defence is facilitating such involvement, and earlier this month it hosted a well-attended briefing day for industry.

Ross Cranston: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer; Members on both sides of the House will doubtless welcome news about progress on the joint strike fighter project. However, may I ask him a very blunt question? What does that news mean for jobs in this country, and for manufacturing and engineering jobs in the west midlands in particular?

Dr. Moonie: I am very well aware of the valuable contribution made by west midlands companies to our effort and procurement. The Government's decision to participate in the joint strike fighter project could reap as much as £3 billion for the UK economy in the system development and demonstration phase, and a potential further £24 billion for downstream production activities. On employment, the demonstration phase should sustain or create some 3,500 high-technology jobs nationwide, potentially rising to 8,500 in a few years' time. The west midlands will be one of the main regions to benefit; in particular, Smiths Industries will be heavily involved in work on the standing take-off, vertical-landing variant.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): May I remind the Minister that the joint strike fighter is, among its other roles, supposed to be a naval fighter? For that purpose, it is most important to have naval aviators with recent fixed-wing experience. Is it not therefore extraordinary that, before the joint strike fighter comes into service—indeed, perhaps some four or five years before—the Fleet Air Arm should lose its fixed-wing aviation and have its Sea Harriers withdrawn from service?

Dr. Moonie: Sea Harriers are being withdrawn from service because the Air Force considered it a waste to spend a great deal of money on updating them. That decision does not affect the pilots' future employment. As the hon. Gentleman well knows, they will be integrated into the joint Harrier project, and all of them will be retained in service. There will be no problem with the retention of pilots and, ultimately, the joint strike fighter's coming into service will enhance capability on board our carriers.

A400M

10. **Mr. Laurence Robertson** (Tewkesbury): When he expects to sign a production contract for the A400M. [40906]

13. **Mr. Andrew Turner** (Isle of Wight): If he will make a statement on the A400M programme. [40909]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): The A400M development and manufacture contract between OCCAR, which is acting as agent for the eight nations participating in the A400M programme, and Airbus Military was signed on 18 December 2001. The contract will become effective once Germany has gained Bundestag funding approval and is therefore able to make its full commitment to the programme.

Mr. Robertson: I thank the Minister for that reply. Of course, he touched on the vital point, which is when Germany will confirm the number of aircraft that it will order. What will be the minimum number of aircraft Germany will need to make the project viable in terms of development costs? What discussions has he had about the content of Rolls-Royce engines? That aspect is very important to a company in my constituency, Dowty Propellers, which hopes to have a great input into the project.

Dr. Moonie: Germany has promised to order 73 of the aircraft. In Berlin the week before last, I had discussions with my opposite number in the German Defence Department and stressed to him the importance of proceeding with the contract. He appeared in no doubt that—provided of course that the present Administration are returned at the next election—there will be no problem with Germany's continuing participation in the programme. With regard to Rolls-Royce, I am well aware of the importance that the project has for future employment and we are losing no opportunity to bring that to the company's attention.

Mr. Turner: Will the Minister return to the issue of the number of planes being ordered by Germany? He does not appear to have a fallback position if the Administration are not returned or do not confirm the numbers about which he sounds so optimistic.

Dr. Moonie: We have to rely on the information that we have at the present time. There is little point in speculating about what will happen, as the Germans assure us that the contract will be signed and that the appropriate number of aircraft will be involved. Clearly, should that not be the case, we will have to re-evaluate our position on the cost of the aircraft and whether the programme is still viable. However, at present I am convinced of the Germans' intention to go ahead with the project at the number specified.

Afghanistan

11. **Richard Ottaway** (Croydon, South): What representations he has made in the last two months to his European counterparts regarding the extension of the international security assistance force's mandate beyond six months; and if he will make a statement. [40907]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): I have regular discussions with my European counterparts on a variety of issues, including the international security assistance force. As I have already indicated to the House, any extension of the force beyond six months would require a decision by the United Nations Security Council.

Richard Ottaway: I am grateful to the Minister for that answer. In January, he indicated to the House that the bulk of the British troops would be deployed only for three months. In the circumstances, can he say which nations will make up the bulk of the six-month deployment and exactly what is the position with Turkey at the moment?

Mr. Hoon: I will make a statement to the House later this afternoon in which I will deal with those issues. However, I can say that discussions are continuing with Turkey, which has expressed an interest in taking on the leadership role in the ISAF. In recent discussions, we have felt more confident of its ability to do so.

First World War Soldiers (Pardons)

12. **Vera Baird** (Redcar): If she will take steps to obtain pardons for soldiers executed during the first world war. [40908]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): The question of granting pardons to those executed during the first world war was the subject of a careful and detailed review by my right hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton, North and Bellshill (Dr. Reid), the then Minister for the Armed Forces. The legal difficulties in considering pardons were fully explained in his statement to the House on 24 July 1998.

The position has not changed but that should not obscure the important and very positive steps taken to recognise those men as victims of the war and to remember them among their fallen comrades. Their public commemoration in the new memorial in the national memorial arboretum is very fitting.

Vera Baird: I thank my hon. Friend for that helpful reply. I ask him to consider two factors that have reignited the issue for some of my Redcar constituents. The first is that New Zealand passed the Pardon for Soldiers of the Great War Act in 2000, which pardoned the few people that it had executed in the first world war, thus showing that it can still be done. The second is that the independent Criminal Cases Review Commission routinely reviews convictions that are more than 50 years old, including executions, and makes sensible suggestions. Do not those two factors together suggest that a short independent inquiry might be able to give at least some people more satisfaction?

Dr. Moonie: Again, I should refer my hon. Friend to the careful and well-researched statement that the Minister made in 1998. The whole subject has been considered with great sympathy and care. The review took a wide

range of expert legal, medical and historical advice from within and from outside the MOD, including from those who seek pardons. The representations from the families of those who were executed and the views of surviving veterans of the war were of course fully considered, as was surviving evidence on the individual cases.

We understand that many people still seek pardons for the executed men, but pardons are an exceptional legal remedy requiring a level of evidence that, particularly in relation to medical matters, no longer survives. However, the difficulties over considering pardons should not obscure the important measures that have been taken publicly to recognise those who were executed as victims of the war.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): The Minister is right to say that this subject is far from simple. He may recall from the history books that when many of the executions took place there were mass desertions from the French army and that, rightly or wrongly, it was feared that similar events might occur in the British Army. He is also right to mention the national memorial arboretum at Alrewas in my constituency. If he has not already visited it, may I invite him and his colleagues to see that fitting memorial to those who tragically lost their lives?

Dr. Moonie: Yes. I can tell the hon. Gentleman that I have every intention of visiting the national memorial arboretum in the near future, and I shall of course inform him, as a local Member, when that visit is to take place.

Type 45 Destroyer

14. **Mr. Neil Turner** (Wigan): What the spending implications are of the revised procurement strategy for type 45 destroyers; and if he will make a statement. [40910]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): The revised procurement strategy announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in July 2001 on the type 45 provides better value for money to the taxpayer, secures welcome stability for our warship-building industry and preserves the possibility of future competition for a number of naval programmes. The £2 billion order for the first six ships was confirmed on 18 February 2002. Once completed and fully equipped with their principal anti-air missile system, the overall procurement cost for the six ships will be £4.3 billion.

Mr. Turner: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. Can the good news that he has announced on savings be applied to future contracts to ensure that we get increased capability and best value for the taxpayer?

Dr. Moonie: My hon. Friend makes a good point. Value for money remains the cornerstone of our procurement policy, with competition a key means to achieve that. The revised type 45 strategy shows that, through smart acquisition, the Government, working with industry, can deliver key national defence industrial capability and ensure best value for money. In the type 45 decision, as in other contracts, the implications for the UK defence industrial base are always considered before any procurement decision is reached.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): May I remind the House that I served with the armed forces parliamentary scheme on HMS Cumberland, where we saw at first hand the work that the fleet is doing? In answer to a previous question, the Minister referred to Sea Harriers remaining in harness until the new aircraft come into operation. When will the type 45s be available for operations, and what is the deadline for the Sea Harriers to come out of action and the new aircraft to go into service?

Dr. Moonie: The pilots will continue in service; the Sea Harriers will be withdrawn. That is what I said.

The armed forces have carefully considered the implications for the next few years, and the type 45s will come into full service in 2007, with their armaments. Given that our procurement strategy is very successful, that date will be met. Until then, there is a perfectly adequate screen of protection available for our carriers and any forces that we send abroad. We have been guaranteed of that, and it was very relevant to the decision on the Sea Harriers.

John Robertson (Glasgow, Anniesland): My hon. Friend is aware that the type 45 contracts were signed in my constituency; may I thank him on behalf of the constituents and those who work in all the yards affected by the decision? Has the strategic review considered any future ships so that we can meet the needs of the coming century? The yards of Scotstoun and Govan will be only too happy to build any more ships that he wishes to announce.

Dr. Moonie: I am sure they are, and I await their bids with interest. In addition to the type 45, there will be work on future carriers to be considered. That will provide opportunities for shipyards and other companies to compete for further much-needed business.

Patrick Mercer (Newark): During a visit last week to the dockyards in Scotland with the Select Committee on Defence, we found HMS Monmouth lying untended in dry dock, where she had been since January. No work had been carried out on her, her crew is lying idle, and the workers who would normally work on her are unable to do so. Would the Minister care to comment on that?

Dr. Moonie: Being completely unaware of the situation, the comment that I shall make is that I shall write to the hon. Gentleman about it.

Military Presence (North-West)

16. **Dr. Brian Iddon** (Bolton, South-East): What the size of the military presence in north-west region is; and if he will make a statement. [40912]

18. **Ms Ann Coffey** (Stockport): What the size of the military presence is in north-west region; and if he will make a statement. [40915]

The Minister of State for Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): As at July 2000, there were 1,904 service personnel based in the north-west. In addition, there are 2,128 civilian Ministry of Defence staff and more than 4,000 reserve forces based in the region.

Dr. Iddon: Under this Government, unemployment has fallen significantly throughout the north-west. Has that had any significant impact on recruitment to the armed forces in our region?

Mr. Ingram: Undoubtedly. One of the characteristics that we are having to deal with is fuller employment in all the regions where before we would have had very good recruitment returns. Because of that, we have to renew our efforts and raise our game, so to speak, to ensure that we continue to attract the high-quality recruits that we need. The north-west is one of the areas in which we have a very good record of recruitment—one of the highest in the country.

Ms Coffey: I am pleased to learn that there are 4,000 reserves based in the north-west. As my right hon. Friend's Department is undertaking a new chapter in the strategic defence review to consider a greater role for the reserves in homeland defence, will he confirm that the north-west should see an increase in the number of reserves in future?

Mr. Ingram: That is an important question because the new chapter, which has been mentioned in responses to previous questions, will clearly have an important impact across the wide reach of our armed forces, not least in the reserves and the territorials. It is too soon to say precisely what the impact of any change in activity will be on the regional footprint, but I shall ensure that my hon. Friend is kept up to date with any changes in her area.

Veterans

19. **Mrs. Betty Williams** (Conwy): What steps he is taking to improve the handling of veterans' issues. [40916]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): Since the announcement of the veterans initiative, and my appointment as Minister with responsibility for veterans' affairs one year ago, we have built up a partnership with veterans organisations and with other Government Departments to develop an integrated policy for veterans. This is well advanced, and will address veterans' concerns across government and identify means of improving the delivery of services to veterans, particularly the most vulnerable.

Working through a veterans forum and a ministerial taskforce, we have agreed an action plan and commissioned nine working groups, made up jointly of representatives of the veterans community and of interested Departments, to identify ways of giving practical expression to the plan. We expect to see the first results of this work later this year.

Mrs. Williams: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. Several of my constituents were very grateful for the settlement for far east prisoners of war that was announced in November 2000. Does my hon. Friend recognise, however, that prisoners of war who suffered horribly in German camps and on forced marches have still not been recognised in this way? I believe that they have been unfairly treated.

Dr. Moonie: This is a matter to which we return time and again during parliamentary questions and in Adjournment debates. I recognise the level of suffering of former prisoners in German prisoner of war camps, but it did not, in general, match that experienced by the prisoners of war of the Japanese. This matter has been very carefully looked at in the past, and I believe that the prisoners of war to whom my hon. Friend refers have been treated sympathetically and appropriately.

Terrorism

20. **Lawrie Quinn** (Scarborough and Whitby): What plans he has to adjust defence capabilities in respect of the coalition against international terrorism. [40917]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): The work being conducted in the Ministry of Defence on a new chapter to the strategic defence review is designed to ensure that we have the right concepts, forces and capabilities in place to deal with the threats that were manifest on 11 September. This work builds on the solid foundation of the strategic defence review, which left the United Kingdom well placed to meet the additional challenges that we now face. I expect to be in a position to announce some conclusions in the spring or early summer.

Lawrie Quinn: Notwithstanding the deliberations that his Department is undertaking, will the Secretary of State tell us whether, in the event of a new problem appearing on the horizon, the Department would have the facilities needed to implement the changes, representations and conclusions embodied in the work in progress, and to respond to any further terrorist threat?

Mr. Hoon: I can give that assurance. Obviously further policy work is under way, but it does not affect our practical ability to deal with a new terrorist threat should it manifest itself.

European Council (Barcelona)

3.30 pm

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement about the European Council in Barcelona on 15 and 16 March.

Two years ago at Lisbon, the European Union set out to become the world's most competitive and dynamic economy by 2010. Since that time, the European Union has created 5 million new jobs. There are now nearly 3 million more women in work. Tax rates on low wage earners have been falling. We have agreed a new framework for competitive telecoms markets. Telecoms liberalisation has cut the price of calls across the European Union by almost a half. As a result of the EU action plan, internet access has doubled across the EU. We have cut red tape for small firms so that a private limited company can now be set up in under two weeks in 10 EU member states. We have recently agreed proposals to deliver a single EU securities market, and cheaper capital for small firms.

However, the recent difficulties faced by the world economy mean that we cannot rely on cyclical growth to deliver the employment that Europe's citizens need. We must therefore push ahead with the structural reforms to Europe's economy.

At Stockholm a year ago, progress stalled. Barcelona had to recover momentum. There is no doubt that after Barcelona we are indeed moving again, although there is still much ground to be made up by 2010. Such progress as there is represents a tribute to the European Commission and the leadership of the Spanish presidency, and I pay tribute to the excellent chairmanship of Prime Minister Aznar.

We set a timetable under majority voting to complete the single market in financial services, itself capable of boosting Europe's national income by half a percentage point. No fewer than 25 different liberalising measures have already been agreed. Seven more key measures will be agreed by the end of the year. Most of all, we made a breakthrough in opening up the European energy market. All member states have now agreed fully to open up the non-domestic market by 2004 with free and fair competition. That represents over 60 per cent. of the total market in gas and electricity. In addition, it is clear that the overriding majority of EU countries are now ready to open up their domestic markets as well. We agreed a decision on the relevant directives to be taken by majority vote, at the latest by the end of 2002. That means that for the first time a single market in energy is now attainable.

We agreed to deliver broadband technology across the European Union by 2005. That means internet access at 10 times the present speed. We agreed to boost our commitment to research and development towards a target of 3 per cent. of gross domestic product by 2010. The new research framework programme will spend 17.5 billion euro to that end. New industries such as the growing biotech market will benefit significantly. We agreed to implement by the end of 2002 proposals to reduce regulation on business, and a new system for consultation with business before regulation is introduced.

Those steps go hand in hand with a social policy that seeks to encourage more and better jobs for all. The record of the British Government in this regard is strong. We have guaranteed fair rights at work. We have a national minimum wage. Our disability, gender and race equality legislation is among the most advanced in Europe. We have introduced a new system of tax credits to make work pay. Our new deal has put more than 300,000 young people into work. Since we came to power, unemployment in Britain has therefore fallen to its lowest level for 25 years. We have one of the highest employment rates in Europe overall, including for women and for older workers. [HON. MEMBERS: "Barcelona?"] At Barcelona, Europe agreed that the enlargement agenda must focus on measures such as those, targeted at jobs, enterprise and moving people into work rather benefit, without heavy-handed regulation. It was, in other words, in agreement with the British approach—increasingly a European one. As the Barcelona conclusions say,

"employment is the best guarantee against social exclusion".

The enlargement countries came to Barcelona and for the first time participated in policy debates. We also discussed how to make our decision making more streamlined and efficient once we become a European Union of 25, 27 and more member states. I welcome the proposals of the Secretary General of the Council, Javier Solana, which will now be taken forward by the Spanish presidency. In many respects, those echo the ideas that Chancellor Schröder of Germany and I put forward in a recent paper on Council reform.

The Council also addressed a range of pressing international issues. The European Union committed to increase its average development aid to 0.39 per cent. of GDP by 2006. That achievement owes a lot to the lead given by my right hon. Friends the Chancellor and the International Development Secretary. It is worth an extra $7 billion a year. If delivered it means another 80 million children in schooling for the first time in Africa and elsewhere.

On the middle east, we underlined the extreme gravity of the present situation and called on both sides to take action to stop the bloodshed. We welcomed the resolution adopted by the United Nations Security Council last week and the initiative taken by Crown Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia offering full normalisation of relations with Israel in return for full withdrawal from occupied territories. There must be an immediate ceasefire all round to give the peace process a chance to start to work again.

On Zimbabwe, the European Council accepted our judgment that the elections were neither free nor fair. It agreed to take forward specific measures through the Foreign Ministers.

On the Balkans, the Council warmly welcomed the agreement brokered by Javier Solana between the authorities in Serbia and Montenegro for a new relationship within a single state. That agreement underlines just how far the countries of south-east Europe have come in the past four years. A democratic Government is in place in Belgrade. Milosevic is on trial in The Hague. Kosovo has held successful elections for its provisional Government. Moderates are in power in Croatia and Bosnia. The noose is tightening around Karadzic. In Macedonia, active diplomacy last year stopped what would have become another Balkan war.

Progress at Barcelona came about in large part through Britain acting in alliance with others. Prior to the summit, we took initiatives with no fewer than seven different countries. Five years ago, such alliances between Britain and those other countries would have been unthinkable.

[The Prime Minister]

Under the last Conservative Government, Britain was marginalised, without influence appropriate to our weight and size, in the isolation room of Europe. Now, from the economy to defence to institutional reform, Britain is in there, shaping Europe's future, making Europe work in a way that is better for Britain and for Europe. The policy of constructive engagement is right. Britain's proper role is as a leader and partner in Europe. We will continue to get the best for Britain out of Europe. Under this Government, the days of weakness and isolation will not return.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): I thank the Prime Minister for his statement on the Barcelona economic summit and for giving me early sight of it.

We on the Conservative Benches deplore and condemn, as he would, the violence that we yet again saw on the streets of the city while Ministers were discussing their various points. There were, however, some good points to come out of Barcelona, and I want to start with them. On overseas aid, we say unequivocally that we welcome the goal of increasing the average EU contribution to 0.39 per cent. by 2006, and we look forward to the Economic and Finance Council's report on debt relief for the least developed countries. However, I suspect that we will still need to see greater speed in the delivery.

Out of the 30-odd pages of the presidency's conclusions, only about four short paragraphs can possibly give the Prime Minister cause for any significant claims to progress. Those are only aspirational anyway. For anyone reading it, 99 per cent. of the document is simply Euro-waffle. For example,

"The euro clearly demonstrates what the European Union can achieve when the political will is there."

What on earth does that mean? Does the introduction of the coins demonstrate "political will"? What of the euro's decline in value against the dollar and the pound?

What about the serious crisis in pensions? In Europe that has been going on for years. Governments have been warned about it. The document states that

"the European Council calls for the reform of the pensions systems to be accelerated to ensure that they are both financially sustainable and meet their social objectives"

That is meaningless. There is a crisis, and that is the best that Ministers can do. Let us hope that what is proposed is more coherent than paragraph 32, which calls for—this is the ridiculous bit—"early retirement incentives" and in the next breath states that they want an

"increase of about five years in the effective average age at which people stop working".

Wonderful muddle and contradiction.

At Lisbon two years ago, did not the Prime Minister describe that summit as a "sea change"? After Barcelona, it is difficult to find out from the Prime Minister's words whether he sees the tide as coming in or going out. In October last year, did he not refer to Barcelona as

"make or break for Europeans' future prosperity"?

Yet yesterday those two high-flying aspirations had been reduced to—I quote his own words—"limited but solid achievements".

The Prime Minister said a moment ago that the EU was getting more like this Government in Britain. Well, there is another 10-year plan that they seem to have copied.

Did not the Prime Minister fail to get any action to enforce the lifting of the illegal French ban on British beef, which is costing our farmers so dear? Some £200-million worth of exports would be a shot in the arm for the beleaguered agricultural sector. I seem to recall the Prime Minister, when he was in opposition, criticising my predecessor for failing to get any movement on that, yet it is five years later and there is still no movement from the Prime Minister.

Did the Prime Minister get firm action on asylum seekers, who are costing the rail freight companies £500,000 a week? There was nothing in that regard.

Was not the Prime Minister pushed into accepting UK involvement in further military operations in Macedonia—both militarily risky and essentially a political gesture on our part—knowing full well that the Ministry of Defence has said that it is against it?

Did the Prime Minister really sign up to the dishonourable concept of the EU effectively offering 30 million pieces of silver to bribe the Gibraltarians, to try and get them off our hands?

What of Zimbabwe? No words on decisive action; just more delay and more talking. Once again, under the Prime Minister's leadership, the wrong message was sent to Mugabe.

Would the Prime Minister tell the House how a strongly worded statement on the US steel tariffs sits with the refusal of the French to open up their energy markets? We have a French state-owned subsidised energy sector buying up British utilities while refusing to open up to free and fair competition. Where was the make or break there?

In Lisbon the aim was "a fully liberalised and competitive telecoms market by the end of the next year." That was 2001. Two years later in Barcelona, we are told that "further progress is needed." A telephone call in Europe costs three times as much as in the United States. Where was the make or break there?

Lisbon was about making Europe more competitive. Since then, Europe has gone backwards. Hourly labour costs in the EU have risen—risen—by 3.5 per cent. between 2000 and the autumn of 2001. The working time directive, the European works councils directive and so on have all reduced market flexibility. Where was the make or break there? The Prime Minister went to Barcelona to urge the need for less red tape on industry, yet in Britain alone more than 5,000 more regulations have been imposed on industry in the past year. Where is the make or break there?

Was not the Prime Minister isolated in his support for America in dealing with the potentially lethal problems of countries possessing weapons of mass destruction—Saddam Hussein and Iraq? Where was the make or break there? Absolutely nothing. The Prime Minister claims to be at the centre of European decision making. After the last summit, he said:

"Europe needs Britain to be engaged and Britain needs to have influence in Europe."—[*Official Report*, 17 December 2001; Vol. 377, c. 27.]

Let us look at the facts. On asylum, he has lost the bilateral agreement with France that Germany and Denmark retain. On Zimbabwe, the Commission,

the Belgians and the French have all rolled out the red carpet for Mugabe. Where was the Prime Minister's influence? Is that what he calls having influence in Europe? I doubt it. At Nice he gave up the veto in more than 30 areas. What influence did he gain in Barcelona from any one of those? None.

Once again, Barcelona failed to address the future of the common agricultural and fisheries policies. Without this sweeping reform, all talk of economic reform founders at the first hurdle.

The Prime Minister came back with so little from Barcelona that half his statement was taken up in talking about what Britain had been doing in the past three to four years—there was nothing about the EU. The truth is that Barcelona was, once again, all about fine words from the Prime Minister and no action. After claiming for five years to be at the centre of Europe, is it not an indictment of him that such an important summit can have achieved so little and at such great cost?

The Prime Minister: That response was certainly as anticipated and expected. I should like to deal with some of the points that the right hon. Member raised. He said that we had to speed up our delivery on overseas aid. I might point out to him that it was this Government who increased overseas aid after years of the Conservative party refusing to increase overseas aid. As for his strictures on Europe not going further on pensions, the reason is that we do not want Europe to run all the pensions systems of various countries. I am not sure whether he is saying that he does want Europe to do that.

The right hon. Gentleman made the extraordinary remark—extraordinary for reasons that I will explain—that nothing whatever had been achieved at the summit: no dates, no timetables. In fact, as I pointed out, 25 measures on financial services have been agreed and another seven were agreed at the summit, with dates attached. In respect of energy, the right hon. Gentleman said that nothing was agreed. In fact, it was agreed that 60 per cent. of the energy market—the non-domestic market—would be liberalised by 2004. The right hon. Gentleman accused us of giving away the veto on directives, but it is only because we have qualified majority voting on the directive to open up the domestic market that we agreed and were able to agree at Barcelona that by the end of this year there will be agreement on opening up that market too. As ever, with the greatest respect to the Conservative party, it has to be negative about everything to do with Europe.

The right hon. Gentleman also made the extraordinary statement that we should not be in Macedonia—that we should have nothing to do with it. I cannot believe—*[Interruption.]* The right hon. Gentleman will have to be a little less excitable and listen for a moment. I know that he does not believe that we should be in Afghanistan. *[Interruption.]* I think that the right hon. Gentleman should calm himself for a moment. He does not believe that we should be in Afghanistan; he does not believe that we should be in Sierra Leone; and he certainly does not believe that we should be in Europe, after the statement we have just heard. Then he said that we should not be in Macedonia, when it is as a result of our action there that we have managed to prevent civil war.

The right hon. Gentleman then said, in another extraordinary aside, that nothing was achieved in Barcelona and that it was a total failure and disaster. Why does he have to say that? Because, for the Conservative party, it is necessary always to be totally negative about Europe. There was one name that he did not mention in his response—one little thing that he did not get round to talking about: the position of Margaret Thatcher on Europe. The Conservative party has worked out its new policy on Europe, which is to be silent about it. Why does it want to be silent? Because it has moved further and further against Europe with every change that it has made. Just a few weeks ago, the shadow Foreign Secretary said again that he wanted to renegotiate the treaties.

Mr. Michael Ancram (Devizes): Revisit.

The Prime Minister: Oh, I see—that is the policy. That is clear, then. When the shadow Foreign Secretary revisits the treaties, what do we think that that visit will entail? Will he revisit it and say, "That was a good treaty; I liked that one."?

The Conservatives' policy on the single currency is, "Never. Not in any set of circumstances." We did not get a single word of dissociation from the remarks of Margaret Thatcher. *[Interruption.]* Well, does the right hon. Gentleman agree with her remarks? A nod of the head would do.

The Conservative right and the right hon. Gentleman say that nothing good comes out of Europe. How can anyone seriously argue for withdrawal from Europe? How can anyone seriously argue that nothing good has come from Europe in the past half century? What about rising prosperity and peace for our people? What about the queue of countries that want to join the European Union, with only the British Conservative party wanting to exit?

The right hon. Gentleman's policy is to talk about withdrawal and end up ruling out a single currency for ever, whatever the economic circumstances. I say in response that his policy on Europe is not an act of patriotism: it is an act of folly.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West): To coin a phrase, it is a joy, as ever, to hear another prime ministerial statement on a European summit. The only thing that was missing in the response that we have just heard was, "And another thing—I had that EU in the back of the cab once".

Does the Prime Minister acknowledge that, in the politics of this summit and increasingly in the politics of British involvement in the European Union, welcome and vital as that is—we obviously strongly support it—the fact that we do not have a clear timetable for a referendum on our participation in a successful single European currency is holding us back from making the diplomatic contribution that we could make in Europe?

When that referendum campaign comes, we will want a broadly based coalition of interests, which will involve some Conservatives, the Government, the Liberal Democrats, the CBI and the TUC. To be seen cavorting with the likes of Berlusconi, given the response that that has elicited from John Monks, is not helping to build that long-term coalition for the referendum.

We welcome the progress that was made on the liberalisation of energy policy, and we would have liked it to go further. None the less, it was a positive step and is to be welcomed.

[Mr. Charles Kennedy]

On Zimbabwe, when the three leaders are in the country tomorrow, will the Prime Minister take the opportunity to stress to them the continuing British concern, which is certainly shared by his party and by ours, and the need for trenchant action following that rigged election?

The Prime Minister: On the last point, our views have been expressed on many occasions and will be expressed again. What has happened is a tragedy for the people of Zimbabwe. It is important continually to emphasise that the main victims of violence and intimidation in Zimbabwe are not whites: they are black people—ordinary Zimbabweans—who wanted the right to elect a Government freely and fairly.

With regard to the initiatives that we took prior to the summit, as I said in my statement, we took a range of initiatives with seven different countries. Without any apology or hesitation, I shall continue to work with all Governments inside the European Union when I believe that it is in the interests of this country.

The tests, for the single currency must be passed. That is the basis for the referendum, and that is the position that we have taken for many years. I believe that it is right to judge the tests on the basis of the national economic interest, and if they are met, to put the case to the people in a referendum.

Ms Gisela Stuart (Birmingham, Edgbaston): I am sure that we all look forward to receiving postcards from the Leader of the Opposition when he revisits the various treaties of Europe. In the meantime, the Prime Minister referred to the progress that was made in Barcelona on constitutional and institutional reforms. Will he give us more details of how he sees the next steps, especially on reform of the workings of the Council of Ministers?

The Prime Minister: The important thing about the proposals that we put forward with Germany before the summit was that we were saying that, when the European Council enlarges—and, frankly, even now—we should try to deal with a lot more of the detail of the business and the dossiers before we get to the Council, and that we need to make Council proceedings shorter and simpler. It is important to do that now, and it will be essential when we enlarge. The comments and proposals made by Javier Solana in that regard tie in well with that. Many people do not understand—although I know my hon. Friend does—the implications of the probable addition of 10 member countries to the European Union in 2004. That will significantly change the whole nature of the EU. These proposals for detailed change may seem anoraky, but they will be vital to the proper working of the Council.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe): First, I congratulate the Prime Minister on the modest advance that has been made towards energy market liberalisation in Europe. I also congratulate him on using arguments about labour market flexibility against his critics in the TUC that are identical to those that were used a few years ago by Ministers in the Major Government when the right hon. Gentleman was leading the Labour movement in opposition to that Government.

Will the Prime Minister comment on progress towards a single market in financial services, from which this country could benefit considerably? It is all very well to have seven directives, but they are a modest advance towards the aims of the Lamfalussy agreement. Does he think that it will be possible to improve on the target of 2005 for an integrated capital market, and does he think that his new alliances with centre-right politicians in the European Union might enable him to improve on that?

The Prime Minister: I thank the right hon. and learned Gentleman for those generous comments on the achievements of the summit. *[Interruption.]* I thought they were fine, actually; I liked them.

In respect of energy, it is worth pointing out that before we got to the summit people thought that we would not be able make advances on any front. In fact, on non-domestic we have done so. The important point is that only one country is standing out against liberalisation, but because we will be able to decide the matter on a majority voting basis we should be able to get round that in time.

On financial services, I agree with the right and learned hon. Gentleman that we have to do far more to make progress on the Lamfalussy proposals, and I think that we will be able to do so. I also hope—this is not directly in relation to financial services—that we can unblock the single European patent negotiations, which are essential for the future.

As for the Governments with whom we work, we work with both centre-left and centre-right Governments when it is the country's interests to do so.

Denzil Davies (Llanelli): My right hon. Friend may know that prior to the summit the European Commission estimated that the European Union's gross domestic product per head of the European Union stood at around only 65 per cent. of the equivalent figure for the United States. In view of that, and given that enlargement will further reduce the European figure, is not it reasonable to assume that Europe may never catch up with the United States and that the euro may never be able to look the dollar in the eye?

The Prime Minister: I think that my right hon. Friend takes too pessimistic a view. If Europe makes the necessary structural reforms—the single currency makes those all the more important because of the lack of exchange rate flexibility—we will indeed be able to compete with the United States and we will have a huge opportunity to do so. When the European Union finally enlarges we will have a market of about 500 million, which is bigger than those of the US and Japan combined. If we look back over the past few years at the changes that have been made in Europe, it is clear that many parts of the continent are enjoying a prosperity that was previously unheard of.

I am not minimising the challenges—that is why I described the progress at the summit as solid but limited. It is important that we continue the process. I repeat the view that I have taken throughout—that we are far more likely to get a Europe that is more shaped in Britain's image and in agreement with what we believe in if we are in there pursuing our interests in a constructive way.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Rochford and Southend, East): Is the commitment to fair and free elections in Zimbabwe wholly consistent with the widely reported comments in

the Spanish press and in *The Daily Telegraph* that the Prime Minister and the Spanish Prime Minister discussed making an offer of £35 million to the people of Gibraltar if they voted yes, but offering them not a penny, and the undermining of their financial institutions, if they voted no? If that is in any way true, would not it be worse than Mugabe ballot rigging?

The Prime Minister: Well, it is not.

Kate Hoey (Vauxhall): Following on from the question of the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir Teddy Taylor), did my right hon. Friend speak to the Spanish Prime Minister during the private chit-chats that happen at Council meetings? If so, did he convey the feeling of the House and the country against any dilution of Gibraltarians' rights to be British? Did he also tell him that Gibraltarians, who are marching in their thousands today, will not be bought off?

The Prime Minister: The Government's position and the constitutional guarantees remain, as we have said constantly. I stress to my hon. Friend and those on the Conservative Benches who want to disown the Brussels process, which the previous Government began, that it is manifestly in the interests of the people of Britain, Spain and Gibraltar to find a proper modus vivendi for the future. It is in everybody's interest, and the constitutional guarantees remain. Maintaining the stand-off that has occurred between people in Gibraltar and people in Spain when they live side by side cannot be in anyone's interests. The conspiracy theorists can have their theories, which abound, but what we are trying to achieve is in the interests not only of this country and our relationship with Spain but of the people of Gibraltar. That is why the Brussels process was started.

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher and Walton): The Prime Minister was right to say that at least the summit was moving in the right direction. However, for those of us who are committed to Britain's playing a full role in the European Union, it was rather disappointing.

Away from the public discussions, did the Prime Minister sense that the leaders of France and Germany were genuinely prepared to make progress and thus make a success of the single market, which Baroness Thatcher helped to create when she was at her peak as Prime Minister? Were they prepared to put in an effort to increase research and development by Governments and to deliver the broadband objectives for telecommunications by 2005?

Will the Prime Minister confirm that, under qualified majority voting—another great achievement by Margaret Thatcher—the energy market will genuinely open up after 2004?

Was there any discussion on the Galileo satellite network for global positioning, which seems vital if we are to make a full impact on world politics?

The Prime Minister: On telecoms, I believe that we will achieve the goal. I also believe, as I said to the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke), that we can be confident about achieving the goal for energy because we are able to open up the domestic market through qualified majority voting.

It is not for me to speak for the leaders of France or Germany, but I believe that the overwhelming desire of those who attended the summit was to push forward opening up the market. The Commission supports that position strongly, as do almost all the member states, whether centre right or centre left. I believe that there is an unstoppable momentum towards it. The pace of change will be governed by many matters, including political considerations. However, the atmosphere of the discussion of economic reform was qualitatively wholly different from four or five years ago.

We have agreed in principle to take Galileo forward. We insist on its civil application and proper systems of sound financial management. If they are in place, we believe that it could play a big part in the technology and technological opportunities for Europe in future.

Ms Debra Shipley (Stourbridge): What does my right hon. Friend consider to be the environmental impact of the European energy market that he described?

The Prime Minister: We have made it clear that at the same time as opening up the energy market, we must push forward on energy efficiency and fulfilling the Kyoto targets. We are well aware that opening up the market may benefit consumers on price but that it is important to take other measures on energy efficiency that are necessary for the environment. All the evidence that I read week after week suggests that climate change has become a more serious rather than a less serious issue. It is essential that the Governments of the world face up to its seriousness.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): To be generous to the Prime Minister, I believe that he misunderstood or misheard the comments of my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith) in response to the statement. My right hon. Friend challenged what the Prime Minister signed up to on British military deployment in the Balkans because it was specifically against the advice of the Ministry of Defence. Why did he disregard that advice?

The Prime Minister: Of course we do not disregard the advice that we receive. The point that I was making to the Leader of the Opposition—I am glad that the hon. Lady agrees that he requires translation nowadays—was that, if we are to play our proper role in the Balkans, it is important that we are part of the system of peacekeeping there. We learned from Bosnia, where we did not go in in the early 1990s when we probably should have done and where tens of thousands of people died, and in relation— *[Interruption.]* If the Leader of the Opposition will forgive me. In respect of any European role on defence, it has been made clear that it, too, must be consistent with the Berlin-plus arrangements for NATO. I say to the hon. Lady—as I keep trying to tell Opposition Members—that it must be right that Europe upgrades its defence capability so that, in circumstances where NATO does not want to be engaged, Europe has the ability to act. That, de facto, is what is happening in Macedonia. It is important that we take forward European defence and it would be a very, very great shame if we turned our back on it.

Mr. Ian Davidson (Glasgow, Pollok): Does the Prime Minister accept that there is great concern both in this

[Mr. Ian Davidson]

place and elsewhere that a British Prime Minister—a Labour Prime Minister—appears to have as his closest ally a Spanish Conservative and an Italian neo-fascist? Do not we spend our time trying to marginalise the right here, and is it not therefore contradictory to seek to ally ourselves with the right in Europe?

The Prime Minister: We spend a lot of time trying to marginalise the right and on the basis of the last two elections I think we have been reasonably successful. The reason for that is that we have been prepared to do things that sometimes, traditionally, people would not have done.

I am happy in the alliance that we had before the summit with Italy and with Spain. We also had one with Germany and with Sweden—both of which have centre-left Governments. It is important that when this country works with other Governments we are prepared to work across traditional lines. I see no problem whatever in that; in fact, it is one of this country's strengths. It is in part because we have been able to do that that we are making a difference in Europe, whereas previously we were entirely isolated. We should leave that type of ideological prejudice to the Conservative party and not adopt it ourselves.

Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory (Wells): Does the Prime Minister recall, two years ago, after the Lisbon summit, promising to lift the regulatory burden on small and medium-sized businesses, since when there has been a steady stream of new EU measures adding to business costs? Specifically, does he remember the pledge on page 17 of the Lisbon conclusions promising to set up an action plan to deal with that regulatory problem by 2001? Why was that action plan never brought forward, as the Barcelona conclusions recognise? Would it not be simpler if the Prime Minister and his colleagues agreed to keep the promises that they made in the past rather than waffling on, as they did at the latest Council, about what they hope to do in the future.

The Prime Minister: First, when the Leader of the Opposition was speaking, I should have said that the numbers given by the Conservatives for new regulations on business are actually the numbers of statutory instruments. Vast numbers of those have nothing whatever to do with regulation on business; indeed, some of them are deregulating measures. In respect of the action plan on Europe, that is precisely why we brought forward the Mandelkern report—to ensure that there is less regulation on small businesses—

Mr. Duncan Smith: What happened to it?

The Prime Minister: I am just about to explain what happened to it.

Secondly, we put in place a new mechanism for deciding regulation in Europe. The principles of that plan were agreed at Barcelona, so we did not fail to take it forward—we actually agreed to take it forward.

Mrs. Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside): Will my right hon. Friend tell us whether there were any discussions about how to tackle the international terrorism supported by Iraq, Iran and Syria? When his European partners were discussing a solution to the middle eastern conflict did they agree that those who support the suicide bombers and the suicide gunmen who kill young people on the streets of Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and Natanya do not want a just solution to the conflict but the annihilation of Israel?

The Prime Minister: The summit focused on economic reform as regards the foreign policy issues that we discussed, although of course the issue of the middle east was raised. I agree with my hon. Friend that the acts of terrorism that are taking place in Israel are absolutely appalling. In this country, we have experience of that type of terrorism—as have other countries in Europe—although on nothing like the scale seen in Israel. It is important, however, that the reaction of Israel and the Israeli Government is proportionate. That is why we welcome very much the moves that have been made by the Americans to send General Zinni back to the region. I think that Vice-President Cheney is there today. Without repeating all that I have said before, may I say that some people will condemn the Israelis and some people will condemn the Palestinian terrorists—we can all state our position on this—but the absolute essence of this is what action we are going to take to resolve the situation, because I understand the reaction.

I spoke to Prime Minister Sharon when I was in Barcelona, and I understand how difficult it is for a Prime Minister in situations where he knows that terrorist attacks are about to happen. Does he sit back and do nothing; or does he take pre-emptive action? I understand the problems that Israel has. My only point the whole time is what is the strategy to get from where we are to where we need to be, and that strategy has to involve minimum confidence-building steps of security and then, as soon as possible, going back into a process. There are signs, first, that Israel recognises, as the UN Security Council did in an open way, that there will have to be a viable Palestinian state at the end of this negotiation and, secondly, in respect of Israel itself, that the whole of the Arab world—this is why I welcome the initiative that Crown Prince Abdullah wants to take—must respect Israel's right to exist.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex): I very much welcome what the Prime Minister said in his statement about the middle east peace process—or so-called peace process—and the move towards it, but does he agree that, even allowing for the fact that Saddam Hussein and his regime have to be dealt with, it would be an act of culpable folly if any action against Iraq were to take place before there was a proper move towards a resolution towards peace between the Arabs and the Israelis?

The Prime Minister: As I said when I was asked about that at the summit, I totally understand why there is a lot of speculation about action on Iraq, but, as I constantly repeat, no decision has been taken at all in respect of any action. There is a very clear view, which must be right, that Iraq should come back into compliance with UN Security Council resolutions and that it certainly posed a threat on weapons of mass destruction, but no decision-making process has taken place as yet. I think, though, that it is very clear that, for the sake of the whole of relations with the middle east—with Israel and the

Arab world—we should all be doing what we can to get the peace process back on track there. That is pretty much a statement of the obvious, and there are many signs from the US Administration that they take their responsibilities seriously and are significantly upgrading their efforts to find a way through.

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): May I gently chide the Prime Minister for being too hard on the Leader of the Opposition? After all, when that right hon. Gentleman was a humble Back Bencher in the early 1990s, he worked tirelessly with the then Labour Opposition and others to ensure the defeat of his own Government on European matters, so all is not bad. May I remind the Prime Minister of the pre-eminence of London and Edinburgh as financial centres, with more than 1 million jobs involved? Can Europe not learn from our example of having a single financial regulator? What steps is the Prime Minister taking to ensure that the voice of business and finance is heeded when it comes to regulation and EU directives?

The Prime Minister: I agree very much with my hon. Friend about London and Edinburgh being major financial service centres, and I hope and believe that the changes that we agreed at Barcelona will make a difference, although the devil will be in the detail and we must make sure that whatever intentions are expressed in the Barcelona summit are carried forward in the directives that come through on financial services.

On the point about business and regulation, as I say, we agreed to commission a report by Mr. Mandelkern. That has now been agreed effectively, and that will make a difference to the way in which Europe views regulation. An indication of that was the agreement by Europe that industrial restructuring issues should be taken forward by the social partners—by the trade unions and business sitting down and talking together—rather than through regulation.

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): What became of the decision in the Gothenburg Council meeting that the following spring Council should be dedicated to sustainable development? How was the cause of sustainable development advanced in Barcelona? Although the extra £7 billion of international development aid is welcome, the target of 0.39 per cent. is barely half the United Nations target of 0.7 per cent. of gross domestic product. Will the Prime Minister at least give an undertaking that his Government will beat the EU average?

The Prime Minister: We have done a substantial amount on sustainable development aid and we led the way in securing that agreement at the EU summit. There are two ways to advance sustainable development: first, through our endorsement of the Kyoto process, our measures to improve energy efficiency and by having regard for environmental considerations in economic growth; and, secondly, through our decisions on aid and development. The hon. Gentleman might be right in one sense by saying that 0.39 per cent. is not ambitious when set against the UN 0.7 per cent. target, but it would be a huge advance if countries achieved the target of 0.39 per cent. because they are so far distant from 0.7 per cent. at the moment. We should not make the best the enemy of the good.

Mr. Mike O'Brien (North Warwickshire): Does my right hon. Friend understand the concern in North Warwickshire that while he was building stronger trade links with Europe in Barcelona, he was being undermined in this country by a former British Prime Minister who was in effect calling for us to leave the EU? Companies such as BMW, TNT and the IM Group are investing in the future in my constituency by creating jobs because they need that European trade link. The failure of the Leader of the Opposition to dissociate himself from the comments of a former leader of the Conservative party will raise questions in the minds—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The question is out of order and does not require an answer.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): The hon. Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien) mentioned manufacturers in the west midlands. Is the Prime Minister aware of the logjam in that region because manufacturers are unable to export to the EU through the channel tunnel? He will be aware that despite all the negotiations between the British Government and the French, there are still only 15 gendarmes and five security men guarding the Calais port. What steps have the Government taken while formulating the Barcelona treaty to ensure the permanent reopening of the channel tunnel for freight? May I remind the Prime Minister, when he says that Britain is in there shaping Europe's future, that the west midlands happens to be in Europe too?

The Prime Minister: This is a serious issue and of course we raised it with France at the summit. It is important that, over the next few days and weeks, the French authorities take proper measures to ensure that the exit route is secure. There is no doubt that the responsibility primarily rests with them. That point has been made repeatedly and will be made again.

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): Will my right hon. Friend elaborate a little more on the course of action likely to be taken by EU Foreign Ministers on the tragic situation in Zimbabwe? Given the condemnation of the election by the Commonwealth observers and statements by individual members of the Commonwealth refuting those observations, it might be necessary to recall the whole of the Commonwealth to repudiate what happened in Zimbabwe. That would be for the good of democracy in Africa, where other countries are also about to have elections.

The Prime Minister: European Union Foreign Ministers will discuss what further sanctions should be taken in respect of Zimbabwe as a result of what happened there. On the Commonwealth, my hon. Friend probably knows that crucial meetings will take place in the next couple of days. The conclusion of the Commonwealth observers' report, of most independent observers and of the parliamentary delegation from the Southern African Development Community is clear. That is why I believe that there is no serious alternative but for the Commonwealth to act against Zimbabwe. The EU will deliberate, in the limited way that it can, on what further sanctions to take in a couple of weeks.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): What precise arrangements did the Prime Minister reach with the Spanish, either bilaterally or within the context of the

[Mr. Edward Garnier]

Barcelona summit, on the future of Gibraltar? Is he prepared to go to Gibraltar, prior to the conclusion of the Madrid-London talks on the principles, to explain to the people there what he and his Spanish counterpart have in mind?

The Prime Minister: The process of discussion between Britain and Spain has not yet concluded. When it does, the proposals will be announced and people in Gibraltar will be able to see them. I appreciate what political advantage the hon. and learned Gentleman and his colleagues may squeeze out of this issue, but they would be very unwise to try to derail a process that was begun under the previous Conservative Government for a very good reason. In a European Union that is moving closer together, when relations between Britain and Spain are not those between the Britain and Spain of 20 or 30 years ago and when people in Gibraltar desperately need a good relationship with Spain so that they can go about their daily lives, it is important that we try to come to a proper accommodation.

The constitutional guarantees remain: in the end there will be no constitutional change unless people in Gibraltar agree to it. It would be very unfortunate—in fact, it would be misjudged and wrong—if the Conservative party attempted to inflame feelings in Gibraltar in a way that was irresponsible and wrong. In the end it is right for Britain, for Spain and for the people of Gibraltar that we find a sensible way forward.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): My right hon. Friend mentioned some of the complex alliances that develop in negotiations such as those in Barcelona. In view of the fact that many of the applicant countries were participating in the negotiations, what assessment has my right hon. Friend made of our relationships with those countries, particularly those in central Europe where there seems to be real enthusiasm for joining the European Union and an unstoppable momentum towards that end?

The Prime Minister: All those countries have made huge changes. In the past it would have been impossible to conceive of them entering the European Union in the numbers in which they will enter in 2004. Some of the initiatives that we took before the summit were with applicant countries, not least with the centre-left Government in Poland, and those countries look on Britain as a champion of enlargement. One of the most unfortunate things about the Conservative party's position is how far it seems to be moving away even from enlargement.

Mr. Jonathan Djanogly (Huntingdon): Most people saw Barcelona as a chance to get to grips with deregulation and liberalisation. I appreciate the Prime Minister mentioning the start of the deregulation process and the reports that are part of that, but is he not aware that businesses in this country see this Government as a regulatory Government and that regulations are increasing rather than decreasing? That being the case, will he now commit himself to practising in this country what he preached in Barcelona, and cut regulations on our businesses?

The Prime Minister: What business really welcomes is the economic stability that has delivered us the lowest interest rates and the lowest inflation for decades, the lowest unemployment that this country has had for 25 years and the highest employment of any major industrialised country. That is in addition to the measures taken, such as the reduction of corporation tax to boost business. The hon. Gentleman is mistaken. The procedures that we have agreed will allow us to take account of the views of business far better before regulation is made in Europe, and that is a significant step forward.

Mr. James Plaskitt (Warwick and Leamington): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is important to press on with enlargement in the EU, not only in the interests of the candidate members who were present in Barcelona but because enlargement will provide an added essential spur to structural reform?

The Prime Minister: I entirely agree. The enlargement process is essential for the future of Europe and for its security. It is one reason why it is so important that this country carries on playing a leading and constructive role in Europe. When the EU enlarges to 25, 27 or 30 members, it would be absolute madness for this country to be on the sidelines of Europe. Our national interest is heavily engaged in Europe, and all our experience teaches us that when we are engaged and we are constructive, we achieve results.

Brian Cotter (Weston-super-Mare): Will the Prime Minister give the House more information on the consultation with small businesses which he talked about? Will he give us specific information on the implementation of the small business charter, with firm dates and tick boxes? Will he consider the paper produced by Small Business Europe, which I have in my hand? Bearing in mind that that organisation was set up by the Government and has only recently started to operate in Europe, the paper contains important recommendations for small businesses in particular, and we would welcome views on it.

The Prime Minister: Small business co-operation in Europe is far better now, because of the changes that we have been making, as the hon. Gentleman implied. We have agreed a whole series of measures to take forward work with small businesses, but the important point that we have been trying to establish is that the right way forward on jobs, the labour market and enterprise is not for Europe to try to impose uniformity in all circumstances, but for us to agree certain objectives, benchmark that process, and then say that it is up to individual countries to take the measures necessary to get there. That is why a major issue in next month's Budget will be measures to stimulate small business and enterprise. Our belief is that in Europe, this is about getting the right process to judge the impact that regulation is having on small businesses, and the support for small businesses set out in the charter.

Afghanistan

4.26 pm

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): I would like to bring the House up to date by making a statement about the continuing role of the British armed forces in Afghanistan. It is just over five months since the global coalition, assembled in response to the terrorist attacks in the United States, began military action in Afghanistan. At that time we set out a number of specific short and longer-term campaign aims. Those included preventing Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda from posing a continuing terrorist threat, breaking the links between Afghanistan and international terrorism, and reintegrating Afghanistan as a responsible member of the international community.

Five months later, it is clear that that action has been remarkably successful. Afghanistan is now a very different country. The Taliban Government, who harboured the al-Qaeda terrorists, are no more. Terrorist training camps have been put out of action. The first steps towards creating a functioning state have been taken. Aid agencies operate with increasing freedom. Refugees are beginning to return to their homes.

I am particularly proud of the vital part that British forces have played in this success. I have set out on a number of occasions the contribution that they have made to the international coalition—reconnaissance and air-to-air refuelling flights, troops on the ground engaged in operations against al-Qaeda and Taliban elements, and Royal Navy participation in submarine and interdiction support operations in the Arabian sea.

Britain's armed forces have also played a significant role in leading the international security assistance force in Kabul, with some 1,600 British troops currently deployed with the force. ISAF's full operating capability was achieved on time on 18 February, bringing together more than 4,600 troops from 18 different countries in a harsh and demanding environment at a considerable distance from home. I pay particular tribute to General John McColl for his role in this.

ISAF is helping the Afghan Interim Administration to provide a secure and stable environment in Kabul. Life in the city is at last beginning to return to some kind of normality, as I was recently able to see for myself. ISAF is already training the first battalion of an Afghan national guard about 600 strong, with an ethnic make-up that reflects that of Afghanistan itself. It is also providing advice to the Afghan police. Where it can, ISAF has helped with much needed-physical reconstruction work—projects that range from repairs to schools to getting the city's dustcarts back on the road.

British forces deployed with ISAF include troops from the second battalion of the Parachute Regiment. It was always planned that they would return to the United Kingdom at the end of March to prepare for their deployment to Northern Ireland later this year. They are now in the process of handing over their responsibilities to the first battalion of the Royal Anglian Regiment.

Germany has agreed to provide a new headquarters for the Kabul multinational brigade—ISAF's subordinate headquarters—which has until now been provided by the headquarters of 16 Air Assault Brigade. A Bundeswehr brigadier will formally assume command tomorrow. That will enable us to withdraw a number of British troops from theatre, and is a demonstration of genuine international co-operation. So, too, is the Czech Republic's offer of a field hospital for ISAF. Following my discussions with my Czech counterpart earlier this month, the Czechs signed the ISAF memorandum of understanding last Thursday. Their contribution is very welcome.

The House will also be interested in the handover of the United Kingdom's responsibilities as lead nation for ISAF. Our talks with Turkey, which has expressed an interest in taking on the role, continue. It would not be appropriate to say too much before the talks are concluded, but the atmosphere in the high-level discussions between the United Kingdom, the United States and the Turks in Ankara last week was extremely positive.

We are therefore still working to transfer the leadership of ISAF. We are working hard to tie down the details, with the reassurance that Prime Minister Ecevit of Turkey has told my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister that he strongly supports his country taking on the role.

However, for all the progress that we have made in Afghanistan, the threat of attack from al-Qaeda and Taliban-related groupings and individuals across the country remains very high. The recent Operation Anaconda in the Paktia province, led by the United States, tackled one group of al-Qaeda terrorists and Taliban fighters. That showed that those people are still in Afghanistan in large numbers and that they are heavily armed. Left alone, those groups would threaten all that the Afghan people and their supporters in the international community have achieved so far and would strive to retain Afghanistan as a base for training and organising terrorism. They do not recognise the Afghan Interim Administration and will work to destabilise the situation across Afghanistan. Al-Qaeda and its supporters continue to pose a direct threat to states outside Afghanistan, including the United Kingdom.

I know that the House will join me in offering its sympathies to the families of the Afghan and American soldiers who died during Operation Anaconda and in paying tribute to all the coalition forces that were involved, including the crews of the RAF Tristar tankers and Sentry AWACS aircraft that supported coalition air strikes during the operation.

The United States has now formally requested that the UK provides forces to join in future military operations against other remnants of al-Qaeda and the Taliban elsewhere in Afghanistan. I have therefore authorised the deployment to Afghanistan of a full United Kingdom infantry battle group, built around 45 Commando, Royal Marines. That group will join a US-led brigade, forming a potent force ready to undertake such operations.

We have held 45 Commando ready for offensive operations in Afghanistan for precisely that purpose. The lead elements of 45 Commando—its headquarters company and "Whisky" and "Zulu" companies—are already in theatre, embarked aboard HMS Ocean. Arrangements are now in hand to deploy those elements to Afghanistan, where they will be joined by the remaining companies of 45 Commando—held at high readiness in Arbroath—and also the combat support and services support elements integral to the Commando Group. Those include: 7 Battery of 29 Commando

[Mr. Geoffrey Hoon]

Regiment Royal Artillery, equipped with 105 mm light guns, from Plymouth; 59 Independent Commando Squadron, Royal Engineers; and elements of the Commando Logistics Regiment. There is already a versatile range of helicopters aboard HMS Ocean to support 45 Commando Group. To increase the Commando Group's operational capabilities still further, we are also deploying a further three Chinook helicopters of 27 Squadron, RAF.

That is a powerful force, in total up to 1,700 strong. We will ensure that it is ready to take part in operations as quickly as possible. The force will go initially to Bagram, with the first members of 45 Commando Group on the ground within days, and ready to commence offensive operations by mid-April.

The deployment of 45 Commando Group is not a decision that has been taken lightly. It is our largest military deployment for combat operations since the Gulf conflict. It is important that the House is under no illusions about what this might involve. These troops are being deployed to Afghanistan to take part in war-fighting operations. We will be asking them to risk their lives. Their missions will be conducted in unforgiving and hostile terrain against a dangerous enemy. They may suffer casualties.

No Government take such decisions without reaching the absolute conviction that it is something that must be done. The appalling events of 11 September demonstrated very clearly that these al-Qaeda and Taliban elements have the ability and the desire to launch attacks right into the heart of nations such as ours. Both the deployment of the Commando Group and our deployment to Kabul as part of ISAF contribute to our overall objectives of ending the threat posed by international terrorism and restoring Afghanistan. Both are entirely consistent with the campaign objectives that we set out last October. However, the troops with ISAF in Afghanistan have their own difficult and demanding job to do; 45 Commando Group will have theirs.

By deploying 45 Commando Group we shall make a new and important contribution to defeating finally al-Qaeda and the Taliban. By our continued commitment to ISAF, we are helping Afghanistan regain her place as a stable and prosperous nation. I have no doubt that our armed forces will succeed in both tasks.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): I thank the Secretary of State for an advance copy of his statement, which I received earlier today. However, I am bound to say that I am a little surprised that we and the minority parties have had no advance discussions about this very significant announcement.

Nobody should be under any illusions that this is the most significant statement by the Secretary of State, the Foreign Secretary or the Prime Minister since 11 September. The Secretary of State has announced the commitment of the largest force to combat operations since the Gulf war in 1991. Moreover, this deployment follows Operation Anaconda in and around Gardez where American and German troops have been killed on operations. This is not just a continuation of existing operations.

Before asking about the deployment of 45 Commando Group, may I join the Secretary of State in congratulating our forces who are already in Afghanistan? In addition to other operations, 16 Air Assault headquarters and 2 Para have been doing an absolutely outstanding job. We are proud of them. We remain concerned about the future of our role in the international security and assistance force, so will the Secretary of State confirm that ISAF is proving a more protracted operation than he had initially hoped? Moreover, will he confirm that, as of two weeks ago, there were more than 2,000 troops committed to Operation Fingal in ISAF? When will we see substantial reductions in that number, so that we can go some way to reducing the over-commitment of British troops?

On the question of Turkey's leadership, I can tell the House that Turkey's decision on whether to lead the force is imminent, but has yet to be made. I can only assume that the Secretary of State had hoped to be able to make that announcement today. What assurances has Turkey been seeking? Is it true that, like Her Majesty's official Opposition, it has been seeking clarification of the nature of the ISAF commitment, so that it is not left stranded with an open-ended commitment without clear objectives? Will the Secretary of State confirm that it would prefer ISAF to be a NATO operation and that it wants ISAF's mandate to be confined to Kabul, as he suggested it would be when he first announced ISAF? Is it also true that only the United States and the United Kingdom will shoulder the financial burden of finding the $100,000 that Turkey has requested to undertake the operation? Why should Britain and the United States be the only countries to carry this financial burden?

The announcement about 45 Commando comes as a surprise. However, we unequivocally support the Government's decision to continue standing shoulder to shoulder with the United States in the war against terrorism. We recognise the dangers to which the Secretary of State has referred, but it is entirely appropriate that we should be prepared and proud to make this commitment. We supported the Government's initial deployment for fighting terrorism in Afghanistan and we continue to support continuing operations.

I have some immediate questions. Under whose command will the operation be undertaken? Will the United Kingdom commander of ISAF have any role in the command of this brigade? We have warned in the past of complications and the possible confusion that might arise from the split chains of command that now exist in the Afghan theatre, with two UK deployments under separate commands undertaking diametrically opposite roles? Will the Secretary of State say anything to address that ongoing potential problem?

There will be further and urgent questions, which I am sure the House will want to discuss. May I ask the Government, through the Secretary of State, to consider replacing Thursday's debate with a debate on the war on terrorism and the war in Afghanistan to give the House a proper opportunity to debate the serious issues raised by this very significant statement? In the meantime, on behalf of the Opposition, I wish our forces every success in the challenges ahead. They fight far away for our security at home; they risk their today for our tomorrow. We think of their families. God go with them.

Mr. Hoon: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's support and, indeed, his good wishes to the armed forces involved and their families. I shall endeavour to deal in turn with the points that he made. First, the deployment of ISAF is governed by a United Nations resolution that

is due to expire in June. As I told the House in defence questions earlier today, to be honest, I recognise that there is every prospect of the resolution being extended in June, but no specific decisions have been made, nor have any decisions been made about the involvement of British forces in any operation that might continue thereafter. However, all of us looking at the situation in Afghanistan must recognise that it is difficult and demanding and that ISAF is making a significant contribution to improving it; the likelihood of an extension of ISAF's mandate cannot possibly be ruled out.

As for substantial reductions in our forces, the hon. Gentleman gave some figures that showed that there has already been a significant reduction. Initial elements have been withdrawn, having completed in particular the task of bringing up to standard the runway at the former international airport, which is now being used successfully and regularly.

As for discussions with Turkey, it is not appropriate to go into detail now about the continuing negotiations with Turkey. I have told the House about the attitude of Turkey's leadership; I am sure that once many of the outstanding questions have been resolved, the commitment that Turkey has expressed in principle can be carried through.

On the Royal Marine contingent, clear command and control arrangements are essential, as the hon. Gentleman said. As part of our deployment, Brigadier Lane, the commander of 3 Commando Brigade, and his headquarters will deploy to Bagram, joining the headquarters of United States Central Command—Centcom—which is already there, to work alongside their American counterparts in Afghanistan. It is obviously important that there should not be any confusion between the various forces deployed in Afghanistan, particularly those on offensive military action. Ultimately, of course, the responsibility for command lies with Centcom, as it has done throughout operations. However, its role will be clearly distinct from ISAF's; there will not be any confusion of roles, subject to the agreement already entered into, for the avoidance of difficulty.

The hon. Gentleman requested a debate. The Opposition could doubtless pursue that through the usual channels, so I shall not make a specific response at this stage. However, there is a full Opposition day tomorrow, part of which is already devoted to a defence matter. If the hon. Gentleman thought it vital to have that debate tomorrow in time already available to the Opposition, I am sure that the Government would accede to his request.

Mr. John Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): I am not in the least surprised that 45 Commando is to be deployed in Afghanistan. I have just returned from Central Command; enormous tribute was paid to British service men already serving on the front line in Afghanistan. Because of our traditions and conventions, we are unable to pay them proper tribute, yet in the United States, people can. Is my right hon. Friend looking at the role of our special forces and our ability—I appreciate the complications—to pay tribute to them for the fantastic work that they are doing?

Mr. Hoon: It is obviously important to pay proper tribute to the role of British forces, particularly in Afghanistan, but also in other theatres. It is equally important that we maintain operational confidentiality and do not in any way put at risk those forces carrying out tasks on the Government's behalf.

Mr. Paul Keetch (Hereford): I, too, thank the Secretary of State for sending me an advance copy of his statement, although I echo the concerns of the shadow Defence Secretary; a deployment of this kind merits prior discussion, at least among party leaders.

May I pay tribute to the men and women of our armed forces, who continue to risk their lives in Afghanistan? As always, they perform an incredibly difficult task with great courage and skill. I join the Secretary of State in paying tribute to General John McColl, who is doing an excellent job. The whole House will offer its support to the men of 45 Commando—and their families—in the endeavours that they are about to undertake.

On ISAF, I welcome the Secretary of State's comments about Turkey. Does he agree that withdrawing any peacekeeping force before an indigenous law and order force can take over would deeply destabilise the people of Afghanistan, and throw away much of the good work already done? Does he therefore agree that the success of Operation Fingal is just as important as that of Operation Veritas? Given that ISAF is a UN-mandated force, does the UN plan to extend the duration of its mission or the mission boundaries? Indeed, is deployment of 45 Commando requisite on UN authorisation?

Will the United Kingdom or the United States provide logistic support for 45 Commando's deployment, and what is the timetable for deployment? How long, in the Secretary of State's view, will the Royal Marines be there, and can he assure the House that their rules of engagement will be robust? I echo the concerns of the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) about command and control. Will the operation be controlled directly from Centcom, in Tampa, or via Operation Veritas?

Most importantly, although we Liberal Democrats offer our support, can the Secretary of State confirm that our forces are being deployed not just as a replacement for American forces? What assurance has he been given that the United States will remain committed on the ground, as well as in the air, until the terrorist threat from Afghanistan is ended? Does he agree that "shoulder to shoulder" surely means not only going in together, but coming out together?

Mr. Hoon: I began by writing down that the hon. Gentleman's initial observations were practical and realistic, in that he did not ask questions that cannot be answered properly in a fast-moving and difficult situation. Unfortunately, he then proceeded to ask a number of such questions, but I shall do my best to deal with each of them.

On UN authorisation, the operation is being conducted in self-defence against those elements of al-Qaeda and the Taliban that continue to threaten the United Kingdom and other countries. Logistic support will be provided through the numbers that I gave to the House. In such difficult and dangerous environments, it is important that the forces deployed be self-sustaining.

I shall not give the hon. Gentleman a specific answer on timetabling; clearly, it will depend on what the forces find on their deployment on the ground, the resistance that they meet and the operations that they will have to conduct. Such deployments always demonstrate that there is a limit to how long we can keep people in the field—particularly a field such as that.

[Mr. Hoon]

I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman ended with that comment about the United States, which recently lost soldiers on the ground in conducting extremely dangerous and difficult operations. The United States will remain committed on the ground, and I am proud that British forces will work alongside their American counterparts in precisely such operations.

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): I welcome the progress made so far in Afghanistan, and the new deployment. It is vital that we remain committed in Afghanistan for as long as it takes, and we should not allow short-term domestic considerations—I know that my right hon. Friend will not—to pressure us into jeopardising what has been achieved so far. However, the lesson of the complications that we are encountering in Afghanistan surely is that we will not have resources available for any adventures in other parts of the middle east, such as Iraq.

Mr. Hoon: I think that I shall probably stick to talking about Afghanistan.

My hon. Friend is right to talk about the need to be there as long as it takes. No one who has read accounts of Operation Anaconda could be anything other than concerned about the level of resistance, the numbers involved and the determination of fighters, many of whom were not native Afghans but foreigners who remained to prosecute continuing attacks—in this case, against the United States. It is likely that there are similar organised elements in other parts of Afghanistan and it is vital for the future of Afghanistan—and the safety of the rest of the world—that we take the fight to those elements and deal with them.

Sir Peter Tapsell (Louth and Horncastle): Does the right hon. Gentleman recall assuring me before Christmas that the British Government would certainly not be sending British troops in to Afghanistan on the ground for any permanent combat operation, but would send them in only for special operations from which they would come out quickly? Does he recall what happened to the Russian army when it went into Afghanistan? Why should he suppose that our experience would be any different?

Mr. Hoon: The Royal Marines are ideally suited to precisely the kind of operation that I and the hon. Gentleman describe to the House, which involves moving fast, deploying quickly and dealing with the type of threat that I have described to the House.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): I am sure that the Secretary of State will confirm that this is mission creep on a massive scale. Will he tell us how many extra troops are being committed from the other 18 countries in the coalition? Will he confirm that parts of Afghanistan are now being carved up by some of the old warlords and that people are moving out of those areas? Can he give us an assurance that our troops will not be deployed in those areas, where they might get caught up fighting the Northern Alliance?

Mr. Hoon: The purpose of the operation is as I have set out. It is to deal with the remaining elements of al-Qaeda and the Taliban, who pose a continuing threat and it will involve other countries. I do not have the precise details to hand because that is a matter for those countries and, ultimately, for the United States. There are already other countries involved—countries other than the US were involved in Operation Anaconda—and I do not accept that there is any risk of British soldiers becoming involved in any fighting against the Northern Alliance, because this is a specific mission designed to deal with al-Qaeda and the Taliban.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex): Will the Secretary of State accept that I welcome the deployment, not least because I am in no doubt—given its size and composition—that it would not be going unless it were absolutely necessary. I share the views of my hon. Friend the shadow Secretary of State for Defence in wishing them well.

Will the Secretary of State pay tribute, in the way that only he can, to the astonishing skill at arms of British forces in Afghanistan in the past few weeks? They have behaved remarkably and we owe them an enormous debt. I mean not only the special forces, but the soldiers doing the run-of-the-mill work around Kabul and elsewhere, which has been very hazardous. Will he also say a word about the importance of the ongoing commitment to getting aid into those areas of Afghanistan that find themselves in a difficult state? Will he assure us that there will continue to be that commitment to Afghanistan that was so lacking last time?

Mr. Hoon: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman who makes his points effectively and with his customary clarity. I have had the privilege of seeing the full range of commitments that Britain's armed forces have engaged in and he is right that they have displayed remarkable skill in what they do. He is also right that that applies across the board, because it is not only those at the sharp end—although I pay tribute to them as well. Deploying forces at this distance for this length of time—and sustaining them in a difficult and dangerous environment—is a considerable achievement by our logistics people, who have done a remarkable job.

I shall not go into too much detail on the question of aid at this stage, save to say that I am assured that aid is continuing to flow and that the flow of aid is improving day by day. That is a recognition of the much improved security environment across Afghanistan and not simply in Kabul.

Mr. Nigel Beard (Bexleyheath and Crayford): What is the latest assessment of the whereabouts of Osama bin Laden?

Mr. Hoon: The latest assessment is that we still do not know. Determined efforts continue to bring him to account, together with other prominent figures from al-Qaeda and the Taliban.

Tony Baldry (Banbury): The ISAF operation is mandated by the United Nations, but is there not a broader point here? Is not the UN Secretary-General entitled to seek wider support among the community of nations for his mandates? Of course everyone fully supports what the United Kingdom is doing, but does the Secretary of State think not that we are doing too much, but that other countries are not fully pulling their weight? That issue

involves not only Afghanistan, because there are, I am afraid, other failing states around the world. Unless other nations prepare to support the Secretary-General, the prospects for civilisation are bleak.

Mr. Hoon: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the comments of the hon. Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Soames). The difficulty is not lack of commitment or support from other nations. Indeed, unusually for an international operation, I have had to turn down contributions to the ISAF. The hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) will recall from his days in government that that is unusual. Normally, the Defence Secretary spends a good deal of time on the telephone trying to persuade other countries to participate in international operations, but the reverse is true on this occasion.

The reason for that is that we required particular, specialist skills. Those necessary for the early deployment of the ISAF involved engineering—rebuilding runways and ensuring that the basic infrastructure could accommodate a force of such a size. The operations that I set out in my statement involve determined war-fighting skills and the ability to deploy rapidly in extraordinarily difficult and dangerous surroundings. Again, there are simply not that many armed forces in the world that can complete those tasks at such notice.

Mr. Mike O'Brien (North Warwickshire): I congratulate our armed forces on their operations to date and acknowledge that the announcement is indeed significant. Of course, 45 Commando will go, and ought to know that it goes, with the full support of the House. Can my right hon. Friend reassure us that he has received assurances that 45 Commando will have available to it full air and logistic support where necessary from US forces in any combat operations that it may undertake?

Mr. Hoon: This will be an integrated force working alongside its US counterparts and receiving US back-up in precisely the way that my hon. Friend describes.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): In pursuing his forward strategy in Afghanistan—a debate on which would be highly desirable at the earliest possible date, preferably tomorrow—will the Secretary of State ensure that he balances it with vigorous efforts to maintain the closest liaison with and support for the Government of Pakistan, without whose stability no progress towards pacifying the region and eradicating terrorism could be achieved? That is particularly so in view of the horrendous atrocity at an Islamabad church yesterday.

Mr. Hoon: I recently visited Pakistan and had a meeting with the President and other senior Government figures. The hon. Gentleman is right that it is vital that we take forward those operations in consultation with the Government of Pakistan, as well as with other countries that neighbour Afghanistan. Their role not only in operations in general, but specifically as part of the political process of rebuilding Afghanistan is vital.

Hywel Williams (Caernarfon): Clearly, the thoughts of Members in all parts of the House are with the forces in their perilous task. Have the Government considered seeking a precise UN mandate for the continuing campaign in Afghanistan?

Mr. Hoon: There is a precise mandate for the ISAF operation. The follow-on operations that I announced this afternoon are covered by the UN charter as justified in self-defence.

Mr. John MacDougall (Central Fife): Does my right hon. Friend agree that fears over loss of life among the troops in Afghanistan, which we all share, will increase if we do not move with the speed and stealth referred to in the statement? Indeed, if we are serious about tackling terrorism, we must use the tactics that have been applied in this instance.

Mr. Hoon: My hon. Friend makes a number of very good points with which I entirely agree. It is vital in this kind of operation that security is not compromised in any way.

Mr. John Maples (Stratford-on-Avon): Are the 1,700 troops that we are deploying precisely what the United States requested, or did it ask for more? Secondly, will the Secretary of State tell us which other countries are providing combat troops, as part not of ISAF but of this operation? Presumably, this force was put together in consultation with Centcom and other national headquarters, so he must be able to tell us what other countries will provide combat troops to fight alongside ours.

Mr. Hoon: I can certainly give the House an idea of which other countries are likely to be involved, but I anticipate that those countries will have to make the same kind of announcements to their Parliaments as the one that I am making this afternoon, and it would be wrong at this stage to give the House a definitive list. I assure the hon. Gentleman that I shall be able to do that in due course, however.

So far as American requests are concerned, I am absolutely confident that we are providing to the Americans precisely what they have been looking for to work alongside their own forces dealing with the remnants of al-Qaeda and the Taliban.

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): I am delighted that the ISAF troops have managed to help the humanitarian effort in Afghanistan, but will the Secretary of State tell us how many Afghans have been killed during the operation, either by military action or by starvation? Does he not agree that the United States should finish its job in Afghanistan before it embarks on another war with Iraq?

Mr. Hoon: I cannot tell the hon. Lady precisely how many Afghans have been killed during these operations. That figure is simply not available to anyone. I anticipate, however, that it is much lower than much of the hysterical comment has suggested from time to time. As a result of an astonishingly well targeted bombing campaign, I expect the number of civilian casualties to be very low. I will not deal with the other subject.

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): May I ask the Secretary of State several brief questions? First, will he

[Mr. Mark Francois]

confirm whether there is any plan for a call-up of elements of the Royal Marine reserves to bolster 45 Commando group's proposed operation? Secondly, will he give the House some idea of what medical facilities will accompany the group on operations? Will they be provided by the UK, the United States or, perhaps, a combination of the two nations? Thirdly, I support this initiative, but I would like the Secretary of State to give us some idea of the effect on the tour plot back home of the decision to deploy yet another regular battalion on operations abroad.

Mr. Hoon: No decisions have been taken yet about calling up reserves as a result of this operation. I shall answer the hon. Gentleman's third question next. It is unlikely that the operation will have a significant impact on tour plots, for precisely the reason set out in my statement earlier, which is that elements of the Royal Marines are already deployed and have been on HMS Ocean for some time. The remaining elements that we intend to deploy are being held at very high readiness for precisely this kind of operation.

There are now some excellent medical facilities in and around Kabul. I mentioned the contribution that the Czech Government were prepared to make, and we are discussing with them the best way of deploying a state-of-the-art field hospital that they have available. That is why I was so pleased with the contribution that they were able to make. It is this kind of specialist contribution that allows this kind of international operation to be so effective in difficult circumstances.

Patrick Mercer (Newark): Last year the Select Committee on Defence—of which I am a member—was lucky and privileged enough to visit the men of 45 Commando Royal Marines on Operation Saif Sareea. They struck me as the finest body of men that we are ever likely to deploy overseas. However, the additional troops that are going to Afghanistan, and that we may or may not be deploying to the Balkans, and the lack of any apparent reduction in the forces in Northern Ireland, will all make the pips—which are already hard-pressed—begin to squeak even more. May I seek from the Secretary of State—whose presence here I applaud after his illness at the weekend—an assurance that new and imaginative ideas will be used to reduce commitments and deployments elsewhere?

Mr. Hoon: As I have told the House on many occasions, I am responsible for ensuring that our commitments are balanced and can be maintained within the capabilities we have available. That continues to be my responsibility.

Hugh Robertson (Faversham and Mid-Kent): In his statement, the Secretary of State rightly drew our attention to the continuing threat from al-Qaeda. Some of those fighters will no doubt stand and fight, as in Operation Anaconda; others may well contemplate guerrilla action, which we have seen many times in Afghanistan over the years. Can the Secretary of State tell us what plans we have to meet that threat, and in particular how we will seal the border to ensure that people cannot come and go as they wish?

Mr. Hoon: The one thing I have become in recent months is something of an expert on maps and the topography of Afghanistan, and I will not pretend that sealing the border is in any way realistic. That applies not least to the border along Pakistan. A number of Afghanistan's external borders consist of extraordinary terrain, and frankly there are not the troops to do what the hon. Gentleman suggests.

Let me say, however, in the spirit of the hon. Gentleman's question, that the operations in prospect, consistent with Operation Anaconda, deal with precisely the kind of guerrilla threat about which he is rightly concerned. It is important that we get to those elements before they are in a position to conduct a guerrilla campaign. That is why Operation Anaconda was necessary, and why the follow-up operations I have described are also necessary.

Mr. David Laws (Yeovil): In his statement, the Secretary of State said that 45 Commando and other forces would be used against the remnants of al-Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan. Can he tell us how large those remnants are, in his judgment and that of the intelligence we have?

So far, in their military operations abroad, the Government have been careful to set precise time scales and targets for the deployment of our forces. What consideration has the Secretary of State given to the question of when our mission—the mission of 45 Commando—can be said to have been completed?

Mr. Hoon: The hon. Gentleman's questions are perfectly proper and perfectly fair, but I will not go into the detail of the numbers with which we expect to have to deal. I said earlier that the resistance to Operation Anaconda had been significantly greater than might have been originally anticipated, and had led to some serious fighting. What I can tell the hon. Gentleman is that if he studies the nature of the deployment we propose, he will see that we are delivering a particularly potent force to Afghanistan. That is not coincidental; it will sit alongside similar deployments from the United States and a number of other countries. It is designed to deal with the elements concerned, and to deal with them extremely effectively.

Mr. Jenkin: I thank the Secretary of State for the full answers that he has given. He has described a fast-moving situation. Other partners may be involved in the operation taken on by 45 Commando; meanwhile, the question of ISAF's leadership remains unresolved. May I reiterate the need for a full debate which should, I stress, be in Government time? *[Interruption.]* I do not think it appropriate to make light of that request. The Secretary of State has made a very serious announcement, and the House is entitled to debate it. I merely ask the Secretary of State to take the request to the usual channels, and to use his influence. I know that he has some.

Mr. Hoon: I am certainly conscious of the importance of the subject. That is why I took the first possible opportunity to make a statement in the House. If the hon. Gentleman is determined to engage in a debate, I am ready and available tomorrow.

Points of Order

5.8 pm

Ms Claire Ward (Watford): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. What instruction or advice was issued from the Speaker's office today to ensure that Members of Parliament could gain access to the House? They are entitled to that access, and to protection. I ask because for approximately 45 minutes today demonstrations outside the House blocked the road, and Members experienced real difficulty in gaining access in order to do the work that we are here to do.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): I understand that both pro and anti-hunting demonstrators assembled in the area of Parliament square, totalling some 500 people, from midday today. The first priority for the police was to keep the two elements apart, and initially that was achieved successfully. Shortly after 2 pm, demonstrators blocked the traffic at the junction of Bridge street and Parliament street. Subsequently, police forcibly moved the demonstrators from the roads, and by 3 pm access to Carriage Gates and Parliament street was restored. Mr. Speaker has asked the Serjeant-at-Arms to investigate the full circumstances of the disruption.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am sure that in dealing with these matters all the authorities concerned will bear in mind the sessional orders that require free access of right hon. and hon. Members to this building.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is precisely why Mr. Speaker has asked for an investigation. There is nothing I can add to what I have already said.

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Have you had any request from Foreign Office Ministers to make a statement on the demonstration in Gibraltar by the majority of people who live there, 20,000 plus, to stand up for their right to self-determination?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I have no information that any such statement is about to be made.

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Further to your statement about the demonstration, I was watching the demonstration, and there did not seem to be any force used by the police in dispersing demonstrators. An agreement seemed to be reached whereby they parted and let the traffic through.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I do not think that there is anything I can usefully add to what I have already said.

Orders of the Day

Business of the House

5.13 pm

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Before I call the Minister to move motion No. 1, the business motion, it might help if I say how Mr. Speaker proposes to proceed, assuming that the motion is agreed.

Mr. Speaker proposes that motions Nos. 2, 3 and 4 on hunting with dogs be debated together. He has not selected any of the amendments to the motions, so at the end of the debate—presumably at 10 o'clock—he will put the questions on motions Nos. 2, 3 and 4 one after the other.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. May I seek your guidance? I tabled an amendment that attracted cross-party support. More than 80 Members, including many luminaries—former Cabinet Ministers and current Ministers—support it, yet to my surprise it has not been selected for debate. Can you give me any advice so that, should this arise again, I shall have a better chance of getting my amendment selected for debate—perhaps by seeking more signatures, more prominent Members of Parliament or whatever?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is a very experienced Member of the House. All I can say is that all proposed amendments were given the most careful consideration. The reasons for selecting or not selecting amendments are never given, for very good reasons.

The Minister for Rural Affairs (Alun Michael): I beg to move,

That, at this day's sitting, the Speaker shall put successively the Question on each of the Motions in the name of Mr. Alun Michael relating to Hunting with Dogs not later than Ten o'clock, and such Questions shall include the Question on any Amendment which has been selected and may then be moved, and those Questions may be decided, though opposed, after the expiration of time for opposed business.

The motion provides that, following the debate, there will be a series of votes on three options for dealing with hunting. The alternatives are, first, "supervision", which is nearest to the status quo; secondly, "hunting under licence" or regulation, known as the middle way; and, thirdly, what has been described as a ban or prohibition of hunting.

In each case reference is made to "Bill 2", which is the Hunting Bill from the previous Session in the form in which it was introduced in December 2000. I understand that copies are available in the Vote Office.

All three campaigning organisations have told me that they accept this as a fair way of allowing the range of opinions across the House to be clearly expressed. Not later than 10 o'clock, the Chair will successively put each of the motions for voting, enabling hon. Members to vote for or against each of the options. The normal procedure would have the potential to constrain the House by preventing further votes once one motion had been carried.

I hope that the House will agree that this arrangement will allow us to cover the range of opinions, while still clearly expressing hon. Members' views through the votes at the end of the debate.

5.14 pm

Mrs. Ann Winterton (Congleton): When I was first taken hunting as a child by my mother, I never expected that one day I would be standing at the Dispatch Box to defend the right of the individual to take part in one of the greatest of our traditions. Hunting and ponies definitely played a part in my eventually standing for Parliament, because it was while I was a member of South Staffordshire pony club that I met my hon. Friend—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Before the hon. Lady gets too far into her remarks, may I say to her that we are discussing a very narrow motion on how we shall proceed this evening? This is not the time for a broader debate.

Mrs. Winterton: I am so sorry, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I misunderstood. I am happy with what the Minister said when he moved the business motion.

Norman Baker (Lewes): My colleagues and I are happy with the business motion, which is very narrow. That is probably the only point of agreement that there will be in the Chamber this afternoon.

Question put and agreed to.

Hunting With Dogs

5.15 pm

The Minister for Rural Affairs (Alun Michael): I beg to move,

That this House considers that arrangements for the supervision of the hunting of wild mammals with dogs should be given statutory effect by provision similar to Schedule 1 to the Hunting Bill as introduced into the Commons last session [Bill 2].

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): With this it will be convenient to discuss motion No. 3—hunting with dogs: supervision—and motion No. 4—hunting with dogs: hunting under licence. [*Interruption.*]

Alun Michael: I heard some advice to quit while I am ahead, but I am a greater optimist than that.

Today's debate fulfils our manifesto commitment that the House would be given an early opportunity to vote on the future of hunting with dogs. It also fulfils the announcement made in the Queen's Speech after the election. It is an important step towards fulfilling the second part of our manifesto promise, which was to enable Parliament to reach a conclusion on the issue.

The issue of hunting is firmly on the House's agenda. It is extremely contentious and it needs to be resolved. There is no right time to try to resolve it, but it is an important issue for many who want to see an end to cruelty and for those who want things to remain as they are.

There have been numerous legislative attempts to deal with hunting through private Members' Bills, but last year the Government introduced a Hunting Bill. It was an honest attempt to enable each of three groups to set out their preferred option, with the Government remaining neutral. It was the subject of a free vote on both sides of the House.

It was hoped that that process would lead to opinion across the piece coming together behind one option, but that did not happen. Rather than coming together, views had polarised between the Houses by the time the Bill was considered in the Lords.

I remind the House of the Burns report on hunting, which the Government commissioned in 2000. The report set out the facts about hunting and the consequences of a ban. Hon. Members who have been involved in the hunting debate, whatever their views on hunting, have been united in their admiration of the fairness of the report produced by Lord Burns, and I am sure that it will again inform debate today.

As promised, we now return to the hunting debate. A vote on the alternative motions provides a straightforward method of taking the views of both Houses in a clear and unambiguous manner, without taking too much time out of the busy programme faced by both Houses. Again, it is as simple as that.

The options contained in the Hunting Bill of 2000 form the basis of the options in the motions that we are considering today. They are, first, supervision, which is nearest to the status quo; secondly, hunting under licence, or regulation, known as the middle way; and a third option, which has been described as a ban or prohibition of hunting.

I have held discussions with all the interest groups, all of which have considered refinements to the detail of their option as originally drafted, in the period since the Bill was introduced in the House. Things have moved on—in particular, the Deadline 2000 option was amended during its consideration by the Standing Committee and on Report. Referring to the three options as set out when the last Bill was introduced is the simplest way of defining the choices on which right hon. and hon. Members are being asked to vote. All interest groups are represented in the House, and anyone speaking in the debate can explain the nuances of the latest thinking on their preferred option.

I remind the House that the Government have remained neutral on the question. No Whip has been imposed on Labour Members for the votes that will be called at the end of today's debate. I understand that that is also the position taken by the official Opposition and other parties. It has essentially been a parliamentary issue rather than a governmental issue, and we respect that fact.

The way in which I have voted on hunting is on the record. I have always voted for a ban on hunting, but that does not interfere with my responsibility for managing the process and encouraging debate from all sides. I promise that all points made in the debate in both Houses will be listened to and considered. Once the votes have been held in this House, and in the other place tomorrow, I intend to make a statement on the way forward before the Easter recess.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): Is my right hon. Friend able to be precise about when that statement will be made?

Alun Michael: No. I have seen suggestions that it is likely to be towards the end of this week, but that is a matter for the business managers and they have not confirmed the time to me. My right hon. Friend will appreciate that there is a fairly narrow window of opportunity between now and next Monday, let us say, and it will be within that time frame.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): I am grateful to the Minister for the balanced and sensible nature of his introduction so far and look forward to the balanced and sensible nature of the statement that will be made later this week. However, given that he has committed himself to an outright ban on fox hunting, does he agree that it is impossible for him to be dispassionate in his consideration of what is said?

Alun Michael: Were that the case, it would be most disappointing because it would have to apply to everyone taking part in the debate. It would mean that nobody who had voted one way in the past could possibly be open to serious points made by people with other views. That is not the position as far as I am concerned. Tonight's vote will allow Members on both sides to indicate the strength of view on each of the three broad options. My responsibility, in addition to being able to exercise my vote freely, like everyone else, is to enable the House to reach a conclusion on the issue. I assure the hon. Gentleman that I will do that as logically and dispassionately as I can.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): I respect the integrity of what the Minister says, but he also brings another aspect to the debate. He is a Minister in the Department responsible for rural affairs, which represents a change from the way in which the matter has been handled in previous Sessions. Can we take it that he will assess the impact on rural communities and the rural economy of any decision or compromise that is reached and that he will be briefed by his Department following analysis of those matters?

Alun Michael: The right hon. Gentleman can certainly take it that I will consider all aspects of this matter before carrying out the responsibilities that are mine at present.

In the past, this matter has been left to Back Benchers, through the drafting of private Members' Bills, and three groups were allowed to draft on the last occasion. The Government took office with a manifesto commitment made at the last election to enable Parliament to come to a conclusion on the issue. That is the responsibility that I have as a Minister, which is what has changed. The matter is not being left to Back-Bench initiatives; I have a job to help the House and Parliament as a whole to reach a conclusion on the issue.

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): My right hon. Friend will remember the private Member's Bill that I was responsible for in 1994, which received the massive endorsement of the House—yet, like other such Bills, it was defeated. The will of this House to ban hunting has been shown time and again. Therefore, if there is any jiggery-pokery at a future date, will the Minister consider invoking the Parliament Act?

Alun Michael: I take it that my hon. Friend is suggesting that there might be obstruction in another place. I hope that in their debate tomorrow, Members of the House of Lords will make a constructive contribution and that we will be able to move forward. My hon. Friend knows that I am an optimist. I encourage Members speaking and voting in another place to approach the matter in the same constructive way that I expect of Members of this House.

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): I am pleased to hear that more of a Government line is being taken and that the issue will be resolved one way or another. The Government have been reluctant to use the Parliament Act. Will the Minister consider using a Joint Committee of both Houses to come up with a Bill that Parliament as a whole can agree so that this issue is settled by the will of Parliament?

Alun Michael: I hear what the hon Gentleman says. He is effectively starting to make a contribution to the debate. He can, I am sure, make his point if he is fortunate enough to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have undertaken to consider all the points made in the debate.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): Further to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall), is not it obvious that there is no way in which the other place will agree to a total ban, no matter what majority there is tonight for that option, as we expect? The question of whether the Government will have the courage to use the Parliament Act is crucial. I hope that there will be an overwhelming vote for a total

[David Winnick]

ban, but, no matter how we vote tonight, it will be a waste of time unless the Government understand the need to act decisively.

Alun Michael: I certainly do not rule out that approach. I hope that my hon. Friend's comments will be borne in mind when Members of the other place debate and vote on the issue. I have already said that I intend to carry on being an optimist, and to encourage intelligent debate from all sides of the argument.

Mr. Mike O'Brien (North Warwickshire): Will my right hon. Friend assure us that he will listen carefully to the debate in this House, and that if there is a vote for a ban he will make clear in his statement in a few days' time the Government's position on the use of the Parliament Act to bring this matter to a conclusion, as the Government have promised they will do for some time?

Alun Michael: I understand precisely my hon. Friend's point, and the importance placed on it by the many Members who signed amendment (b) to the motion for a ban, although it is not being considered. I shall take that point on board, and I shall respond to it when I make a statement in the next few days.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley): I remind the Minister and the Government that this House was elected by the British people, whereas Members of the other place were put there by privilege.

Alun Michael: That point can be made in a variety of ways, gently or bluntly. My hon. Friend does it in his own inimitable manner.

Mr. Malcolm Savidge (Aberdeen, North): My right hon. Friend has been most generous in giving way. He will have noticed that Members from all parts in the other place, when discussing its future reform, repeatedly said that even in a reformed state it should be subservient to this House. That should also have an important influence on how we judge the decisions made here against those made there.

Alun Michael: My hon. Friend makes an important constitutional point. I want to encourage rather than threaten Members of the other place, as I encourage Members of this House, to approach this debate constructively and positively. I know that there is a temptation to say that we have debated this issue before, so why are we debating it again? We are debating the three motions, and they will be debated tomorrow in the other place. On the back of those two debates and the votes cast, I shall make a statement to the House. It would not be fair to go beyond that. I am hoping for a constructive debate, with more light than heat in both Houses.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): As my right hon. Friend will know, a decision on this subject has already been made in Scotland. What advice would he give to Members representing Scottish constituencies on using their vote tonight?

Alun Michael: On a free vote, all Members can decide how to cast their votes. It is for hon. Members to decide how to vote.

Judy Mallaber (Amber Valley): Has my right hon. Friend received any indication that Members of this House who have previously voted for a total ban and who I expect to do so again tonight would be influenced to change their mind if the other place voted tomorrow for the middle way?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Before the right hon. Gentleman answers that question, may I say that he has been very generous in taking interventions, but they do not directly relate to the subject matter before the House? An enormous number of Members want to catch my eye, and unless we get going, more and more of them will be disappointed.

Alun Michael: I can tell my hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley (Judy Mallaber) that I have received no such indications. I have seen in the press many reports of deals being done and negotiations going on, but that speculation is inspired by nothing. I have listened to a variety of views. That is a sensible approach for any Minister with responsibility for an issue to take. I shall now listen to the debates in this House and in the other place.

The purpose of the motions is to give all right hon. and hon. Members the opportunity to consider the matter and to vote. Hunting is an emotive issue. It remains to be seen what debate we will have here and in another place, but in the past both Houses have risen to the occasion when there has been a debate on a free vote. I shall listen with interest to what is said in the hope that it will illuminate the way forward. I have always been an optimist, and I hope that contributions will generate light, not just heat, and inform the debate.

5.30 pm

Mrs. Ann Winterton (Congleton): Earlier this afternoon I was rather too keen to get on with the debate in order to share my own experience with the House. I have never spoken in a debate on hunting before, and I thought it important to set out my stall.

It was when I was a 17-year-old at grammar school, which will be another red rag to the bulls opposite, that I was first invited to become joint master of the South Staffordshire hunt, and I served for five seasons as field master. During that time I learned many of the skills that are needed for politics, not least the ability to lead from the front and to develop a thick skin to withstand the slings and arrows that are sometimes aimed at us. At the time, I was the youngest master of foxhounds in the country, but I am not sure whether that record still stands. I continued to hunt with my family, on and off, until the early 1980s, and now occasionally go out with the Forest and District beagles in Cheshire. I especially enjoy being up in the hills, where life is pretty hard but the people are the most genuine.

In all that time I have never considered hunting cruel—if I had, I would not have taken part. It always seemed to me to be the greatest privilege of all to be able to follow hounds and to watch them work in the company of others who respected and loved the traditions of the countryside as much as I did. When I was a joint master I worked to a voluntary code drawn up by the Masters of Foxhounds Association; I therefore know from personal experience that the system of self-regulation works. That arrangement has more recently been superseded by the Independent Supervisory Authority on Hunting, which operates at no cost to the taxpayer but ensures that all recognised hunting with dogs is accountable. I support that organisation wholeheartedly and believe that the best way forward is to back it and self-regulation.

The breathtaking arrogance and insensitivity of this Government have to be seen to be believed. At a time when the countryside is still reeling from the shock of a devastating outbreak of foot and mouth disease, and on top of the deepest farming recession since the 1930s, the Government seek to kick the countryside in the teeth once again by introducing this debate on hunting. In the current climate of rural crisis, it is an unacceptable distraction from the real issues that face the countryside, let alone the nation.

Mr. Colin Challen (Morley and Rothwell): Given how well the hon. Lady knows the countryside people she has mixed with through hunting, will she denounce those in the hunting lobby who have said that if the House passes a law outlawing their activity, they will break the law?

Mrs. Winterton: The hon. Gentleman refers to the people whom I have met through hunting. In fact, I come from a farming background and have lived in the countryside all my life, so not all the people I know hunt, although most of them support field and country sports. Like him, I do not believe that any group should break the law of this land. I believe in the rule of law.

To most rational people, it seems extraordinary that the Government have dropped what we were told were important pieces of legislation owing to a shortage of parliamentary time, yet—surprise, surprise—have miraculously found time to buy off the hounds on the Labour Back Benches who are giving glorious tongue to their dissatisfaction with their party and its obvious failures. The deal to save the skin of the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions—for the time being—has not gone unnoticed by the people of this country, especially by those whose lives will be adversely affected by a possible ban and those who may lose both their livelihood and their homes.

While the nation's priorities on the domestic agenda, such as health, rising crime, transport and education, are being sidelined, this matter is being driven by single-issue Back Benchers and campaigning groups who do not have the best interests of the countryside at heart, know little of its ways and care even less about its people. If they succeed in banning hunting, they will be personally responsible for a worsening of animal welfare.

Mrs. Lorna Fitzsimons (Rochdale): As someone who was brought up in a village at the base of the Pennines and who knows how hard it is to be a hill farmer, may I ask the hon. Lady to accept from me how little foxhunting has to do with many in the rural community? What does she have to say about the priorities for the people among whom I was brought up—education, housing and rural transport? They are far more important to communities in the countryside than foxhunting.

Mrs. Winterton: The hon. Lady has just shot her own fox. It is the Government's choice to debate this matter at this time instead of the issues in which she says her constituents are most interested.

Bob Spink (Castle Point): May I take my hon. Friend back to the point that she was making about the welfare of the fox? Is she aware that four senior executives of the League Against Cruel Sports have withdrawn their call for a ban on hunting precisely because it has been shown that such a ban would have adverse consequences for the welfare of the fox?

Mrs. Winterton: My hon. Friend makes a true and worthwhile point.

Farmers have a statutory obligation to control pests such as foxes. That control should include both dispersal and culling, but never the extermination of an indigenous species. Following the voluntary suspension of hunting owing to foot and mouth last spring—this will answer the question put by the hon. Member for Rochdale (Mrs. Fitzsimons)—including suspension of the lambing call service, farmers started to report to hunts that acute fox predation was occurring, resulting in severe lamb losses.

In January, the Farmers Union of Wales reported that:

"The ban on foxhunting over the last year has led to an explosion in the fox population to unprecedented levels. In some cases, farmers who lost six or seven lambs to foxes normally have seen the numbers jump to between 35 and 40"—

[Interruption.] Labour Back Benchers who are shouting "Rubbish" should tell that to Welsh farmers.

The need to control the fox population cannot be challenged, but the debate, more often than not, focuses on cruelty or perceived cruelty. I commend the former Home Secretary for setting up an independent committee of inquiry into hunting with dogs in England and Wales, commonly known as the Burns committee after its distinguished chairman. I only wish that the Government had been as forthcoming in seeking after the truth about the cause and handling of the foot and mouth epidemic—but we all know why they were not.

At no point did Lord Burns conclude that hunting was cruel. While making the obvious point that hunting

"seriously compromises the welfare of the fox",

the report noted that

"insensibility and death will normally follow within a matter of seconds once the fox is caught".

One of the most senior vets in the UK, Lord Soulsby, went on record to condemn the organisations which claimed that the former phrase equated to cruelty and hence justified an end to hunting. He said:

"At no point did the committee conclude, or even attempt to conclude, an assessment of cruelty. Yet many bodies have erroneously—I repeat the word 'erroneously'—quoted the Burns

report, stating that it clearly demonstrated that the practice of hunting wild animals with dogs caused cruelty. The report did not state that."

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): In the hon. Lady's pony club days, did she ever go hare coursing? Did she consider then or does she consider now that hare coursing is cruel?

Mrs. Winterton: In fact I did not go hare coursing in my pony club days, but I did go hare coursing once with a local veterinary surgeon. Funnily enough, it is the only field and country sport in which people do not seek to kill the quarry, and I do not personally believe it to be cruel, but the hon. Gentleman obviously does.

In addition, Burns concluded that none of the legal methods of fox control is without difficulty from an animal welfare perspective. There are welfare implications for all legal methods of managing the fox population and, on welfare grounds, no clear case has been made to separate hunting from other forms of control as a method that should be banned.

The question that has to be answered by those who seek to ban hunting is: what alternative method would cause less suffering, would be more natural—after all, foxes themselves live by hunting—and would provide such benefits to conservation and biodiversity? Farmers sympathetic to hunting have enhanced the British landscape by ensuring that hedgerows, thickets and woodland are well managed, providing an appropriate habitat for a variety of species. Research has shown that areas managed for hunting are significantly more biologically diverse than unmanaged areas.

People are important too, however, and what a terrible impact a total ban on hunting would have on the rural economy, which is still reeling from the after-effects of foot and mouth disease. With average net farm income having fallen to £5,200 per farm in England and £4,100 in Wales, it seems an act of spiteful vandalism to destroy literally thousands of jobs in deeply rural areas, when it is simply not necessary to do so and where no meaningful alternative employment exists.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): The Burns report clearly said that the abolition of hunting would have an impact in some parts of the country, and my constituency, with its six hunts, would be just such an area. In July 2000, *The Mid Devon Gazette* showed from a four-week survey in my constituency that 69.32 per cent. of the population wanted to retain hunting. That shows how important hunting is not just to huntsmen, but to the wider community.

Mrs. Winterton: My hon. Friend is right. Hunting and other field and country sports are very important to the rural economy, and a ban would have truly devastating knock-on effects on rural businesses, such as feed merchants, blacksmiths, veterinary practices, the horse industry, and village pubs and hotels, among others. Even a former Minister at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food—the right hon. Member for Gateshead, East and Washington, West (Joyce Quin)—has acknowledged that hunt kennels provide a valued service to the farming industry by removing casualty and fallen stock, the considerable cost of which would have to be borne by farmers themselves if hunting were banned, thereby adding to their current financial difficulties.

Hunts are not only at the heart of economic activity in the countryside, but play a vital role in organising a whole range of social activities that provide a lifeline in the more remote areas, which are so badly served compared to their urban and suburban counterparts; and everyone is welcome to participate, irrespective of age, income or social background. *[Interruption.]* Sadly, when I say such things, Labour Members merely scoff. No doubt they live very comfortable lives; they do not know how hard it is in the upland areas of the United Kingdom to farm and get a living from the land, or how remote and cut off people often are.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mrs. Winterton: I do not intend to give way for the very simple reason that many other hon. Members wish to speak, and I believe that we should hear their voices.

Before Members vote on the three options before them today, perhaps they should also consider the efforts to legislate on this difficult and sensitive issue north of the border. The Scottish Parliament set a damaging constitutional precedent by ignoring the findings of its own Rural Development Committee, which spent 15 months taking evidence before concluding that it would be

"difficult or impossible to amend the Bill into a form which will adequately meet the aim of ending cruelty and for this reason recommends that the general principles of this Bill should not be agreed to".

Yet bigoted Members of the Scottish Parliament, who played no part whatever in the scrutiny of the legislation, voted for a ban without even arguing the case, let alone mentioning animal welfare. If the hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) thinks that an honourable course of action, he and I must differ.

Mr. Hugo Swire (East Devon): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mrs. Winterton: I am sorry, but I said that I would not give way.

The Bill was promoted in Scotland as a modernising measure to take us into the 21st century, without offering 21st century solutions for species management. As a result, the Bill is the equivalent of a dog's breakfast, and police in the borders have said that it is

"almost unworkable . . . because the legislation is not clear".

Serious concerns were also expressed about the lack of police resources—a valid point that is reflected throughout England and Wales, too.

We have the precedent before us of an in-depth independent inquiry set up by the present Government, and we should, if we use common sense, avoid the trap that Holyrood fell into, which generated headlines such as "Daft as a Brush" in the *Sunday Mail*, "NHS not foxes is top priority" in *The Sun*, "A vote for flawed and ambiguous legislation" in *The Scotsman*, "This law is an ass" in the *Daily Mail*, "Executive must intervene with compensation" in *The Herald*, and *The Independent* said:

"The mark of a civilised society is its tolerance of unpopular behaviour".

Surely this issue is about civil liberty and personal freedom. It is quite wrong in principle to make criminal an activity just because a certain percentage of the

population, often guided by misleading information, disapproves of it. Labour Members may say that a majority of people think that way, but they should read the most recent polls, which show that opinion has changed.

In the light of the Scottish Bill, which will most certainly be subject to at least two legal challenges when it has gained Royal Assent, it would surely be foolhardy to follow in those flawed footsteps. However, I recognise with a certain amount of sadness that tonight's votes will reflect not the arguments for hunting put before the House in the debate, but perhaps the prejudices of the past and the imagined prejudices of the present.

The opportunity to destroy yet another institution of our great nation will be irresistible to some people, including the hon. Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks), who was heard to boast on Jimmy Young's show the other day that they have the numbers in this Parliament to do just that. He and his ilk loathe anything to do with tradition and seek to destroy it at every opportunity, but perhaps he and others should recall that this Parliament cannot constitutionally bind its successor and a future Parliament can undo anything it wishes to. I urge the House to reject the ban and to vote unequivocally for the status quo: self-regulation.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I remind the House that Mr. Speaker has put a 10-minute limit on all Back-Bench speeches during the debate and that that limit starts now.

5.49 pm

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): The House has a shameful record on social reform which stretches over centuries. It always lags behind public opinion and has done so on divorce, capital punishment, ending the criminalisation of homosexual acts, and animal welfare. The same arguments have been expressed throughout—the very same arguments that we heard from the hon. Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton).

Let me remind the House of a similar argument. Talking about a countryside pursuit, a right hon. Member of this House said that it

"had existed for more than 1000 years without . . . having been supposed to be pregnant with any of those crying evils that are now"

associated with it. He went on to say that there was

"a busy and anxious disposition to legislate on matters in which the laws are already sufficient to prevent abuse. The House should intervene only when an Act was generally and gravely called for, not to glorify petty, personal and local motives which were infinitely below the dignity of Parliament."

That is almost identical to the hon. Lady's statements, but those remarks were made on 18 April 1800 by the right hon. William Windham in defence of the practice of bull baiting. The hon. Lady talked about a red rag to a bull. The fact is that it took 35 years from that date to get bull baiting banned.

Ever since I was elected to the House of Commons 32 years ago, I have been voting and instituting measures to ban hunting with dogs. I am perfectly ready to spend the second half of my parliamentary career doing so, but I would prefer to spend my time on other matters.

Mr. Jonathan Djanogly (Huntingdon): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Kaufman: If the hon. Gentleman allows me to pursue my argument a little further, I will give way if I have time.

The House will vote tonight, and the Minister confirmed that he will make a statement in the next few days. If the House votes for a complete ban, as I very much trust it will, I cannot understand what it is that the Minister will have to tell us. If he believes that our House voting for a ban will persuade the other House to vote for a ban, then he is indeed an optimist, but to quote "South Pacific", he is a cockeyed optimist, because that will not happen. I cannot understand what my right hon. Friend will say other than that a Bill implementing a full ban will be introduced by the Government in this Session preferably, or in the next Session at the latest, and that if the Bill is passed by this House, the Government will put it through under the Parliament Act if it is blocked in the House of Lords.

If my right hon. Friend turns out to have something else to say other than that the Government will introduce a Bill instituting a full ban, one must assume that it is what the press is going to call a compromise, and that is utterly unacceptable. In addition, that would introduce a new constitutional doctrine. When my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister invited me to be a member of the royal commission on the reform of the House of Lords, he gave me terms of reference that began:

"Having regard to the need to maintain the position of the House of Commons as the pre-eminent Chamber of Parliament".

That is the policy of the Prime Minister and the Government, but it is not pre-eminent unless the House of Commons gets its way in a conflict with the House of Lords. Any compromise will mean not that the House of Commons is getting its way, but that the House of Lords is getting its way, and that will mean that the Government are abandoning their position on the pre-eminence of this House.

The doctrine does not say that the Government get their way; it says that the House of Commons gets its way. What is more, for the House of Commons to get its way, whether with Government legislation, which this measure would be, or with private Member's legislation, it does not need as big a majority as it is possible that we will get tonight. When I was Minister of State at the Department of Industry, we used the Parliament Act to get through the Aircraft and Shipbuilding Industries Bill when we had a majority of one in this Chamber. If we can do it on a majority of one, we can do it on the kind of majority that we will have tonight.

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that when the Aircraft and Shipbuilding Industries Act 1977 was taken through the House, I asked why Opposition Members had voted in support of a Government move of which many Opposition Members and I strongly disapproved? Sir Keith Joseph told me that it conformed with the proprieties and rules of the House. In what way does it conform with the proprieties and rules of the House that a Bill that forms no part of the Government's manifesto is taken through under the Parliament Act?

Mr. Kaufman: The hon. Gentleman knows little if anything about the history of the House of Commons if he promotes that point of view. The Parliament Acts were introduced first by the pre-war Liberal Government and then amended by the Attlee Government so that the House of Commons could get its way in a conflict with the House of Lords. That is what the Parliament Acts are

[Mr. Kaufman]

about, and I am simply asking my right hon. Friends to endorse and reinforce my terms of reference as a member of a royal commission.

If my right hon. Friends adopt a new doctrine that when there is a difference between the House of Commons and the House of Lords, there has to be a compromise that gives way in some degree to the House of Lords, I will assume that that will apply not merely to legislation on hunting with dogs, but to everything else. I give notice to my right hon. Friend the Chief Whip that if this House of Commons votes for a total ban and then gives way to the view of the House of Lords, she need not expect to see me in the Division Lobbies in the future when this House is asked to vote down Lords amendments to Government legislation. I very much hope that we shall not come to that. The whole point about being as sickeningly loyal as I am is that when one does rebel, one does it with a vengeance, and if necessary that is what I shall do.

I deliver that message to the Chief Whip and say to Ministers that there is only one way to resolve the problem—to enact what the House of Commons votes for tonight. Let no one believe that if that does not happen, we will stop. We will go on until we get the complete ban. It will have to be done some time, so do it now.

5.58 pm

Norman Baker (Lewes): It falls to me to kick off the debate on behalf of my party because I am responsible for animal issues. I should make it clear that it has long been a tradition of the Liberal Democrats to have a free vote on the subject and I confidently expect my colleagues to split three ways in the Division Lobbies at 10 o'clock. *[Interruption.]* Members of other parties make a noise about that, but I think that there is a free vote on both sides of the House. It is worth pointing out that we have heard only from Labour Members in favour of a ban and from Conservatives in favour of the status quo. I look forward to hearing from the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) and the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey) who will help to balance the debate.

Mr. Swire: Given that the Liberal Democrats will operate a free vote, is it still official Liberal Democrat party policy to ban hunting with dogs?

Norman Baker: We have explained many times that it has long been a tradition for our party conference to vote for a ban on hunting. It has equally been the case, however, that the parliamentary party has consistently decided that this is a matter of conscience and people can vote accordingly. There is nothing wrong with that, and it would be healthier if we saw greater diversity in the other parties.

I have a sense of déjà vu because this is far from the first debate on hunting in which I have participated, and the same is true of many Members. My constituents say to me, "Another debate on hunting? Why are you not discussing the NHS, Government sleaze or Iraq?", and I have some sympathy with that view.

Mr. Savidge: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Norman Baker: No, not at the moment.

I have sympathy with that view not because this issue is not important—it is—but because we are going round and round in circles. We have discussed foxhunting many more times than any other issue. We have had at least three votes on this substantive issue since 1997, and today we will have the fourth. On each occasion there has been a clear majority in favour of an outright ban. Two Committees have undertaken long proceedings—25 sittings in all. Since 1997, Parliament has spent 125 hours and 47 minutes discussing hunting, and the clock has been started again today.

As I said, in each vote there has been a substantial majority in favour of a ban. On 20 November 1997, on Second Reading of the Wild Mammals (Hunting with Dogs) Bill, 411 voted for the principle of the Bill, which was to ban hunting, and 151 voted against. On 20 December 2000, when we were offered a multiple choice option similar to the one that we are faced with today, 387 voted for an outright ban and 174 voted against. On 27 February 2001, on Third Reading of the Hunting Bill, 319 voted for a ban and 140 against. Nobody can be in any doubt about the view of the House of Commons. Some Members may feel that that view is misguided, but it is absolutely clear. The view of the House of Commons is that there should be a ban.

I wonder how we have managed to proceed through an entire Parliament and into the next one without seemingly making very much progress. Frankly, an abdication of responsibility and leadership by the Government has led us to the situation today. There has been a failure to respond to the general public and the views of the House. The Labour party promised a vote on hunting in its 1997 manifesto. It stuck to the letter of that promise, but although everybody thought that the vote on hunting would be followed by legislation, there was nothing of the sort; it was an indicative vote. What was the point of it? It got us nowhere.

There followed a period in which the Countryside Alliance was making its views very plain and Ministers took fright. The previous Home Secretary set up the Burns inquiry and hoped that the issue would go away or somehow be resolved, even though there are irreconcilable views in the House. Most cynically of all, as I pointed out in my last speech on the matter, in January 2001, when the election was approaching and it was obvious that traditional supporters of the Labour party in particular were unhappy with the Government's inaction on the issue, a Bill was introduced which stood no chance whatever of becoming law.

Mr. Roger Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire): Does my hon. Friend agree that the nature of the Welsh countryside and Welsh agriculture means that legislation on hunting would be best undertaken by the Welsh Assembly, although given the circumstances we would like to work towards agreement in this House?

Norman Baker: I agree. I remember the Minister picking me up on that point in the previous debate on the subject and disagreeing with that in principle. However, although I personally strongly hold the view that hunting should be banned, I think that it is for the Welsh Assembly to sort out the situation in Wales. It is wrong

for us to legislate on this issue in Wales. The position would be stronger if this were a devolved matter, and the Welsh Assembly could reach its own conclusions.

Alun Michael: Just to make it clear, this is not a devolved matter; that is the point.

Norman Baker: Absolutely. We are saying that it should be a devolved matter, and that is an area of unity between Liberal Democrats and, I suspect, Plaid Cymru and members of other parties in the House.

We have come full circle. Today we will have an indicative vote—exactly the same sort of vote as we had in December 2000. We are no further forward. I listened to the Minister carefully, and he made no guarantee that the Government will do anything after the vote. They will make a statement, but we do not know what it will say, and nobody has been able to tease that out of the Minister.

I make one plea to the Government: for goodness sake, put this issue to bed. It has been going on long enough. I suggest that, constitutionally, the Government ought to adopt the views of the Commons. The right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) expressed the view that that is the proper position. We will have had four votes in two Parliaments delivering a large majority in favour of a ban. The Government cannot go on having these votes year in, year out, only to leave them hanging in the air. They may want to sit on the fence and they may hope that something will turn up to save them, but it will not. In the end, they will have to get a grip and do something.

I ask the Minister to make it clear what the Government will do if the House again votes for an outright ban and the House of Lords votes for retention. Will the Government invoke the Parliament Acts and bring the Bill back? We have not had a clear answer to that question. What if the Lords votes for the so-called middle way? Does that make a difference? I do not think that it does. Will the Minister agree that the issue needs to be settled once and for all, and that this should be the last substantive debate on hunting in this House?

I turn briefly to one or two personal remarks to set out my position. I have listened carefully, as I am sure have hon. Members throughout the House, to my constituents on this issue, and there was a diversity of views, as one might expect. The majority is clearly in favour of a ban. The letters in my postbag are about 10:1 in favour of a ban, and they come from people in urban and rural areas. I do not believe that this should be portrayed as an urban versus rural issue; that is a red herring. There are people in towns who want hunting to continue, and there are people in rural areas—a majority, I believe—who want hunting to be banned.

A ban is appropriate. As I said, these are my personal views; I am not speaking on behalf of my party. I do not accept that the method of foxhunting, which involves cruelty and stress to the animal, can be justified by the pleasure that it gives to those who hunt or by the ancillary benefits which I accept flow from hunting.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): What would happen to fallen stock on farms if hunting were banned?

Norman Baker: If the hon. Gentleman will bear with me, I will come on to farming issues in a moment.

If hunting is essentially cruel, as I believe it is, the question is whether there are any other factors in the calculation that outweigh that so that hunting can be allowed to continue. I make that calculation carefully because no Liberal wants automatically to jump towards a ban. Indeed, we are often accused of wanting to legalise things rather than to ban them. Is the damage done by not banning something greater than the loss of freedom caused by such a ban? In this case, the answer to that question is yes.

Mr. Gregory Barker (Bexhill and Battle): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Norman Baker: No, I want to conclude my remarks before long.

For me, the freedom to hunt is the freedom to inflict unacceptable stress and pain on an animal, and the human freedom to hunt cannot outweigh that consideration. There is nothing new in that argument. We had bear baiting and cock fighting, and we still have hare coursing.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: It is generous of the hon. Gentleman to give way. Is he aware of what veterinary surgeons say? More than 300 have written to Members of Parliament to support hunting. They do not agree that stress is placed on the animal. They say that the process is perfectly natural and that death is very quick. Their arguments run counter to the hon. Gentleman's.

Norman Baker: I accept that there are experts on both sides of the argument who will produce conflicting evidence. That is inevitable. However, the Burns inquiry, to which the hon. Lady referred in her speech, concluded that hunting seriously compromises the welfare of the fox. I am convinced that it is cruel.

In outlawing bear baiting, cock fighting and other such so-called sports, which were once mainstream, we have already accepted that human freedom can be curtailed. I believe that hunting falls into the same category.

Are there any other offsetting factors? The Burns report referred to 700 people who are directly employed by hunts and between 6,000 and 8,000 who are indirectly employed. If Parliament bans hunting, as I hope it will, I hope it will accept its responsibility towards anyone who loses their job as a consequence, as it did when the legislation to ban fur farming was passed.

The hon. Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton) referred to the social structure. That can carry on. There is nothing to stop people dressing up and riding a horse across fields chasing a trail. That is drag hunting, and I would be happy to present the stirrup cup to my local hunt if that was what it was doing. I do not believe that that is a real objection.

The third factor is the effect on the fox population.

Mrs. Browning: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Norman Baker: No, I will not.

We have had a period of foot and mouth disease in this country, and I would be interested to see some Government figures showing the impact of foot and mouth on the fox population. I have had no

[Norman Baker]

representations from my local farmers about the fox population being out of control because hunting was not allowed during that period.

I have been to see my local hunt; I visited the Southdown and Eridge hunt kennels in Ringmer. I asked how many foxes the hunt caught each year, and the answer was about 50. I do not believe that hunting on that scale has an overall impact on the fox population: it is insignificant.

Sometimes hunts argue that by catching foxes they are eliminating the weaker strains—which would mean that the fox population was being perpetuated by the hunt. At other times they say that they are solving a problem for farmers by killing a pest. Those two arguments seem slightly contradictory, and they are wheeled out on different occasions, depending on what argument the hunts are facing.

Does hunting increase or diminish the fox population? That question has not been answered, although I have noticed reports of hunts constructing artificial earths—apparently in order to breed foxes. That seems to be at variance with the need to control the fox population.

Finally, let me say something about the middle way. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik) will violently disagree with me in a moment, but I have to say that in my view the middle way is the worst option of the three. It is a legitimate position to say that hunting should be banned. It is also legitimate to say that hunting has long been the tradition of this country, and should be continued; I do not happen to share that position, but I respect its integrity.

However, it does not make sense to say that the Government should interfere and set up a massive bureaucracy. Not only would that involve lots of red tape—which we are all supposed to be against—but it would appear to give Government approval to what I regard as a cruel sport. The middle way is not a middle way; it is hunting by other means, hunting with knobs on—or perhaps the nobs are on the horses.

I hope that the House will be able to reach a clear conclusion tonight. I would like a ban, but if the House decides to allow hunting to carry on, that is fine. We do not want the middle way, but we do want a resolution of this matter before long.

6.12 pm

Kate Hoey (Vauxhall): Five years ago, when the Bill introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Foster) was being discussed, I opposed a ban and said that a way forward suggested by a former chief executive of the League Against Cruel Sports, Jim Barrington, might be the answer. That was a radically different approach that could have provided guarantees on the animal welfare aspects that concern people about hunting, while still respecting the rights of minorities.

I am pleased that the work carried out by my colleague Llin Golding—now Baroness Golding—and by the hon. Members for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) and for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik) and others, is now being seriously considered as a way forward. I thank the Minister for the way in which he has worked with all the groups and listened to them.

My reasons for opposing a ban, after looking into what happens, were related to what I discovered about the killing of foxes. I felt strongly that if we were serious about animal welfare, opposition to a ban should be our conclusion. Foxes may be furrier and sexier than rats, but they are still vermin, and need to be controlled and killed. When I consider all the different methods of killing foxes, my view, backed up by Lord Burns, is that hunting with hounds is the most natural way to kill them.

It is important to read what Lord Burns said, and remind ourselves that he did not find hunting with hounds cruel.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Kate Hoey: No, I am not giving way because I have only a few minutes.

In the House of Lords, Lord Burns was asked whether his report said that hunting was cruel, and he answered no. There is no doubt that the Burns report did not find that hunting was cruel. In fact, it said that if we stopped culling foxes in that way, many of them would die in much more horrible and painful ways, such as by gassing, poisoning or shooting—and foxes that are shot may not be killed immediately.

All that makes it clear that people's reasons for opposing foxhunting are not to do with animal welfare. There is no cruelty involved in foxhunting, any more than there is in shooting, gassing or poisoning foxes. The only people who can genuinely oppose foxhunting are those who do not eat meat, or kill anything, or wear leather. The reality is that we need to kill foxes, and we have to find a way that is as humane as possible.

We have to be honest about the fact that what really upsets some of my hon. Friends—and, perhaps, some Opposition Members too—is the idea that only toffs go hunting. If only hunters did not wear red coats, things might be different—*[Interruption.]* Hon. Members will have the chance to speak later.

I have spent some time with hunts now, which I had not done last time I spoke on this subject. When I visited the Thurlow hunt recently, and met many of the people involved, I found a more socially inclusive group of people out with the hunt than are to be found on our Back Benches—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order.

Kate Hoey: I shall now quote someone with whom I sometimes do not agree—but on this issue I do. In a recent article in *The Sun*, Richard Littlejohn wrote:

"I hold no brief for foxhunting. But at a time when the nation is plagued by a drugs epidemic, carjacking, burglary, street robbery, it seems a perverse set of priorities to make criminals out of thousands of people following a sport dating back hundreds of years".

In my constituency, just down the road in Vauxhall, there are people who want to ban hunting, but there are very few who want to make criminals out of people who hunt. People in my constituency are much more concerned about the fact that their streets are rife with criminals, that their cars are being broken into every day, that they are being mugged and having their mobile phones taken from them willy nilly, and that our streets are increasingly in the hands of real criminals.

I have to question the priorities of Parliament again. When the lives of our constituents are being made intolerable, what people are really asking for is a ban on being mugged, a ban on having to wait to get into hospital, and a ban on being homeless, or overcrowded and unable to be rehoused. Those are the issues that we as parliamentarians should be concerned about, rather than taking an attitude based on the feeling, "We don't like those people, so we'll ban them."

It is interesting that some people say that perhaps they will still allow fell hunting—presumably because the hunters are not on horses. The idea is that if people are on horses they are different from people on foot—or that if people, either on horses or walking, are working hard to kill foxes, so long as they are not getting any enjoyment out of it, that is all right. There is muddle and confusion among the people who want to ban hunting, and that is not in the interests of the countryside or of the people of this country.

I shall end by quoting the Prime Minister. A couple of years ago he talked about

"justice, freedom, tolerance"

and a respect for minorities and said:

"These are the values that drive and govern my political life".

I cannot believe that we have to take away the livelihood of country people and bulldoze their rights and freedoms, all for the sake of trying to pretend that killing a fox by hunting is any more cruel than killing a fox by any other means. I hope that the House has more sense.

6.19 pm

Mr. William Hague (Richmond, Yorks): I am grateful for the opportunity to take part in this debate. It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey) and to congratulate her not only on the wisdom of her remarks but on having the courage to speak out against the orthodoxy of her party. I congratulate her heartily on doing so.

It would be good if the Government could find time to debate a wide range of rural matters—this is one—in the House. They could have found the time to debate the aftermath of the foot and mouth disaster and to learn its lessons, which are not being learned by the public inquiry that ought to be taking place. They could have found the time to debate the need to make sure that meat imports into this country meet the standards of food produced at home. They could have found the time to debate the need to help rural tourism to recover from last year. However, they have not done so, and they have shown how grossly out of touch they are with the feeling of the countryside in the bizarrely inappropriate choice of hunting as the debate for today.

Some interesting points have been made. The hon. Member for Rochdale (Mrs. Fitzsimons) said that her constituents were more concerned about education, health and transport. That is precisely our point.

Mr. Savidge *rose—*

Mr. Hague: The hon. Member for Blyth Valley (Mr. Campbell)—I mention him only because of his sedentary interventions—warned about the other place and said that it was a place of privilege. Of course, it has largely become a place of the privilege of knowing the Prime Minister. That is why a large proportion of Members of the other place are sitting there. What is more, we know that the real reason for this debate, which was announced three weeks ago, was not to prevent the pursuit of a single fox by a pack of hounds, but to prevent the pursuit of a particular Secretary of State by the media and by my colleagues in the House.

Nevertheless, the Government said in their manifesto that they would have a vote on this issue, and, at some stage, they are entitled to do so. As we have discovered, feelings run high on this matter. My constituents, from everything that I have seen over many years, are very much in favour of being allowed to continue to hunt. I represent a very rural constituency. For some, hunting is a practical matter. For example, Hawes and High Abbotside parish council in Upper Wensleydale wrote to me on Friday—*[Interruption.]* I think that the hon. Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks) knows about as much about upper Wensleydale as he does about Timbuctoo, if I may respectfully say so. The letter stated:

"As you will probably be aware, our local hunt, Wensleydale Foxhounds, does not hunt with horses, but on foot. The hunt is often called out at night by farmers to destroy foxes which are killing their animals and this service would be very much missed if this bill comes into force."

That is simple and practical, and is one of the reasons why the council is in favour of hunting being allowed to continue.

For others, hunting is a matter of employment. There is no doubt that scores of people in my constituency would lose their jobs if hunting were to be banned. Every Member of Parliament can sympathise with constituents who are worried about losing their jobs. For some, hunting is part of their rural way of life and of maintaining a balance in the countryside between the farmed animal and the wild predator, and of doing so as they have done for a very long time. The right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) referred to 200 years ago—I know that he has now left the Chamber—and said that he would spend the remaining half of his parliamentary career campaigning against certain traditions. I will spend the remaining four fifths of mine campaigning for certain traditions, because there is value in them, and people should be free—this is a large part of the case—to pursue their customs, traditions and habits if they do not cause injury or gross inconvenience to others.

Dr. Nick Palmer (Broxtowe): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. [HON. MEMBERS: "Right honourable".] I am sorry. I am grateful to the right honourable Gentleman. If he believed—I accept that we may dispute this—that suffering was caused to animals by foxhunting would he still feel that the freedom of the individual came first?

Mr. Hague: I would have to consider the alternatives. Anyone with an understanding of a rural area such as my constituency is in no doubt that some way of controlling the fox population is necessary. There is a choice between the methods of doing so. We live surrounded by predators, and not only when I am here in the House of Commons. If one lives where I live, one hears at night the screech of the owl descending on the mouse, one sees the stoat jumping on to the rabbit, and one captures in one's car headlights the fox going about its business, seeking the new-born lamb or the chicken coop door that has been

[Mr. Hague]

left open. Predators do not consider the moral rights and wrongs as we do as human beings. They are predators, and will go on being predators in larger numbers. We have created an agricultural society with large numbers of sheep and chickens to support a huge predatory population of human beings numbering 56 million. Of course, that agricultural society can also support a huge fox population—if left to their own devices—that would wipe out many other species altogether.

One can read about the ludicrous contortions into which the so-called animal rights movement gets itself. It was reported that, last month, the Essex Wildlife Trust banned foxhunting and then became the target of furious protests by animal rights activists for ordering a cull of a booming fox population. The article stated:

"Since the fox population increased from four to five animals five years ago to about 20 today, the number of breeding pairs of ground-nesting lapwings has decreased from 38 to three, and the number of redshanks from 25 pairs to 10."

The trust's development manager said about the animal rights protesters:

"When we tell them that we have seen foxes killing lambs and ground-nesting birds, they simply do not accept it."

That is what we are up against. The protesters think that if the hunting of foxes is banned, the foxes will be deeply grateful and rush round to help the farmer at lambing time. That is the kind of ludicrous misconception that they have.

We must control foxes somehow. The alternative proposed by the animal rights movement is shooting, because it is clean, easy and so on. No one who has handled a gun could possibly come up with such a naive suggestion. One person wrote to a Sunday newspaper yesterday with an account of having seen a fox shot. The first shot broke the fox's leg, the second hit it from another direction, the third shot knocked it off its remaining feet, the fourth shot failed to kill it, and, in the end, its neck was broken because it was not killed by the four shots. Foxes do not obediently line up to be shot by firing squad. We do not have laser-guided shotguns to home in on them in the night. If shooting is the alternative, it will lead to much greater animal cruelty and inconvenience.

Mr. Kaufman: It sounds to me as though the man using the gun had drunk 14 pints before shooting.

Mr. Hague: It sounds to me like the right hon. Gentleman's serious contribution to the debate was made much earlier.

In my remaining two minutes, let me make the other part of the case. What of animal cruelty? There will be far greater cruelty to animals if foxes are to be controlled in some other way. There will be cruelty to the hounds that will have to be put down—I have not noticed anyone volunteering to take hounds into their homes.

Phil Sawford (Kettering) *rose—*

Mr. Hague: The hon. Gentleman is volunteering. That is very interesting. We shall put down his name to take hounds into his home. I have only two minutes remaining, and I am not going to give way again.

There will be greater cruelty to the foxes that will be killed in larger numbers by other means. There is also the question of respecting the rights of a minority. We often hear from many hon. Members about the need to respect minorities, and about the need to respect a culture of diversity. Why, therefore, is this particular minority being picked on? Why are people who fish not picked on? One can argue that fishing is an equivalent act of cruelty. The reason is that fishermen are large in number so hon. Members who wish to ban hunting do not pick on them. Why is ritual slaughter under certain religions, in which there is no stunning of the animals, not picked on? Many people would regard it as a great act of cruelty. It is not picked on because we respect particular different traditions and cultures. Why is the tradition and culture of foxhunting not respected when there is no compelling case to do away with it? It is because it can be picked on.

That is the hallmark of the bully throughout the ages and the signal of the abuse of majority power. If a majority in the House abuse their power in that way, it will be a deeply unattractive spectacle based on prejudice, ignorance and naivety that will do the cause of Parliament no good at all.

6.29 pm

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): I have been consistently in favour of banning hunting from before I came into Parliament and throughout my time in the House. However, I must confess to the House—I know that this will disappoint some of my hon. Friends—that I have changed my mind. I shall explain my reasons, because this should be a thoughtful debate. It is an important subject.

I have been in the House for a long time and suffered a Prime Minister who believed in confrontation. She took on the miners and other minorities and made life hard and unpleasant for those who confronted her. I do not like that style of politics or the way in which some of my hon. Friends and colleagues use our position in power to drive through proposals about which I have certain concerns.

I approach this issue from a different angle and I wish to share my worries with the House. I have always cared about cruelty to animals. I have always hated it and wanted to minimise it, and I believe that my views have been consistent. However, I have also cared very much about the rural environment and the countryside that we must leave to our children and their children. I worry about both those issues, and most of those who have spoken in the debate agree on that. They want to minimise cruelty to animals and have a decent rural environment. We can have both and I positively believe that there is room for compromise.

Mr. Challen: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Sheerman: No, because I have only 10 minutes.

One of my other worries is that many of the zealots on this issue—I am not referring to most of my colleagues—will not be content with banning hunting. They will go on to fishing and to the shooting of rabbits, pigeons, pheasants or whatever. They will not be satisfied until, as my hon. Friend the Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks) says, every sentient animal is protected. That is a dangerous position to take.

I know that some of my colleagues will not like me saying this, but we cannot separate this debate from other issues. For example, scientific and medical research must use animals in its experiments to push forward the frontiers of science and to help people who have certain diseases. We will be able to control those diseases because, in the long term, research will find the cures. However, the zealots involved on this issue—we cannot divide them up—have caused misery to those pursuing a scientific line of inquiry and carrying out their professional job. What happened to Huntingdon Life Sciences was a blemish on our national life. We must be careful to take a balanced view. These issues go together.

The hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) discounted the third way, but I make an appeal to the House to take it seriously. We should be able to say that the argument is not all on one side. When the hon. Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton) spoke, I thought, "My Goodness, I have got to follow that and agree with some of the things that she said." *[Interruption.]* My hon. Friend the Member for Reading, West (Mr. Salter) is giving the speech a good roasting.

One thing that many of us share is that we do not like the people who go hunting. I do not like many of them, but many of the people who hunt in the Colne valley and in Yorkshire do not have horses and they do not wear red coats. They hunt to reduce the numbers of what they regard as a pest, and do so in a fairly innocuous way.

My neighbour is an organic farmer, whom I very much admire. He cares about the environment and does not use chemicals. However, his livelihood is threatened by the fact that rabbits plague his land. The rabbit population is the most difficult thing to control, so my neighbour wants a group of well trained people with dogs and with the right equipment to reduce the rabbit population. However, what does he have to resort to? He has to resort to the use of gas. I do not know whether Members have seen a warren where the rabbits have been gassed, but it is not very pleasant.

There is something else that human beings have done to rabbits—our cuddly friends. We introduced the disease of myxomatosis and it returned five years ago. I never understood how it returned, but the effects of that man-delivered plague on the rabbit population are not very pleasant at all.

The more I have considered the subject, the more I have been concerned to learn whether the alternatives are any better. I am not convinced that they are. The turning point for me came when I read the Burns report, and I value highly the work that Terry Burns carried out. He got the balance absolutely right. The report did not conclude that hunting was the cruellest thing that one can do to animals or that it was much crueller than any other method of controlling their numbers. It concluded that there was not much to choose between the various options of killing them. It is not nice to kill an animal, and choices have to be made. I do not believe that the alternatives to hunting are much better.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: Will my hon. Friend way?

Mr. Sheerman: No.

Mr. Prentice: I want to quote from the Burns report.

Mr. Sheerman: My hon. Friend will have his turn to speak and I shall listen to him when the time comes.

I merely wish to address the issue, and I knew that that would not be popular with some on this side of the House. I have genuinely listened to the arguments, I have thought about them and I have changed my mind. After 30 years of holding one opinion, I have every right to change my mind, to tell the House that I have changed my mind and to give the reasons. All my reasons may not please my hon. Friends and I know that they will probably think that I am something of a deserter. However, the fact is that they must recognise that some people have concerns.

I note that there are very few people on these Benches compared with the 1997 debate in which I also spoke. I suspect that colleagues and the public outside are getting a little bored with the House's antics on this matter. Most people with common sense will say, "Why don't they reach a deal? Why don't they come to some sort of compromise such as a middle way?"

I believe that the Government will be remembered for certain things. I do not want them to be remembered for an obsession with foxhunting and for the hours that we have spent on the issue in this House and in Committee. However, people might remember us for that. I disagree with every word of some previous speakers in that I believe that the Government are delivering better health, better education and better law and order on our streets. I do not want all those achievements to be forgotten or for someone to write in 10 or 20 years' time that this Government were obsessed with hunting with dogs.

There is a way ahead, and it is called the middle way. It is a compromise under which we can cluster. We can reach a compromise with the other House, and that is the way forward. I urge my colleagues to think seriously about the issue and not to remain in the trenches of prejudice where they have been for too long.

6.39 pm

Mr. John Gummer (Suffolk, Coastal): Perhaps the earliest political discussion that I remember is one that took place when I was at university and we discussed the conclusions of the Wolfenden report and made the distinction between sin and crime. It was an important distinction to make. Many things that we do not approve of should not necessarily be made criminal. The first point that this debate should take into account is that it is not sensible to make criminals of all those of whom we disapprove or make criminal those activities that we do not wish to take part in ourselves and that we would perhaps prefer others not to enjoy.

A tolerant society is one in which we criminalise an activity only as a last resort. Toleration is not just about allowing people to do things of which we approve, but about allowing them to do things of which we do not approve. Sadly, sometimes people who want to ban hunting forget that; they also forget that many of the things that they do are not approved of by other people. As minorities—in one way or another we are all minorities—they rely on the majority respecting, whenever humanly possible, their right to act as they want; they do not want that right interfered with because they are a minority.

[Mr. John Gummer]

That is even more important in a multicultural and multiracial society. As a Minister, I had to face up to the issue of ritual slaughter, which I dislike very strongly. Religiously and philosophically, I believe that it is wrong; it is based on an unacceptable historical argument. However, for some people, it is a religious belief; Jews and Muslims have a right to live in our society and be respected. So, although I hated the concept of ritual slaughter, I agreed to its continuance because I believe in toleration; one should tolerate those with whom one disagrees. Above all, one does not put one's own views on such matters above the serious beliefs of others.

Andy King (Rugby and Kenilworth): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gummer: No, the hon. Gentleman has already expressed his views clearly in a sedentary intervention. If he thinks that ritual slaughter, in which Jews and Muslims believe, is equivalent to bear baiting or bull fighting, he demonstrates the triviality of his thinking.

Miss Ann Widdecombe (Maidstone and The Weald): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Gummer: No.

One must ask whether hunting is so immoral that it cannot be accepted. Some people believe that the House can enforce a secular morality; I dread to think what kind of things it might do, or might have done, if it acted on that. Nobody with religious views in Judaeo-Christian history—whether Anglican, Roman Catholic or Orthodox—believes that hunting is immoral, which begs the question of how those who claim the right to forbid others to do something on moral grounds manage to maintain their position. People whom we do not expect to take a clear moral position make it plain that they have taken such a position. It is hard to claim to be more moral than the Pope or the Archbishop of Canterbury, particularly when one is an elected Member of Parliament.

Mr. Savidge: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gummer: No, I have not got a lot of time and want to address the question of reality—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Gummer: I find it hard to accept the arguments of people who want a ban when they do not appear to understand how the natural world works. My right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague) gave a graphic description of the basic predatory characteristic of the natural order. We are part of the predatory chain, but our job includes keeping the balance in nature. The difference is that we have the right and ability to choose. The problem is not that we choose between killing foxes and not killing them; we have to choose the mechanism and the method by which we kill them.

The Burns report is only the latest in a series of investigations, all of which concluded that if hunting is not the least cruel option, it is certainly no crueller than the alternatives. It is all very well for people to go on voicing their opinions, but anyone who has looked seriously at the issue has come to that conclusion. If we deal with the reality of the situation, and if we decide to be as lacking in cruelty as possible, we must take the view that hunting is the best way of undertaking a necessary action.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gummer: No, we only have 10 minutes each; the hon. Gentleman has spoken ad nauseam on the subject, and no doubt we shall hear from him again.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks was right that some people's view on animals includes the belief that we should not intervene in the natural world at all. Dare I tell my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) that that view is heretical because it suggests, untruthfully, that nature would be much better if humans were not here at all? One must distinguish between those who take a sentimental Mable Lucy Atwell view of animals and those who understand the nature of the countryside and the role which mankind is supposed to play in it.

On the grounds of reality, we have to choose how we are going to keep foxes under control; I maintain that hunting is much the best way. Some people, however, believe that the debate is not about morality, diversity or reality. They take a puritanical view; they do not mind what people do as long as they do not enjoy it. I find it extremely difficult to accept the position of people who wish to stop others doing what they want because they think their opinion so important that it must be imposed on the rest of society.

That fascist element has characterised much of the argument that has taken place. Fascism is about doing to the minority what one would never get away with on a majority, and has been a distinctive feature of our debate. People who wish to get rid of hunting are afraid to say that they would like to get rid of fishing. There is no need to control the fish population, and people are allowed to treat them as they wish. There is a need to keep the fox population under control, but we are not allowed to do so. Members who want to deal with hunting are afraid to deal with fishing because they are afraid of offending the many voters who fish.

At stake is the diversity of our society; a sensible morality which is not overcome by sentimentality; an understanding of the reality of circumstances; and, above all, standing up for freedom and toleration. The idea that we would use the Parliament Act to cut back—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The right hon. Gentleman's time is up.

6.49 pm

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): My hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) has every right to change his mind, but he should have spent more time reading the Burns report, paragraph 60 of which states:

"Our tentative conclusion is that lamping using rifles, if carried out properly and in appropriate circumstances, has fewer adverse welfare implications than hunting, including digging-out."

Mr. Barker: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Prentice: I do have 10 minutes; if the hon. Gentleman will let me make some progress, I will give way.

The report goes on to make observations about special circumstances in upland areas—the point on which the hon. Gentleman is presumably trying to intervene.

The other person who has changed her mind is my hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey). I have a copy of a letter to one of her constituents, dated 22 March 1994—admittedly, quite a long time ago—in which she says:

"Please be assured that I will actively support all moves in Parliament to ban hunting and to improve animal welfare generally."

Kate Hoey: I have never made a secret of the fact that that letter was written, but the difference between me and some of my colleagues is that, since then, I have begun to listen, look and understand.

Mr. Prentice: I was going to say that I might not need 10 minutes to explain my views, but perhaps I will.

Mr. Barker: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Prentice: No. I want to speak bluntly, because on this issue—as on so many others—I am the Government's best friend.

The indicative votes are worse than useless and will tell us nothing that we do not already know. I believe that hunting with dogs is cruel, inflicts unnecessary suffering and should be banned. Such sentiments are not being uttered by some Marxist from a different planet—*[Interruption.]*—not on this occasion, at least. Blue-chip organisations such as the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals have argued such views for years, but matters are not straightforward. The Prime Minister said recently that the third way is entering its third phase, but on this issue we seem to be stuck for ever. We are back where we started, endlessly dancing around and—as the hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) said—getting nowhere.

I shall give the House three guesses as to who said, in 1999,

"It will be banned, we will get the vote to ban as soon as we possibly can."

[HON. MEMBERS: "The Prime Minister."] They guessed it—my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. That is his view, unless he repudiates it and publicly says that he has changed his mind. Journalists tell me that he will join us in the Lobby this evening. That is great, but how do we get from where we are to where we want to be?

When I bump into the Prime Minister in the Lobby, I shall tell him that the answer is not to bring in a new Bill—that would involve further consultation, could take another two years to get on the statute book and may trigger the Parliament Act—but to bring back the Bill that was carried by the Commons in the previous Session and sent to the Lords. I have in my hand a copy of that Bill, which generated some 60 hours of debate. I know what will happen. This evening, we will vote for a ban; tomorrow, the Lords will vote for regulation; and on Thursday the Minister will tell the House that we need to reconcile those two divergent positions. I suspect that he will also say that the Bill that was carried overwhelmingly by the Commons in the previous Session is flawed, and that bringing it back is not an option.

If we endlessly prevaricate, hesitate and vacillate, we will lose a lot of support and people will start to ridicule us. Perhaps they will ridicule the Prime Minister and, by extension, the rest of us. On this issue, ridicule and mockery would be very difficult to cope with, especially when an option exists. That could be avoided by using the Parliament Act. The matter could be done and dusted by October—at the end of the current Session. The alternative is to allow it to drag on until 2003-04.

As I said, the Minister will probably tell us that the original Bill is unworkable, yet it was piloted through Standing Committee by my hon. Friend the Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien) and it covered all the ground.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Prentice: No. My hon. Friend—who was a Home Office Minister and took advice from parliamentary draftsmen—said that the Bill was workable. Even if it is flawed in some respects, the answer is not to throw it in the bin but to pass it and introduce a short, technical Bill in November to plug the gaps

There is no middle way. A middle way is an illusion—it is chasing moonbeams. The issue is not just the welfare of foxes—we heard earlier about the South Staffordshire pony club—but of deer, mink and hares. According to the pamphlet published in November 2000, the Middle Way Group had no policy on hare coursing and hare hunting, although I am not entirely sure whether it has a such a policy at the moment.

The hon. and learned Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) sought to intervene just a few moments ago, and I shall give way after I quote his comments in Standing Committee. He said that

"the purpose of hare coursing is not to inflict unnecessary cruelty on the hare but to watch two greyhounds competing to show how skilled they are at turning or moving another animal."—*[Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 30 January 2001; c. 183.]

Why are greyhounds not muzzled, therefore? I invite him to intervene and say whether he believes that greyhounds should be muzzled, but I suspect that he will not.

Mr. Garnier: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for allowing me to intervene, because every time I do so I remind him of the fun that we had—

Mr. Prentice: Get to the point.

Mr. Garnier: I shall forget about that particular incident. The Minister for Rural Affairs would agree that the original Bill is unworkable because, as a Back Bencher, he participated in Standing Committee and saw how unworkable it was. I suspect that that experience is

[Mr. Garnier]

seared on his ministerial memory. On muzzling, I do not accept that it would answer the hon. Gentleman's point.

Mr. Prentice: If a hare could speak, it would answer that point.

I should tell my hon. Friend the Member for Hudders[illegible] that the Burns inquiry concluded that hare coursing is ca[illegible] for largely recreational purposes. In essence—this always [illegible] reaction from Opposition Members—we are talking abo[illegible] blood sports and killing for fun. In 21st century Britain, killing for fun should not be allowed.

Mr. Barker: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Prentice: No, I will not. As my amendment was not called for debate this evening, I hope that I will be allowed to raise this issue—and, if necessary, to vote on it—at the meeting of the parliamentary Labour party at 11.30 am this Wednesday, before my right hon. Friend the Minister explains to the House the Government's definitive position. It would be eccentric if Labour MPs were not allowed to express their views on whether the Hunting Bill should be brought back and the matter resolved once and for all in the current Session.

6.59 pm

Miss Ann Widdecombe (Maidstone and The Weald): Future generations will look back on some things in disbelief, just as we look back in disbelief at cock fighting, bear baiting and, more recently, badger digging. One of the things on which they will look back in disbelief is that at the beginning of the third millennium we were still debating in this Chamber whether it was right and proper to allow people to chase an animal to exhaustion, with its killers closing in on it, causing it the most unspeakable fear before its death, and all in the name of tradition.

I have found some of the arguments mounted on the other side of the debate today incredible. Instead of making the case for keeping hunting, those in favour have sought to question the motives of those of us who believe that it should be abolished. The hon. Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey) painted a wonderful picture of life under Labour. Apparently, one cannot walk down the street without having one's phone nicked and nobody can get an operation under the NHS. She said that those issues were more important. I agree, so let us get this issue out of the way and then we can concentrate on those more important issues.

The hon. Lady also claimed that those who opposed hunting were anti-toff. Even my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague), for whom I have tremendous respect—he is my wonderful and fantastic right hon. Friend—ended up by saying that opposition to hunting was a product of prejudice and not liking the sort of people who hunt. Anti-toff? Moi? I am one of the few people in this Chamber who upheld the rights of hereditary peers to carry on in the House of Lords. I actually believed in that. I was one of those—and my right hon. Friend knows it—who argued for the repeal of the iniquitous Act that stopped them. To suggest that somehow I am prejudiced against what have been called toffs—it is a stupid expression—is a nonsense.

Apparently, I do not like people who go hunting. My parents hunted. I like my parents very much indeed.

Mr. Bellingham: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on her recent appearance in the programme "When Louis Met Ann Widdecombe". Am I right in thinking that when her drawing room was filmed I saw some very nice hunting prints?

Miss Widdecombe: Yes, indeed. They are wonderful, colourful scenes of olde England, and in olde England they firmly belong.

It is true that the Burns report said that hunting compromises the welfare of the fox. The only thing that surprises me about that is that it should take all those learned men all that time to decide that.

Mr. Barker: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Miss Widdecombe: No. I have given way once and I do not intend to give up too much of my time.

One hon. Member told us to beware, because if we gave in on hunting, fishing would be next, but my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) said that fishing would not be abolished. Pro-hunt Members must make up their minds about which side of that argument they are on.

We also heard the usual old nonsense that banning hunting would affect employment. Yes, it will affect employment, but as I said in a previous debate, if we abolished crime we would put all the police out of work. If we abolished ill-health we would put all the nurses and doctors out of work. Will anybody argue that we should preserve crime and ill-health in order to keep people in jobs?

Hunting is either right or wrong. My right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal said that we must respect certain things because people sincerely believe in them religiously. I am not sure who believes in hunting religiously, but he argued that people's religions must be respected and that they should be allowed to do anything in the name of liberty that their religion dictates. Fine. I look forward to my right hon. Friend's private Member's Bill to legalise polygamy.

Even from my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks, who should know better, we heard all the arguments about how it is natural to hunt and to be a predator, and that that is practised widely throughout the animal kingdom. Yes, but should Members of Parliament take their standards from the animal kingdom? Do we seriously think that we should determine whether something is right or wrong by whether the animals do it? That seemed to be the proposition made by some of those who support hunting.

We are also told that the issue is one of liberty, and nothing else. It is about the liberty to do anything one wants to do. However, it has always been the purpose of the law to curtail liberty to do something that is believed by the democratically elected body of this House to be wrong. We eliminated cock fighting, bear baiting and badger digging. I do not say that those activities equate

with hunting. Hunting is much less wrong than those activities, but my argument is that we curtail liberty when we believe that something is wrong.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): Does my right hon. Friend think that fishing is wrong? If she is taking a stand on the issue of cruelty, her speech is illogically nonsensical if she would not also argue for banning fishing.

Miss Widdecombe: I shall come to that point in a minute. Some people argue for the retention of hunting on the basis that it is the normal method of fox control and that if we get rid of it something vastly more cruel will be put in its place. The Burns report says that hunting is responsible for only 6 per cent. of all fox destruction—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Barker *rose—*

Mr. Simon Thomas *rose—*

Miss Widdecombe: The other 94 per cent.— *[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The right hon. Lady is on her feet and is entitled to be heard.

Miss Widdecombe: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for your protection against my various colleagues who wish to take issue with me.

Hunting is responsible for only 6 per cent. of fox destruction. The idea, therefore, that we wish to abolish the only means of fox control is wrong. What that figure proves beyond doubt is that hunting is not even an efficient pesticide, which is just about the one argument that could be made for keeping it.

If hunting is not an efficient pesticide, it has no purpose. There is some purpose in fishing—and I come to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Sir Patrick Cormack). I agree that not all fishing has a purpose, but one can fish and then eat the result. [Hon. Members: "Not all the time."] I did not say that that applied to all fishing. Either my hon. Friends were not listening or they did not want to listen.

The last argument that is often mounted is that those who hunt want to be left alone and that they cause no problem to other people. Those who make that argument should read a letter from a rural resident who has lived for 20 years in a foxhunting area of Hampshire. Her animals have been attacked, and she has to keep them in whenever the hunt is in the area. She talks about the immense damage that hunt supporters do to verges and other parts of the countryside and she says that although the hunt claim to care for their own animals, the state of the horses and hounds at the end of the day calls that claim into question.

It is right that this House should consider whether to ban hunting. When everything is added up, the argument is decidedly in favour of a ban. However, we are all entitled to our views and neither side should imagine that the views of the other are the product of prejudice or ignorance.

7.9 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (West Ham): I am grateful for having been called—

Mr. Peter Luff (Mid-Worcestershire): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I understand that it is now the convention of the House that only Members who were present for the opening speeches are called during a debate. The hon. Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks) came into the Chamber at five minutes to 6.

Madam Deputy Speaker: May I inform the hon. Gentleman that he is correct, save that the hon. Member for West Ham was attending a meeting of the House of Commons Commission? I call Mr. Banks.

Mr. Banks *rose—*

Sir Patrick Cormack: Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. As I attended that meeting, may I be called too?

Madam Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman may well succeed in catching my eye.

Mr. Banks: I was about to make that point. I had no choice but to attend on Mr. Speaker at the Commission, and it was a privilege to do so. I found the experience a damn sight more intellectually stimulating than certain aspects of this debate.

May I say to, on this occasion, my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe), that it is a privilege to follow her? She made a brave speech. Frankly, nothing more needs to be said and we could all go into the Lobby, but I have brought my speech and I intend to make it. If the Conservative party chose her as its leader, the Labour Government would find themselves in considerable difficulties. Fortunately, I know that such good sense does not prevail on the Opposition Benches.

I say to the right hon. and pious Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer), who unfortunately has gone— [Hon. Members: "He is back."] I say to his holiness that it is interesting that he mentioned ritual slaughter, about which I have said a number of things in the House before. He says that we should respect those religious conventions. What about Sharia law and stoning to death for adultery? Would he suggest that we must also respect that? If we did, there would be an awful lot of stone dodging in this Chamber.

The right hon. Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague), for whom I have a great deal of respect, says that we should get on to other matters and asks why we are obsessed. I have heard him make two speeches since he stood down as Conservative leader, both on this subject. A large number of Members are in the Chamber, so clearly we are interested, and the idea that the debate is forcing other issues out is nonsense.

People may say, "Why aren't you dealing with the problems in law and order, education and transport?" Well, we are, but the fact is that this is not an administrative Chamber. We do not run the education service or the transport system or the hospitals. We pass laws. That is what we are here to do. Some say that we are obsessed, even though we have made our decision in

[Mr. Banks]

favour of a ban so clear on so many occasions, and that those at the other end of the Palace are not obsessed, even though they keep obstructing it. We have our priorities right; Opposition Members and Members of the other place have their priorities wrong.

We spent more than 100 hours debating the last two Bills on the issue and there is no doubt about what will happen tonight, but I must pick up a couple of points. The first is the idea that foxes are vermin. If they are vermin, why is there a close season? I do not understand that; it makes no sense whatever.

Mr. Gray: The hon. Gentleman is, of course, quite incorrect. Most foxes are killed outside the close season, which applies only to killing foxes with hounds.

Mr. Banks: It seems to me that continual pressure on vermin is the way to deal with them, but as my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald said, those who support hunting do not want foxes to be eliminated. That is why, for example, foxes were introduced to the Isle of Wight and why certain hunts put carcases out to feed foxes—they need the sport.

The idea that foxhunting is an effective method of fox control is nonsense. Only about 5 per cent. of foxes are dealt with through the hunt and most are killed on the roads. Indeed, we would probably be better off issuing the hunts with four-wheel drive vehicles so that they can run the foxes over. For me, this is a moral issue. I cannot understand how anyone takes pleasure from killing a wild animal, and the aspect of bloodlust fills me with detestation.

We have made clear in the Chamber how we feel, and it is about time that my right hon. Friends on the Front Bench respected that. I have a lot of time for my right hon. Friend the Minister, who is a man of great compassion, and I know that he wants foxhunting abolished. The fact is that our manifesto said that we would bring the matter to a conclusion, but we can reach a conclusion only if the will of the House of Commons as expressed in a vote is respected.

I do not understand what the Government are frightened of. The issue is not about town versus country and I have received a large number of letters, as other Members have, clearly from people in rural areas who abhor foxhunting. Indeed, the most recent opinion polls, taken in late January, suggest that a majority of the public favour a ban on foxhunting, hare coursing, stag hunting and mink hunting. Do not forget: this issue involves not only foxhunting, but all those other creatures. No one could call stags and hares vermin or pests.

With such a majority, what are my Government worried about? Is it the Countryside Alliance? Frankly, they should not worry. Most of its members are die-hard Tories who would not think of voting Labour even if my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister formed the Downing street hunt and went into the royal parks to get hold of foxes. There might be a reason for doing that. Not many people know this, but last year 110 foxes were removed from the royal parks.

Mr. Mark Simmonds (Boston and Skegness): Is the hon. Gentleman aware of the poll in *The Sun* today, which says that 76 per cent. of people who took part in it favour the continuation of foxhunting?

Mr. Banks: That is effectively a straw poll based on telephoning, but the MORI poll that I referred to was scientific. The hon. Gentleman should take note of that. Now, what is 17 minus nine?

Mr. Ian Cawsey (Brigg and Goole): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Banks: I cannot, because my mental arithmetic, which is rather deficient, tells me that I have only two minutes left.

Let me say something about the middle way. There is no middle way. We cannot compromise on cruelty. We cannot have some system of Queensberry rules whereby an animal can be ripped to pieces and that is okay. It is totally unacceptable, and I hope that my right hon. Friend the Minister does not come back with a recommendation, following a change of opinion in the House of Lords, that we should accept the middle way. I am sure he will not. Why would the House of Lords change its position and go for the middle way? Because the middle way is hunting by another name. That is all it is—hunting with a bit of bureaucracy. Quite honestly, that is totally unacceptable to us.

We will face an electoral backlash, and I recommend that my right hon. Friend the Minister read the many hundreds of letters that I have received from people who say, "This is a matter of good faith for the Government." He must bear that in mind. I trust that he will look after us and I hope that he does not become the political equivalent of St. Jude, the patron saint of lost causes, because he has suffered from that in the past. I want him to prosper and do well. The best way to achieve that is to recommend to the Prime Minister that we bring back the Bill that the House passed and the House of Lords rejected.

7.18 pm

Mr. Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe): I have never taken part in a debate in the House on foxhunting, but we have debated it so frequently in recent times that it is necessary for me to give a word, at least for the benefit of my constituents.

I have not changed my mind, although I have the greatest respect for those who have over the years. I have always voted against a ban on foxhunting and I have always made it perfectly clear to my constituents on both sides of the argument that I oppose any attempt to ban it. I feel that it would be particularly wrong to invoke the criminal law against people in my constituency who take part in the three hunts that enter it in their traditional pursuit of foxhunting, unless some compelling public interest reason can be found so to do. It is the use of the criminal law that would most appal me.

I shall not have time, in 10 minutes, to go into all the arguments—which the aficionados of this debate seem to know backwards—about the number of foxes killed in

particular ways at different times of the year, the employment consequences, and so on, although I have become familiar with most of them over the years.

I find myself allied with the majority of people who have spoken on this side of the debate so far, when I single out the one thing that places me on this side—my instinct. The more I listen to the debate, the more I believe that most people on both sides are reacting by instinct when making their personal judgments. No doubt they are doing their best on the subject on behalf of their constituents. My instinct is on the side of a liberal and tolerant approach to society. I agree with all who have said that it should be the aim of the House, in setting the laws for society, to encourage the greatest possible degree of tolerance of a wide variety of lifestyles and customs, and we should hesitate strongly before we intervene against that.

The remarks of the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), with whom I have often debated, were particularly wide of the mark. I do not know whether he was trying to comfort himself by saying that those in favour of foxhunting were somehow akin to those who have been against every other social reform of the last 200 years. I have always been against capital punishment, and on the side of liberal divorce reform. I regard myself as a liberal social reformer. It is absurd of the right hon. Gentleman to say that the invocation of the criminal law in these circumstances is somehow akin to all the enlightened liberal reforms that have been supported on both sides of the House over the last three decades, and which will, I hope, continue to be so supported.

I sympathise with the difficulty of the courageous Members on both sides of the House who are out of touch with their party majority on this issue, as I suspect that I am out of touch with the opinion of the majority of my constituents. I do not deceive myself on that. There are three hunts in the rural part of my constituency; one third of my constituency is suburban, and two thirds are rural. I suspect that, if an opinion poll were held there today, there would be a majority in favour of banning foxhunting, although I am encouraged by the way in which the national opinion polls appear to have been moving recently, as people face up to what is involved in the issue.

The hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) said that there was an enormous majority in favour of a ban in his constituency. With the greatest respect, we do not make the criminal law on the basis of opinion polls. A majority of 9:1 could be in favour of a ban in my constituency, but I would not regard that as conclusive, and I hope that we never would. That would lead to the intolerant attitudes to which my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) has referred. If we start having opinion polls about all the unpleasant and distasteful habits and customs of some members of society, and suggesting that their findings should be made part of the criminal law, foxhunting would come way down the list, and quite a lot of strange enactments would have to go through the House.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) made a brilliant speech, and, as usual, I admire her courage. I have to say to her, however, that we tolerate polygamy in this country. We do not allow polygamous marriage, because of our views on the family and because we do not think that our civil law should encourage the legal formation of polygamous unions. Unless we change the law, however, someone who comes to this country with his coterie of wives—having legitimately been married in a country whose jurisdiction allowed him to do so—is indeed allowed to enjoy a polygamous marriage in this country and even, occasionally, to claim benefits for his various family members if anything goes wrong. That would not be popular with my constituents, but I would defend his right to have his polygamous marriages recognised.

The criminal law should be used only with great care, when someone's behaviour is not only something of which the majority—or any of us—disapprove, but is doing positive damage to the legitimate interests, property or well-being of other citizens, or doing great damage to society. That is the reason we do not normally use the criminal law in areas of this kind.

Of course, we use the criminal law in relation to animal welfare. This is a matter of judgment and degree. I entirely support the continuance of the ban on bull baiting and badger baiting, because they involve capturing an animal and placing or tethering it in a confined position for the purpose of setting up a bloody fight with dogs, on which people bet or from which they take a certain amount of satisfaction. We regard that as so distasteful and disgusting that it damages society to encourage its prevalence. These are matters of judgment, however, and it is frankly bizarre to leap straight from that standpoint to the banning of the countryside method of foxhunting as part of the cull of foxes that has to take place.

This is relevant not only because foxhunting is traditional, although that is important, but because it takes place in the setting that it does. My right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague) has already mentioned the natural setting, and people's enjoyment of it. I take a great interest in conservation, and in bird watching. When I support the protection of the peregrine and the hen harrier, I am in favour of inhibiting "man the hunter". I think that it should be a criminal offence to shoot such birds, because society is impoverished by reducing their numbers. We therefore encourage their numbers to grow. They are, however, fairly deadly killing machines when they attack some of the other birds that I watch. Nature is red in tooth and claw, and everyone who understands nature knows that many animals are predated upon, and that they, in turn, predate.

In the context of conservation plans, however, we do not have a natural environment any more. We have a man-made environment in this country. We have to manage even the nature reserves that we preserve, and we have to cull. The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds often has great difficulty explaining to its members that it really has to cull that Walt Disney-like little duck, the ruddy duck, because it will otherwise damage other, rarer species. Foxes have to be culled, and I find it impossible to draw a judgmental line that involves saying that it is all right to carry on shooting and gassing them—and that it is all right to do that to rabbits—but that it is uniquely unacceptable for people to hunt, in a traditional way and in a natural setting, an animal that hunts in the same setting itself by pursuing and killing its prey.

We should not be allowed to make criminals of the perfectly respectable, civilised people who take part in hunting. They are law-abiding, decent citizens. I do not hunt, but they are people who would not understand why they were being classed with the criminals of Vauxhall if they were subject to a law such as this. Many of them

[Mr. Kenneth Clarke]

hunt and fish, and there is no logical distinction between the two activities. With the greatest respect to my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald, people do not fish because they are starving and need to eat. They fish because they enjoy the process of pursuing the fish, and many of them throw them back again. Such people do not go rough shooting because they want to eat all the rabbits that they shoot, and we cannot get through all the pigeons that get shot. Pigeons are not shot in sufficient numbers nowadays to protect crops. This is a way of life enjoyed by respectable people, such as the people of the Vale of Belvoir, in my constituency.

This measure is being driven through largely for the benefit of the prejudices of the Labour party, and being handled in a ridiculous way by dragging it out and by making us vote and vote again until we all become good people and vote in the moderate way that lets the Government off the hook. It is a bizarre way of proceeding, and a parliamentary majority, even of this size, should not be used in this intolerant and unfeeling way. We should vote on the side of reason.

7.28 pm

Mr. Gerry Steinberg (City of Durham): I want to start by quoting from an article by John O'Farrell in *The Guardian* on Saturday 2 March, in which he asks:

"If 'country sports' really are a sport, how come the same side always wins? Does this always come as a surprise to the participants? Do the hunters look on excitedly with their fingers crossed to see whether the fox rips the dogs to pieces or vice versa? You don't get the fox being interviewed on Sportsnight beforehand, saying: 'Well Brian, I'm really confident about this one. I've had a couple of fights in the run-up; there was that easy win against Mr. Rabbit, but this is the big one I've been training for'.

'So you're not worried that the bookies have you at a 1,000:1 against beating this pack of foxhounds?'

'What, you mean there's more than one of them? Er, excuse me—I've just got to call to my agent'."

Foxhunting is as much a sport as badger baiting or cock fighting was, and it is just as barbaric. One form of cruelty that is often overlooked in this debate is the unnecessary suffering caused to the thousands of dogs used in fox, deer, hare and mink hunting. I am in no doubt as to the immense suffering caused to wild mammals when they are chased to exhaustion, brutally savaged by a pack of hounds or forced to fight underground with terriers. The Burns inquiry into hunting with dogs in England and Wales has been mentioned often today, as we might expect. It concluded that hunting with dogs "seriously compromises the welfare" of the foxes, deer, hares, and mink. What is often forgotten, however, is the plight of hunting hounds and terriers. No one has mentioned that today.

The plight of the foxhound starts early in its short life. Contrary to what the Countryside Alliance would have us all believe, it is not natural for foxhounds to hunt foxes. It sickens me to say that puppies that do not show aptitude for hunting, or whose colouring or body shape does not meet the requirements, are usually shot by the kennelman. Foxhounds fortunate enough to make the grade as puppies are trained to chase and kill foxes during the cub-hunting season. It is a particularly unpleasant aspect of hunting that involves the chasing and killing of fox cubs for the purpose of teaching young hounds to kill.

Hunts will head for wherever the scent of their quarry takes them, which is what makes the route of hunts for live quarry so unpredictable. Many hounds are run over on the roads, or even hit by speeding trains after straying on to railway lines. Others are injured on barbed-wire fences, or are lost from the pack for days on end.

In November 1999, six hounds were electrocuted and killed as the New Forest Foxhounds trespassed across a railway line. The incident was witnessed by passengers on the London to Bournemouth train that ran over the dead bodies of the hounds. Not only did the incident cause the senseless loss of the lives of six hounds; the delay caused to the train led to further huge delays. Sixty-one other trains were delayed.

The Wiltshire Times reported the needless deaths of three beagles from the Wiltshire and Infantry Beagles at Steeple Ashton, near Trowbridge. A car hit two of them as they chased their hare across the A350 between West Ashton and Stoney Gutter, and one sustained fatal injuries. Another dog was killed at a nearby roundabout, and the third fatality occurred as the dog tried to make its way back to the pack.

Mr. Andrew Turner: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Steinberg: No. I have not enough time.

That is not all. There is no gentle retirement home for these poor animals. When hounds reach the age of six or seven, about half their normal life expectancy, most are simply shot by the very people whom they have served loyally since their birth. That makes a mockery of the hunts' claim that in the event of a ban on hunting with dogs they will have no alternative to shooting them: they shoot them anyway. It is estimated that between 3,000 and 5,000 hounds are killed in that way by hunts each year.

For some time the Countryside Alliance has used its dogs to blackmail the public by arguing, for instance, that all hounds would need to be destroyed in the event of a ban. Being a dog lover, I have looked into that claim. According to the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, a mass slaughter of hounds in such circumstances would be irresponsible and unnecessary. The RSPCA has pledged to do all that it can to prevent such needless destruction at the hands of the hunts. The committee of inquiry into hunting with dogs found that

"any need to put down hounds or horses, in the event of a ban, could be minimised if there was a suitable lead-in time before it was implemented".

The Government's Hunting Bill, produced in March last year, provided for such a lead-in period—although I believe that responsible hunts should start to wind down their breeding programmes immediately to reduce the number left in the event of a ban.

When the time comes for hunts to disband, three options will be open to them: to disband and rehome their hounds, to disband the hunt but keep their hounds, and to convert to drag hunting. I believe that a switch to drag hunting is the preferable option, as it would allow the hunt to continue the so-called sport, the pageantry and the social side while allowing the hounds to continue to be kept in packs. Hounds that cannot be rehomed with drag hunts should be assessed for their suitability for rehoming elsewhere. The RSPCA has offered to work with hunts to help find alternative homes for puppies and grown dogs.

Perhaps the most brutal and callous form of cruelty inflicted on dogs in the name of sport occurs in what is known as terrier work. Most registered foxhunts use the services of terriermen or fox diggers—people employed to find, dig out and kill foxes that have found an underground refuge during a hunt. That activity has become a "sport" in its own right, attracting thousands of enthusiasts who kill an estimated 50,000 foxes a year just for the fun of it.

Most people are familiar with the illegal practice of badger digging, in which terriers are sent underground to find badgers. That often results in appalling injuries to both dog and badger. Fox digging works in exactly the same way; the only difference is that fox digging is legal, because foxes are not afforded the same legal protection as badgers.

The legal loophole that allows the digging out of foxes while outlawing the same practice in the case of badgers has provided those engaged in the illegal practice of badger baiting with a convenient alibi. In recent years there have been several court cases in which suspected badger baiters have escaped—or attempted to escape—conviction by claiming that they were hunting for foxes rather than for badgers.

Only last month, a gang of suspected badger baiters escaped conviction owing to the very same loophole. The six men, who were accompanied by 12 dogs—12 dogs for one fox!—were found by police at the entrance of what was believed to be a badger sett in Wales. They claimed that they had been digging for a fox that had gone to ground. The court heard that two of the dogs had been seen trying to get into a tunnel at the bottom of the hole, and that a squealing noise could be heard. When one of the dogs was pulled out of the tunnel it was heavily bloodstained, and was later found to have badger hairs in its mouth. A veterinary surgeon who examined the dog said

"The injuries to the dog were consistent with dogs fighting a badger".

The six were acquitted by magistrates who felt it could not be proved that the men were hunting badgers rather than foxes.

When a fox finds an underground refuge during a hunt, terriers are sent into the earth to locate it. If a terrier finds the fox an underground battle may ensue between the two animals, in which both dog and fox can suffer horrific injuries. The fox is then either flushed from the earth by the terrier, or dug out and shot at close range by a waiting terrierman.

Not surprisingly, there have been several successful prosecutions of a number of terrier owners for failing to seek veterinary treatment for terriers injured during such encounters. I am pleased to say that a recent case of that type led to recognition from the High Court that those who send terriers into earths where an underground battle may ensue as the terrified quarry tries to defend itself can be guilty of cruelly ill-treating their dogs—not to mention the suffering inflicted on the fox. These can hardly be regarded as the activities of animal lovers.

Hunting wild animals with dogs inflicts immense cruelty on both dogs and wildlife, and is totally unjustifiable. It can be prevented only by the introduction of a complete banning of such barbaric and bloodthirsty so-called sports.

Finally, let me make a few observations about the so-called middle way. Again, I quote from John O'Farrell in *The Guardian*.

"In fact the government is promoting a middle way which would involved foxhunting only being permitted under licence. This would be like solving the problem of burglary by issuing housebreaking permits and requiring the burglars to close the door behind them."

Proponents of the middle way tell us that it is not a compromise, and I agree. That is about the only sensible thing they say. It is not possible to make hunting "slightly" barbaric, or to allow animals to be "almost" torn apart. I cannot see for the life of me what difference it will make to the fox that is torn to shreds if those doing it are licensed. It is plain stupidity: it is a hunter's fallback, and it rubber-stamps cruelty. It is merely—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman's time is up.

7.38 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): The speech of the hon. Member for City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg) reflected an earlier observation by the hon. Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks), who said that there could be no compromise over cruelty. The hon. Member for City of Durham delivered a similar message at greater length—but this whole area is riddled with compromises, as it has to be.

Even the legislation preferred by those who want a total ban is full of compromises. It is a compromise that it does not include fishing; it is a compromise that it does not include stalking. Actually it does include stalking, but the last time we considered the Bill the Government tabled an amendment—after I had pressed them on the point—to exempt it from the effects of the Bill.

These are not simple black and white issues. We are discussing how species are controlled, and what methods can be used to control them. Some people feel strongly that hunting is a particularly cruel method. As I shall explain, I do not agree. At the end of the day there are compromises. My hon. Friend the Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik) and others who have worked with him on the middle way proposal seem genuinely to seek a compromise to allay public anxieties about activities that some think should be banned or restricted, while not banning the sport altogether.

My view has been that we do not need to go that far, and that the kind of supervision that would be put on a statutory basis if one of the options that we are considering tonight were accepted is sufficient. I understand why people want to go further. All these issues involve compromises.

It is difficult to bring something new to the debate at this stage of the evening, especially given that many of those hon. Members who are here are determined to speak later to express their own strongly held views, whatever side they are on. I want to contribute something from the standpoint of someone who represents an area in which hunting is pretty significant. It is part of the way of life, as are shooting and fishing, although many people hold contrary views; there are plenty of opponents of hunting in my constituency as well as people who take part in it. As someone who is philosophically a liberal, I have to look at it from that philosophical standpoint.

[Mr. A. J. Beith]

I first have to look at what we are doing. We are not discussing whether we disapprove of hunting, as some hon. Members do. We are discussing whether it should be a criminal offence—whether it should be banned by law. We should therefore look first at what consequences may follow if it were made a criminal offence. It would undoubtedly—I do not think that the proponents can disagree with this—deprive a lot of people of the freedom to carry out an activity that they have carried out for many years in the genuine belief that it is a reasonable contribution to the life of the countryside and does not involve unreasonable cruelty.

A ban would clearly restrict freedom. It would affect jobs. A number of people in my constituency depend wholly on hunting for their employment and indeed their home. It has a wider effect on the rural economy. A great many businesses in areas such as mine would be very adversely affected by a ban on hunting. Saddlers, for example, derive most of their income from hunt-related horse activity, which would reduce sharply if hunting were banned. In an area such as mine, there are landscape benefits when people who support hunting, landowners and farmers, preserve parts of the land in a way that is not the most economically attractive or viable because it is beneficial for hunting or shooting. We all gain benefit from that.

Those arguments would in themselves still not be sufficient if we could demonstrate that hunting were sufficiently cruel to justify our making it a criminal offence and sending people to prison for it, but that is the argument. There are some arguments that are irrelevant, such as, "We do not like the people who do it," which I have heard quite often outside the Chamber and occasionally inside it, or the argument that people who do it enjoy killing. I have often heard that in this Chamber. It is misleading because most of the people who take part in hunting do so for the excitement of the ride and the chase, not for the kill.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Beith: I must try to deploy my arguments. I will see if I have any time at the end to allow interventions.

It is also the case that if the argument had any force, it could be applied to all the methods of controlling vermin, or indeed any species. If a person gets job satisfaction from his work as a mole-catcher, do we ban the control of moles as a species? If a person enjoys rough shooting, do we ban it simply on the ground that he enjoys it? We cannot do that.

Huw Irranca-Davies (Ogmore): What we should be very concerned about is the excesses and the abuses. Where we see hunts where the fox is torn away out of the hole and thrown to the hounds, we have to be very concerned. Where we have hunts where foxes are bred for the sport of it, that is not pest control. That is pure bloody sport. However—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Interventions must be brief. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman could come to the point.

Mr. Beith: I think that the hon. Gentleman is on the same tack. He is looking for ways of ensuring that hunting is carried out properly. That can be done by the supervisory system in the first option. My hon. Friend the Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik) and others suggest a method that may give more public confidence but that is not the same thing as saying that the proper and well-regulated conduct of hunting should be a criminal offence.

I was dealing with some arguments that one cannot apply and that are irrelevant. Then there are arguments that are insufficient, such as the fact that one personally does not approve of hunting. Many hon. Members feel very strongly that hunting should not happen, or for that matter that many of their constituents do not approve of it. Again, there is an important distinction between what we do not like and do not approve of, and what we pass laws against.

Philosophically, as a liberal, I have to address that question time and again. Sometimes I have to revise my opinions on what I am entitled to ban. I am faced with the question: why am I entitled to prevent someone else from doing something that they feel strongly they should be allowed to do? I have to have an overwhelming argument and the overwhelming argument in this case has to be the cruelty argument.

Any serious examination of the evidence cannot draw a wide distinction between the amounts of cruelty or suffering involved to the fox in the different methods of control and killing. If there are distinctions, they are quite small and marginal. If anything, they may err in favour of hunting. They may not. They may go the other way, but on any analysis, the distinction cannot be said to be of the scale that makes the difference between sending someone to prison and accepting that their activity can be legally carried out even if one does not like it. That is where the argument for a ban falls.

Mr. Bob Blizzard (Waveney): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Beith: I must try to ensure that I have deployed all my arguments before I give way again.

My fear, and it has been expressed by others, is that the only consequence of a ban would be that, in those areas where hunting takes place, much more use would be made of other methods. The Burns report points out that, in some of those areas, it is difficult to do that. In particular, the report refers to upland areas. Paragraph 61 comes just after the bit that was quoted by the hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice), who came to an unexpected stop in the middle of a sentence. The following sentence says:

"In the event of a ban on hunting, it is possible that the welfare of foxes in upland areas could be affected adversely, unless dogs could be used, at least to flush foxes from cover."

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Beith: I was talking about the hon. Member for Pendle, who did not go on to read that sentence— *[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Beith: Any serious look at the evidence fails to provide that broad distinction, which could properly be the basis of saying that hunting should be illegal, whereas the other methods of controlling foxes can remain legal.

Hardly anyone is trying to say that we should not kill foxes. It is generally recognised that there is a need to kill at least some foxes and to control the population. People are not arguing for the elimination of foxes, either. Hunting does not eliminate foxes. It is in the interests of hunts that there should remain some foxes. It is an argument about keeping a level of population that is tolerable in relation to the farming activities upon which the foxes are predators. It is a question of balance.

One of the things that fascinates me is that the legislation has never been defined in those terms. The legislation has never been defined as an attempt to ban the killing of foxes except in certain circumstances. The legislation has never been defined in terms of attempts to ban cruelty. The word "cruelty" does not really appear in the Hunting Bill. The legislation concentrates on the use of dogs. When we start to look at it in detail, we discover that many of the other methods of control that would have to be used if we did not have fox hunting also rely on the use of dogs.

The Minister for Rural Affairs will remember vividly the discussions in Committee. We came to the point where it became clear that the Bill as drafted banned stalking with dogs, and it had not been the intention of the promoters or of the Government that it should. That is the problem. Bills have never been drafted in terms of what are supposedly the objectives of those who want them passed into law: they have never been drafted in terms of killing or in terms of cruelty. It comes down to drafting a Bill in terms of the use of dogs. Then the practical difficulties begin.

In Committee in the previous Session, we found when we looked at the Bill in detail how difficult it was to get the Bill into the sort of order that would not preclude all sorts of other activities, including other forms of pest control involving other mammals—for example, rats—so there is a whole area of difficulty about drafting the legislation correctly.

Technical difficulties cannot be the only reason for taking a view that the legislation should not go forward, because one assumes that a solution can be found to take it forward. What they point to is the inability to define the purpose of the legislation in terms of bringing an end to cruelty or to killing. That is not what it is about. If those who promote this legislation go to their constituency and to the country in general and say, "We are going to get a Bill through that will mean that foxes will never be killed or suffer any more," that would be seriously misleading. The question they then have to face is why they are prepared to send people to prison for hunting—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The right hon. Gentleman's time is up.

7.48 pm

Mr. Bill Etherington (Sunderland, North): When I spoke on this subject approximately 14 months ago, I had high hopes that we would make some progress. Since I came into the House in 1992, we have had numerous debates and free votes on this issue and we are no further on. I issue a friendly warning to my right hon. Friend the Minister. The credibility of the Labour party is on the line over this issue—it is as simple as that. I want to spend more time talking about that than the issue of cruelty, anti-hunting, and what is right and what is wrong.

In a democracy, when a majority of the population want something, it is the duty of the Government to ensure that they get it. If the Government do not do that, and the situation goes on for 10 years, the whole political process becomes denuded. Like many other Members of Parliament, I have had numerous letters along those lines. Some people think that there is an unholy alliance between the Labour party hierarchy and the Countryside Alliance. I should like to think that that is not true. I do not think that it is true, but I well understand that there are people who feel that way.

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire) *rose—*

Mr. Etherington: I am not giving way; I do not have time. The hon. Gentleman will have his chance.

When people say that they see no progress being made, and ask, "What is the use of the political process?", they have a point. If the Labour party does not get things right, and if my right hon. Friend the Minister for Rural Affairs does not make the right sort of statement after the vote against hunting, is it will affect us badly at the next general election. I do not doubt that for one minute. I hope that people will take note of that.

I shall say a word or two about the merits or demerits of the case. We have not three, but two options tonight. We can abolish hunting with dogs, which the majority of people want, or we can use one of the other two systems that keep it going. There is no difference between an unregulated system and a licensed system. The licensed system simply appears to give a little more credibility to what is barbaric and unacceptable.

We are not talking about people being against the culling of foxes. That is as old as mankind. We no longer have wolves and bears in this country, because they were a threat to man's food supply, and they were eliminated. I have no doubt that foxes will be kept down, whatever method is used.

People wax lyrical about what a wonderful thing the hunt is, but I cannot think of a worse way of destroying an animal. Only two other methods come to mind, and they are similar. One is to boil the fox alive, and the other is to burn it alive. Those are just about the only alternatives that are worse than hunting.

A small vociferous minority have been able to hold sway for far too long. The vast majority do not want hunting to go on; they want something done about it. It is all right talking about tolerance. Like everyone else, I accept that it is wrong for minorities to be persecuted, but we are not speaking of persecuting minorities. The minority will not be affected in any way, other than losing a certain type of enjoyment.

My hon. Friend the Member for City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg) made it clear that there was a simple alternative. If people want to go on enjoying the pageantry, the uniforms and all the rest of the rigmarole, they can use a drag hunt. It is quite satisfactory. That is the real compromise, not licensing.

The same arguments in favour of hunting have probably been used for the past 500 years. No doubt the same arguments were put forward when eminent people were trying to abolish the slave trade—"Oh, you can't interfere with people's rights. People have a right to buy and sell slaves." When we stopped children cleaning chimneys, the

[Mr. Etherington]

opponents no doubt said, "Oh, we can't interfere with someone's personal freedom." Those arguments are ludicrous. They have no credibility whatever—none at all.

A small, extremely influential minority seem to have the Government frightened. That is my impression, and the impression of many members of the public. If, after the vote against hunting tonight, the Government do not do something about it, and if my right hon. Friend the Minister's statement is not to the effect that we will use the Parliament Act if the House of Lords once again proves obstructive, we will lose a tremendous amount of credibility.

I shall not say much more, as I said all I had to say 14 months ago. Hunting is a barbaric practice which we in the House should be ashamed to say still goes on in this country. Unless we are prepared to do something about it, the rest of the country will hold us in the contempt that we will thoroughly deserve.

7.54 pm

Mr. Peter Luff (Mid-Worcestershire): I begin with two words of thanks. First, a word of thanks to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, after my earlier challenge to the Chair about the right to speak of the hon. Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks), my fellow Chelsea supporter. His speech was entertaining but, I am afraid, not particularly convincing.

I also express my gratitude to the Minister for the evenhanded way in which he has approached the matter so far. I have every confidence in his evenhandedness, despite his earlier record and voting on the issue. I am grateful to him for the great courtesy that he showed to the Middle Way Group at the meeting that we had with him.

Scylla, as hon. Members will remember, was a horrible six-headed monster who lived on a rock on one side of a narrow strait, and Charybdis was a whirlpool on the other side. When ships passed close to Scylla's rock in order to avoid Charybdis, she—the monster—would seize and devour the sailors. Aeneas, Jason and Odysseus all had to pass through the narrow strait, and when they passed, they were not engaging in some soggy compromise or refusing to take some braver, nobler path; they were taking the only safe path, a middle way, and one that demanded great courage and skill.

So it is that I am proud to stand shoulder to shoulder with the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey), who spoke earlier, the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik) and an increasing band of adventurers in the House, including the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) and, I believe, the hon. Member for Ogmore (Huw Irranca-Davies). I am proud to count myself among their number as we steer the middle way between the hunt banners of Scylla and the countryside campaigners of Charybdis.

I shall not rehearse all the arguments in favour of hunting—that has already been done spectacularly well, particularly by my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague)—nor will I rehearse all the arguments against, although others have done that less persuasively.

I shall simply try to demolish eight of the arguments most frequently deployed against our proposition—a twofold proposition, remember, that hunting should be licensed and a new offence created of causing unnecessary suffering to a wild mammal. Hunting without a licence issued by the new authority would be a criminal act attracting a fine of up to £5,000. The authority could revoke a licence as a punishment for breach of a tough code of conduct.

Let us consider the eight arguments—first, that to license hunting is to license cruelty. Nonsense. That is just wrong. To ban hunting is to increase the suffering of the fox population, as speech after speech from Opposition Members has made clear. Alternative control methods would be used more frequently. To ban hunting—I look at the hon. Member for West Ham as I say this, because he is fond of the line about licensing cruelty—is to increase unregulated and uncontrolled killing of mammals. That is the simple truth, which the hon. Gentleman must accept.

That is a paradox, I know. The Burns report used the word "paradox" extensively. To ban hunting is to increase animal suffering. I am sorry that my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe), for whom I usually have such respect, and whom I am glad to see in her place, cannot see that.

The second argument is that hunting is perfectly all right as it is. It is not. Monitors have filmed activities by hunts that are unacceptable and that should not be occurring under the current Independent Supervisory Authority's rules. In my constituency, hunts have frequently shown insufficient respect for the rights and freedoms of others by trespass, selfish parking and reckless behaviour. Those can be dealt with by licensing, not by a ban.

The third argument, which was deployed by my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton) in her opening speech, is that self-regulation is good enough. It is not. Even if all the codes of practice of the Independent Supervisory Authority on Hunting are perfect—I think that some of them are pretty good—self-regulation lacks credibility and effectiveness. It lacks credibility because it is a creature of the hunting world. The wider general public will not accept its independence. It lacks effectiveness because it polices only those who want to be policed by it. It excludes several hunts—not all hunts subscribe to ISAH—and it excludes all individual dog owners, the lurcher owners. ISAH does not regulate hunting effectively or comprehensively. It is not a sufficient answer. Only statutory regulation of the kind that we suggest can do that.

The fourth argument is that hunting must be banned because most people want it banned. We have heard that argument repeatedly, most recently from the hon. Member for Sunderland, North (Mr. Etherington) and the hon. Member for West Ham. The claim is not true. There is no longer a majority for a ban among the British general public.

Opinion poll after opinion poll, and some straw polls such as that conducted by *The Sun*, show 74 per cent. opposition. Some scientific polls conducted by National Opinion Polls and others show a majority in favour of keeping hunting, either on its current basis or on a regulated basis. There is no longer a majority of the public backing a ban. That fact cannot be disputed. It is

demonstrably true. Even those who want a ban could not care less about the issue; they think that there are much more important things that we should be worrying about.

Mr. Banks *rose—*

Mr. Luff: I shall give way once briefly to the hon. Member for Newham.

Mr. Banks: Incidentally, my constituency is West Ham. A MORI poll in late January showed that an overwhelming 72 per cent. of British people think that foxhunting should be illegal, 80 per cent. that deer hunting should be illegal and 81 per cent. that hare coursing should be illegal. What am I going to do with this?

Mr. Luff: I took advice on the hon. Gentleman's constituency and I am sorry that the advice was wrong. I will give him a list of opinion polls showing quite the opposite.

Mr. Swire: I was listening to what the hon. Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks) said. The latest poll, which is more recent than the MORI poll to which he alluded, came out over the weekend. It showed that only 48 per cent. of people support hunting being made a criminal offence, while 49 per cent. said that hunting should be allowed to continue—22 per cent. were in favour of it continuing in its present form and 27 per cent. supported a licensing regime. Those are the latest statistics.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Interventions, as I have already said, are meant to be brief.

Mr. Luff: I am grateful to my hon. Friend who makes my point for me.

Most opinion polls show a significant majority against the ban in one form or another. In any event, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) said, this House cannot be dictated to by opinion polls, whatever they say. *[Laughter.]* I am sorry that Labour Members find that so funny. We would be reintroducing the death penalty today rather than seeking to ban foxhunting if we had been guided by opinion polls. We must take judgments on what is best and, in doing so, be guided by all the voices that talk to us, such as vets, police officers, animal welfare academics, lawyers and all the other experts who oppose a ban, as do most serious newspapers.

That leads me to the fifth allegation that the Middle Way Group is a front for the hunting world. It is not; that is a silly attack. I have magazines attacking the Middle Way for being a front for banning hunting. The truth is that we are unpopular with both sides of the argument because we threaten their prejudices. We are not a front for anybody; we have never taken money from any organisation that wants to keep hunting going. That is simply not true. We believe that we should keep hunting going because it is in the animal welfare and human liberty interests of the nation.

Mr. Savidge *rose—*

Mr. Luff: I am not giving way again, I am running out of time.

The sixth allegation is that we lack credibility because we have no view on hare coursing. Frankly, I am in this debate for foxhunting—that is the sport in my constituency that drives me to the middle way position. There is a bit of hare hunting but, as far as I know, no hare coursing. I do not like hare coursing. It is not hunting as I understand it, and although most hares escape the dogs, the deaths are watched by the spectators. That puts it in a different moral category from foxhunting, where most participants never see the death of a fox. The motives are completely different.

The Middle Way Group believes that our proposals could be applied to hare coursing if the House so chose. Equally, hare coursing could be banned and our proposals applied to other, real forms of hunting. We regard that as a matter for the House, not for us, but I speak for myself when I say that I would vote for a Bill that sought to ban hare coursing and introduce the middle way for other forms of hunting with dogs.

Our proposals would crack down on illegal hare coursing, which is disliked by everyone in the House. The fines are derisory at present. Illegal hare coursing would automatically be classed as hunting without a licence; it would attract a fine of £5,000, giving the police a real incentive to enforce the law and providing a real deterrent to the illegal hare coursers. We have that unique benefit.

The seventh accusation is that the Middle Way Group is an attempt to ban hunting by the back door—the mirror image of my earlier point. We are not. It is true that we have taken on suggestions from hunting interests following the hearings that took place after the last election. Sadly, none of the campaigners for a ban would participate, which was a matter of great personal regret. However, that fear, held by many Countryside Alliance members, is misplaced.

If the Government bring forward their own middle way proposal—I have no knowledge of any deal or discussions in that respect—they must ensure that it could not be used or corrupted by a future Minister or a hunting authority improperly composed to introduce a ban through the back door.

The eighth accusation is that our proposals are expensive, clumsy and bureaucratic. I have some sympathy for those criticisms, which were made the last time these proposals came before the House. We have radically streamlined our proposals to make them less bureaucratic and costly and easier to implement. I hope that that point will commend itself to the House and that if the Minister is framing proposals along these lines he will guided by the need to be as unbureaucratic as possible.

For the Middle Way Group, our only resource has been our idea. We have had invaluable help from a couple of individuals who have stuffed envelopes for us. Not for us, however, the expensive advertising campaigns of the League Against Cruel Sports, the RSPCA, the International Fund for Animal Welfare and others. Not for us the immense resources of the Countryside Alliance. We were not even given a shoestring budget—we could not afford the shoestring. However, our idea is a compelling one, which is why it is winning.

We have a recipe that will improve animal welfare—uniquely, of these three options—and protect human liberty. We have been David taking on two Goliaths, and with informed opinion, the public and the media on our

[Mr. Luff]

side, we have won. Anyone who votes for a ban tonight is voting to make animal welfare worse. To vote to ban anything for no better reason than disapproval is the route to tyranny.

8.5 pm

Mr. Colin Pickthall (West Lancashire): I gently remind the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) that after negotiating Scylla and Charybdis, Odysseus and his men were confronted by the sirens. The sirens, he may recall, were beautiful and sang beautifully but were surrounded by piles of bones from previous travellers—the siren voices of compromise, I suggest.

I support a total ban. The middle way is essentially the same as the status quo. In fact, as has been said, it is the status quo with added bureaucracy. It would continue the acceptance in our law of human cruelty exercised to no necessary end and the acceptance of unnecessary cruelty by sentient creatures. It is ridiculous to say that the activity is cruel but if there is a chit or licence, we can put up with it. As the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) said in her excellent speech, hunting is either right or it is wrong, and that is what we are talking about tonight.

The House has voted overwhelmingly, twice, to bring an end to unnecessary cruelty to wild mammals. There can seldom in parliamentary history have been an issue on which a large majority of the people, almost the entire Labour party and the parliamentary Labour party have held views that are so much in tune. It is remarkable that that coincidence should not have quickly manifested itself in legislation.

Lembit Öpik: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Pickthall: No, I do not have the time.

I fully support the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice). We already have a Bill that stood a lot of testing in Committee and there is no reason why on Thursday, or whenever, that Bill should not be re-presented to us, with the Parliament Act following thereafter.

I want briefly to address some of the arguments, such as they are, that pro-hunters adduce to defend the continuance of their diversion. I could at least respect the argument that simply went, "I like hunting animals and, even more, I like seeing them killed." There is an honesty about that, as there is in the confession "I like driving fast cars at 100 mph through city centres." Instead, we get a rag bag of quasi-moral assertions that do not bear a great deal of scrutiny.

The first argument, put by the hon. Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton), is about individual rights. The hunters say that Parliament has no place in interfering with their individual human rights in this matter. Of course it has. The right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald was absolutely correct: if Parliament judges that inflicting cruelty and death on an animal for human pleasure is wrong, Parliament will, if given a chance, stop it. All legislation circumscribes individual freedoms to some degree, whether it is, at one extreme, the freedom to rape or, at another, the freedom to drive at whatever speed we wish. That is why we need Parliament, why we need governance at all—to determine these matters.

We already have laws to prevent cock fighting, bear baiting, bull baiting, badger digging and otter hunting. They all circumscribe human rights. These laws have huge public approval. The public are saying, as we are, that we need to go further and get rid of hunting wild mammals with dogs.

The second argument is that Parliament has more important things to do. Baroness Mallalieu traipsed out that argument on "Today" this morning and we have heard it a few times tonight. It does not bear a moment's examination but it is spun heavily by pro-hunting apologists and by the Conservative party. The argument presupposes that Parliament can do only one thing at a time.

Mr. Savidge: Did my hon. Friend find a slight incongruity in what the hon. Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton) said? Having argued that there were better things for Parliament to do, she then said that if she ever got back into power and there was a ban, the first thing she would do would be to legislate to reverse it?

Mr. Pickthall: That is a highly theoretical and unlikely eventuality.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Pickthall: I hope that I get some injury time for giving way to the hon. Lady.

Mrs. Winterton: What I said has been misrepresented. I said that the sovereignty of Parliament was the issue, and that the House can decide in the future, if it so wishes, to undo what this Parliament has done. It is a constitutional issue.

Mr. Pickthall: The hon. Lady makes her own argument.

The contention that Parliament can do only one thing at a time induced a letter from a constituent, who chastised me for trying to get rid of hare coursing while there was still crime on her estate. Crime is still committed on her estate, but that is like my telling her not to clean her windows because her garden needs digging. Parliament deals with dozens of issues at the same time. It is worth remembering that in the five years since Labour came to power, the House of Commons has spent only three days discussing hunting, although 25 of us have spent rather more hours in Committee. I shudder to think how many days we have spent discussing crime, health and the other big issues of the day. Moreover, the parliamentary timetable is hardly overstretched at present, thanks to the timetabling, of which I heartily approve.

The third argument used is that these are country matters, as Hamlet might have put it. The debate on hunting has successfully been elevated by pro-hunters into a bogus country versus city stand-off—I give them credit for that—whereas polls consistently show a high level of anti-hunting feeling among rural as well as urban citizens. In the letter that the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) helpfully put around today, he says that this issue concerns

"very large numbers in the towns".

I have no means of knowing how many active hunt supporters are urban dwellers who are out for some jolly fun in the countryside at the weekends or on their days off.

Since coming to this place in 1992, I have taken a consistent interest in ending hare coursing, partly because a major event, the Waterloo cup, takes place in my constituency, partly because the vast majority of my constituents demand that I see to it that it is ended, and partly because it is in my view the most horrible of all blood sports. It is a spectator sport, and the hon. Member for Mid–Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) described it perfectly. Hares are torn to bits. They are not pests, but that is done to appease a peculiar lust among a largely urban audience for the Waterloo cup. The question put by my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle was never answered. If coursing is done just to turn the hares and to score points, why are the greyhounds not muzzled? The answer to that question never came.

In recent years, it has been suggested in pro-hunting circles that hare coursing could be offered as a sacrifice to save other blood sports. The spin since last week, which has been confirmed tonight, suggested the same thing, but added stag hunting as another sacrifice. It has been put to me, even by friends, that I should accept that to ensure the end of hare coursing. That is not good enough, and it is not logical. The same cruelty is involved in all blood sports: the cruelty of human intention and the cruelty experienced by the hunted and attacked mammal.

All hunting of wild mammals with dogs is unacceptable to me and, I believe, to most of my fellow citizens. The killing of an animal is justifiable only if it is done for food or to protect people, other creatures, property or crops. If we have to kill animals, it is incumbent on us to do it as humanely as possible. Killing animals for pleasure is little short of sub-human.

I began with a comment on human rights, and I shall end with a variant on the same theme. What makes hunt supporters assume that they have the right to do what they wish to animals, and to kill them by whatever means they fancy? Those mammals do not belong to the hunters. If they belong to anyone, it is to all of us: to the community as a whole; to the many, not to the few. They certainly do not belong to the tiny minority who want to destroy them vicariously with dogs.

8.15 pm

Mr. Richard Page (South-West Hertfordshire): In view of the fact that many points have already been made, I shall not gallop too heavily over the ground that has been covered. Knowing the paranoia in the House about declaring an interest, I shall begin by declaring that in my youth, when I was younger, fitter, stronger and faster, I went on the odd hunt, and I thoroughly enjoyed it. We had a good burn up across the countryside, and we went over the odd fence and hedge. Catching the fox was secondary: it was just a good day out, and I thoroughly enjoyed it.

A cost-benefit analysis of hunting would show that it is remarkably inefficient and expensive. It is said that it is enjoyed by people from all walks of life, but I have to say that it leans towards the more wealthy rather than towards the poor.

Lembit Öpik: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Page: No.

I shall not take up the religious-spiritual argument of my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer), but I agree with him that there is a fairly high jealousy quotient. That is why so many Labour Members are against the activity.

As a number of hon. Members have said, hunting is a matter of the quick and the dead. The fox is either caught or it gets away: there is no halfway house. A constituent wrote to me last week arguing that I should vote against hunting and get it abolished, because a cull of foxes could be achieved by the painless, quick rifle shot. As someone who has shot in most disciplines, I can tell the House that when one is lying on one's stomach in Bisley with a sling round one's arm to hold the rifle steady, it is hard enough to hit the target on the right spot even when it is obligingly staying still. Foxes do not stay still. They move with remarkable rapidity. No shot can achieve the clean, quick painless kill.

I endorse what the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey) said about other methods of killing foxes. I do not know whether any hon. Members have seen snares or poison being used. Shooting, snaring and poisoning do not measure up to the clean sport of hunting in which the fox is either dead or alive.

It is interesting that, as more and more people get to know exactly what is involved in this issue, the percentage wanting to keep hunting is going up and up. This debate has shown that certain hon. Members need to have their education broadened. The hon. Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks) is not present at the moment, but he asked why hunting does not take place all year round. It is quite simple. Foxes do not know that they should not go into growing crops. If we could train them not to go into growing crops, we could hunt all year round, but farmers get upset about foxes going into growing crops, and that is why there is a hunting season. People can shoot all year round, but hunting takes place only at certain times of the year.

I must make another announcement. I have the privilege of being the joint chairman of the all-party racing and bloodstock committee. It is a position of immense influence and power, and one that I thoroughly enjoy.

There have been many comments about the wide range of associated activities that are involved in and depend on hunting. One such is point-to-point training, which is absolutely vital for national hunt rules and racing. Anyone who looked down the Cheltenham race card last week would have seen the names of many horses that came into national hunt racing through the point-to-point route. I shall not labour the point, but getting rid of hunting would mean getting rid of point-to-pointing and reducing the number of horses that take part in national hunt racing. People who suggest that drag hunting would provide an alternative are completely and utterly wrong.

We all read in the media over the weekend about the idea of introducing some form of licensing, and I see the sticky fingers of No. 10 all over those comments. I have no objection to licensing—it would be a good thing. We just heard about certain practices that are engaged in by certain of the hunts. Those practices should be banned and the law should be able to take action against the hunts that use them.

If, as I hope, we take the licensing route, the basic terms of the licence must be spelled out in primary legislation, not introduced by regulations. Right hon. and hon.

[Mr. Page]

Members who experienced the progress of the Child Support Agency legislation will remember that when we were asked to vote for a Bill to chase parents who were not fulfilling their obligations towards their children we all said yes and it went through without a ripple. But when we saw the regulations that emerged and the way in which the CSA was operating I, for one, held my head between my hands. My surgery and local advice centres, like those of every other Member of Parliament, were full of people complaining about the operation of the CSA. It is much better now, but when it was first introduced it was a nightmare. I therefore hope that if the licensing route is chosen, we will see the basic terms of the licence in primary legislation or, at least, be given an idea of what it will entail, so that we can consider it when the Bill passes through the House.

The licensing route is the right one to take. Let us put this matter to bed, get it off the Floor of the House and start to concentrate on matters that are far more important to the country, such as the national health service, schools, transport and housing. Let us get on with the things that matter.

8.23 pm

Mr. Anthony D. Wright (Great Yarmouth): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in this debate on hunting. It is the first time that I have done so, although the subject has been discussed on the Floor of the House on two previous occasions.

I give my support to all hon. Members who have spoken in favour of a total ban on hunting with dogs and reiterate the point that although there are three options for us to vote on, we really have only two choices—in favour of hunting with dogs or opposed to hunting with dogs. I do not accept that licensing or regulating hunting in any way is acceptable—the status quo may as well prevail.

I have no hunts in my constituency, but I do have foxes. I sometimes see them near my house in the early hours of the morning or near the marshes late at night when returning from Westminster to Great Yarmouth. I have also seen many foxes lying dead on the road or by the side of the road having been killed by vehicles. That saddens me, but nothing saddens me more than contemplating an animal being chased by a pack of hounds accompanied by people on horseback.

As leader of my local authority, I had the unenviable job of having to give permission for a fox to be shot by a marksman. I shall explain the circumstances. In the nesting season, Great Yarmouth has one of the largest tern colonies in the United Kingdom on an area of marram on our north beach. The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds fences it off to stop people accidentally treading on a nest or frightening the birds away, and an RSPB warden oversees the area. Approximately seven years ago, the warden informed me of the destruction of a substantial number of terns' eggs by an animal. Evidence suggested that it was a fox that had been sighted more than once.

The solutions available were to trap or shoot the animal. I opposed the latter, but on further discussion it became clear that the fox was destroying a number of eggs and something had to be done urgently. No one dared suggest that a hunt should enter the area. Given the RSPB's predicament, I reluctantly gave permission for a marksman to shoot the fox. Fortunately, it never returned; perhaps it had a sixth sense.

There will always be times when we agree that a fox may have to be humanely killed. Even an animal lover like me understands that. However, I shall never understand the apparent enjoyment that the hunter derives from chasing an animal to exhaustion.

To my knowledge, there is no hare coursing in my constituency; the nearest hare coursers are the Waveney Harriers. Again, I must admit that I have not been to a hare coursing meeting, but I learned enough through talking to individuals who have witnessed the activity at first hand. I have also seen the usual video footage.

In the past century, hare numbers have declined dramatically, largely because of the advent of intensive agriculture methods. The Committee of Inquiry into Hunting with Dogs in England and Wales chaired by Lord Burns heard evidence for and against the practices that we are considering. It concluded that

"there is little or no need to control overall hare numbers."

Indeed, brown hares are the subject of a biodiversity action plan that aims to maintain and expand their population so that numbers double by 2010. Lord Burns also found that

"hare hunting and coursing are essentially carried out for recreational purposes."

In hare hunting, packs of beagles are used to chase hares to the point of exhaustion. The hunting season runs from September to March after some litters of leverets have been born. That means that some hunted females leave orphaned and dependent young. A single hare is chased until dogs kill it or it escapes. Hunted hares are beaten not by speed but by the stamina of dogs. The hare is worn down by a protracted chase, which provides more satisfaction for the followers, until it is simply overwhelmed by the hounds and killed.

Hunted hares are reluctant to leave familiar territory and will run in a large circle until worn down, caught and killed. The Burns inquiry concluded:

"This experience seriously compromises the welfare of the hare."

Coursing enthusiasts claim that when a hare is caught, it dies instantaneously from the bite of one dog. However, post mortem reports show that hares can die a gruesome and painful death as they are savaged by the dogs.

Mr. Gray: If, as the hon. Gentleman claims, the carcase is ripped to pieces by the dogs, how is it there for the post mortem?

Mr. Wright: Those carrying out the post mortem can tell that the hare has been stretched between two animals and killed by horrendous methods.

After the 2001 Millennium cup coursing event, the RSPCA arranged for the carcases of five of the hares killed in the competition to be examined by an independent vet. After the post mortem, the vet concluded that none had died instantly from a bite. All had suffered injuries before being retrieved from the dogs. From 1977-79, the Universities Federation for Animal Welfare carried out 53 post mortems on coursed hares. None had been killed by a bite to the neck and several had to be killed by the handlers when they were retrieved from the dogs.

The Burns committee commissioned research into how hares are killed during coursing. It showed that only one of 12 coursed hares was definitely killed by the dogs.

Of the remaining 11, five were killed only when the picker-up arrived and broke their necks, and in six cases the cause of death was uncertain. The committee concluded:

"It is clear, moreover, that, if the dog or dogs catch the hare, they do not always kill it quickly."

I have been made aware of threats against farmers and landowners who have attempted to prevent illegal hare coursing on their properties. Resentment of the landowner's attitude has been made clear, even to the extent of physical threats. Illegal hare coursing is widely condemned, but the only difference between legal and illegal coursing is the issue of the landowner's permission—the cruelty is the same. The Hunting Bill would provide a real means for the police to address illegal coursing and would deal with the issue of permission.

Finally, I want to turn to the debate that will be held in the other place tomorrow. I understand that there will be a report to this place after debates and votes have taken place in both Houses. The Government's view will be based on those responses.

We are currently considering the second phase of House of Lords reform. The Select Committee on Public Administration, on which I serve, recently examined proposals for that reform and took evidence. Nearly everybody commented on the need to protect the pre-eminence of the House of Commons, mainly because we are accountable to our electorate, but in this instance the pre-eminence of this place is contested because of the suggestion that the views of both Houses will be taken on board.

This is the third time that we have debated the ban on hunting. Furthermore, it has been mentioned twice in the Labour manifesto. The will of the people of the country is clear; the will of the elected Chamber is clear, so let us be clear that nothing less than a programme for the abolition of hunting with dogs will be acceptable when the Leader of the House makes his statement. I hope that that will lead to the reintroduction of the Hunting Bill.

8.31 pm

Mr. Roger Gale (North Thanet): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in the debate. I shall be brief.

The hon. Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey) and I have a couple of things in common. She is in a minority on her side of the House, and I am in a minority on my side. I have great respect for what she said and for her right to say it. I do not share her views, although I agree with her that the House has more important things to discuss.

The House has more important animal welfare issues to discuss. Currently, the United Kingdom imports thousands of chickens, thousands of pieces of pigmeat and tonnes of veal bred throughout Europe and beyond in conditions that we would not allow in this country. That is being done to the detriment of our farming community, so when we talk in a holier than thou way about foxhunting and about animal welfare we should remember that there are priorities. I care passionately about the issue, but when it is set beside the tens of thousands of other animals that suffer and about which Parliament and the Government are doing nothing, a few hundred foxes almost pale into insignificance—almost, but not for me.

This charade tonight is a disgrace. This debate is a fig leaf, designed to cover the embarrassment of a rotten Prime Minister who has broken a promise. This Prime Minister has a tendency to blame the "last Government" for everything. Well, it was under the "last Government" that this Prime Minister promised on television that he would end the practice of hunting wild mammals with hounds. This Prime Minister has forgotten that he was also the Prime Minister in that "last Government".

The House of Commons has debated this issue under the Labour Government many times before and has made its decision plain. Let us not try to pretend—as the Minister for Rural Affairs did when he introduced the debate, in measured terms—that this is the Labour Government honouring a manifesto promise. That promise was broken by the Prime Minister in the last Parliament.

This debate is irrelevant. When we vote at 10 o'clock, most Members will vote against option 1; most Members will vote against option 2; and most Members will—as they have done before, and I will be with them—vote for a complete ban, because one cannot be a little bit pregnant. One cannot be not very cruel to foxes. One either believes that there must be a ban or that hunting is in order.

I respect the views—which I do not share—of my hon. Friends who believe that somehow the 6 per cent., 7 per cent., or, being generous, 10 per cent. of foxes killed by the hunt is a form of pest control, but it has already been pointed out that more foxes are killed on the roads. Foxes are killed in my North Thanet constituency. North Thanet does not have a hunt. The population lives on the coastal strip, but the overwhelming acreage of my constituency is rural and most of it is farmed.

There is no hunt in Thanet, nor is there a fox problem. There is no Tooting hunt, no Wandsworth hunt and no Clapham hunt, but we can see foxes on their streets at night. If we want to control vermin we should work out how to deal with that problem. The idea that foxhunting controls the fox population is arrant nonsense.

The debate is a fig leaf. It is a way of trying to get a discredited Prime Minister off the hook. The hon. Member for Sunderland, North (Mr. Etherington) said that the credibility of the Labour party is on the line. Yes, it is—because the Labour party has failed on health, failed on education, failed on transport and failed on animal welfare, on which it has delivered none of the promises it made before both the previous elections. The Government's record on animal welfare is pitiful. This issue should have been put to bed under the last Labour Government. This Government should have the guts to do the job and finish it once and for all.

8.37 pm

Dr. Nick Palmer (Broxtowe): This debate reminds me of what the American baseball coach said: it is déjà vu all over again. Most of us have been here before and made similar arguments. There are some new elements, however, and I shall concentrate on them. I shall briefly summarise the central case that has been discussed and then consider compromise.

Most Members would agree on some basic principles. First, we should not frivolously ban sports merely because we do not like them. For instance, I would not ban boxing. I think it a degrading sport and I am against it, but the participants consent to it so it is not appropriate to make it a criminal activity.

[Dr. Nick Palmer]

Secondly, most Members would agree that if a practice causes real distress to animals merely for the sake of sport, it is not frivolous to want to ban it. I refer to distress rather than to cruelty, because I do not think that most people who take part in hunts are motivated by cruelty in the sense of wishing to cause pain. They are motivated by a wish to enjoy themselves, and they accept that, as a by-product, the animals will be caused some distress. But we tie ourselves in knots if we talk about cruelty. I am interested not in the motivations of the riders but in the effect on the animals.

Thirdly, I believe that most hon. Members would accept that, if genuine distress is being inflicted, it is not right to do so merely for the sake of generating employment; otherwise a great many activities would be legal that are not legal today, and we would be horrified if they became legal.

Mr. Bellingham: Such as?

Dr. Palmer: Such as bear baiting and torture. No doubt, the manufacturers of torture equipment would be happy to supply it.

The opponents of a ban today have primarily concentrated on the argument that the alternatives would be worse. I draw their attention to three points. First, the Burns report, which we all happily cite when we agree with it, makes it clear that the Burns committee considered lamping an adequate alternative in most circumstances, with probably fewer welfare implications, and it makes an exception for uplands, where it thinks gun packs are necessary; I shall return to that issue.

Secondly, as several hon. Members have said, hunting is, in fact, only responsible for the deaths of 6, 7 or 8 per cent. of foxes. In all areas outside the Welsh uplands, hunting is not a serious contributor to the control of fox numbers, and the House will not be taken seriously if it argues otherwise; it is simply not the case. Thirdly, I note that the supporters of hunting have quietly tossed aside the arguments for coursing and stag hunting because, of course, neither hares nor stags are generally considered pests that need to be controlled. One gets the impression that, like the proverbial Cossacks being pursued by wolves, they are chucking coursing over the back of the troika in the hope of satisfying those in pursuit.

Mr. Garnier: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Palmer: No, I had better concentrate on the time.

The bottom line for me is the chase. Some hon. Members focus particularly on the kill, which I find distressing as well. We have to accept that there will be occasions when the kill is swift and occasions when it is less swift, and it will be particularly horrible in those cases. But for every fox killed by a hunt, a number of others will be chased and caused considerable, lengthy distress. Indeed, the hunts make a point of stressing that many foxes escape, especially the healthier ones. I spoke to a supporter the other day and he said that, in 40 years of hunting, he had seen only two foxes killed. If we were trying to deal with insect pests and succeeded in deterring one wasp every 20 years, we would not feel that we were using a very effective deterrent.

Mr. James Paice (South-East Cambridgeshire): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Palmer: No, I am sorry, but I will not.

The reality is that we are accepting something that is essentially a sport based on terror and painful deaths for animals. We hear about compromise, and I have to say that I am an inveterate compromiser. If I had been a Member of the House at the time of William Wilberforce, I might have been seriously tempted by a new deal for slaves—slavery with a human face. I can understand the temptation to split the difference, not to go too far and to find somewhere in the middle. However, there is a difficulty with the proposed compromise—either people can chase animals with dogs, or they cannot. I completely agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice), and I am grateful to him for sticking the debate out this long to hear my contribution.

Huw Irranca-Davies: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Dr. Palmer: I had better not give way, because I have already said I would not.

By far the most sensible alternative for all hon. Members is to deal with the issue by simply reintroducing the previous Bill and finishing it in this Session. However, I have the sneaking feeling that the Minister may have a different view, and I want to give him some input on the kind of compromise that would tempt me. If the Government believe that there are areas where foxes are a serious pest—perhaps in the Welsh uplands—let them authorise gamekeepers to conduct culls when necessary. Further, if they think that it is sometimes necessary to flush out foxes with dogs in upland areas, as suggested by the Burns report, I can reluctantly accept that, as we did in the Bill introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Foster).

My bottom line is this: a compromise that involves the continued existence of organised pursuit across the countryside and of causing terror and death through a chase is not a compromise. I would vote against it regardless of the number of lines on the Whip and I believe that the majority of hon. Members feel the same way. If we wish to dispose of the problem, as the Government have rightly said, ultimately we shall have to push through the same Bill as we put through last year.

8.45 pm

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): Plaid Cymru did not want a free vote tonight. We hoped that our amendment would be chosen so that we could have a whipped vote on the constitutional relationship between the National Assembly and this place as regards hunting and agriculture. Although the Assembly was not granted all powers over animal health, significant powers were devolved to it to deal with agricultural matters, and it is right that it should decide the matter in Wales.

The National Assembly voted to ban hunting. It undertook its own study of the effect of the different options on Wales. I hope that whatever happens, the

Minister will see fit to consult the National Assembly and consider the evidence that its Agriculture and Rural Development Committee took on hunting in Wales.

The debate has been good and some contributions have been most useful. I found myself agreeing with much of what hon. Members on both sides of the argument have said. In particular, I agreed with the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) when she said that it was right for the House to address and legislate on the subject if it thinks it wise to do so, although the idea of whether something is wise raises problems of its own.

I also feel strongly that we are discussing a compromise. Not even the ban in the previous Bill would have led to the complete cessation of the killing of wild mammals. It simply dealt with killing wild mammals in certain way. Rats, for example, were not included. I do not know what the difference is between Basil Brush and Roland Rat, but the Bill certainly made such a distinction.

I also think that the timing is nakedly cynical. The Government are in trouble, whether it is Tony Blair cosying up to Italian fascists in Barcelona—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. The hon. Gentleman must use the correct parliamentary language when he addresses Members of the House.

Mr. Thomas: I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Of course the word "fascist" is in order, but the Prime Minister's name is not.

So whether it is that problem or the Prime Minister's relationship with Mr. Mittal, the purpose of the Bill is to reignite the socialism on the Labour Benches. They are socialist, red in tooth and claw, and nothing else is behind the Bill's timing. I know that the hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) wants it to go through no matter what, but he must recognise that that is why it has been introduced now.

In the Animal Health Bill the Government created massive powers to slaughter animals because they were not prepared to face the reality of vaccinating against foot and mouth, so it ill behoves them and those Back Benchers who supported them—I certainly did not—to talk about animal cruelty and animal slaughter. For me there are only two absolute positions: either we accept a vegan's point of view and reject the use of animals for human purposes, or we accept that we use, eat and conserve animals, both wild and domesticated. I am firmly in the second camp and I have only to look at all right hon. and hon. Members in the Chamber to know that the vast majority are also in that camp. I know that not from their faces or speeches, but from their footwear.

The question is the degree to which we deal with the problem. There is no doubt that we will continue to kill foxes no matter what form the Bill takes. The problem is how we do that. On considering that, my first principle is that we cannot allow and legislate for gratuitous cruelty, which undeniably happens in some hunts and in some forms of shooting and fishing. However, hunting is in an anomalous position. Without licensing, the hunt can go at it and hunt in any area that it wants, including places where it would be difficult even to stage a simple party. Hunting therefore needs a licensing and regulatory scheme.

Secondly, we have to accept that the countryside is managed, and in England and Wales there is no real wilderness. The fox is the top predator in the countryside—there is no predator of the fox apart from man. In Wales, we have 5 per cent. of the population and 25 per cent. of the nation's sheep; indeed, we have 5 per cent. of the total number of sheep in Europe. The situation in Wales is different from England's, and that has been recognised in the Burns report and in the comments of the hon. Member for Broxtowe (Dr. Palmer).

The Burns report found that terriers and hounds were involved in at least 70 per cent. of fox culling in Wales, which is very different from the 7 or 8 per cent. quoted by other hon. Members. The report concluded that in areas dependent on sheep rearing and game management there is no real alternative to using dogs for flushing out. The topography and afforestation of upland Wales mean that that needs to be taken into consideration.

The third principle is that we must legislate equitably. This is a central moral question about our approach to animal welfare in the House. Why should the hunting of foxes be banned, but not the hunting of rats, or shooting, fishing, vivisection and slaughter? There are moral gradations here and no moral absolutes. Of course, it is for the House to gauge where that moral decision lies, and we must do so in consultation with our electorate. However, I would argue strongly that it is hypocritical to say that foxhunting with hounds is in some way morally less acceptable than shooting, fishing or hunting other animals with dogs.

There is no moral gradation there, so we must ask why people are so upset about hunting foxes with hounds. If it does not stem from a class mistake—certainly in the Welsh context—I do not know where it comes from. I accept that there are Members who firmly oppose the killing of animals in the wild, full stop. However, the vast majority of Members are motivated by other thoughts, and there is no moral certainty in that.

There is, however, public distrust and disquiet about practices such as hare coursing. I am open-minded, but I cannot see an ecological or conservationist reason for hare coursing. I have similar feelings about stag hunting, although there may be a conservationist argument to be made. Certainly, there is an ecological reason to catch mink in the way that we hunt foxes.

There is disquiet also about aspects of hunting. The hon. Member for Ogmore (Huw Irranca-Davies) is a new Member of the House, but I understand that his position on this matter has not changed since he stood as a candidate in Brecon and Radnor, and he is to be congratulated on that. There are aspects of hunting that we need to address in legislation. It is not right that animal cruelty perpetrated by hunts should be accepted under the law as it stands. We have to bring those practices within the ambit of the law.

For me, there are two unresolved issues. We have to ensure that matters of welfare and any cruelty practised by hunts are examined openly, and that there is accountability for them. In my experience, the independent authority on hunting is not sufficiently powerful or interested to deal with the matter. We need a supervisory authority on hunting to be set up on a statutory footing.

[Mr. Thomas]

The second unresolved issue is conservation. I have heard nothing yet that convinces me that, in upland areas at least, hunting can be replaced by equally useful tools. I am open-minded about that too, but I have not been convinced.

The social aspect of hunting is important and cannot be ignored. For me, however, it is not in itself sufficient to justify the continuation of hunting. It has to be considered alongside conservation and welfare aspects. Nevertheless, the Government, who are responsible for the countryside as well as the towns, should remember that, post foot and mouth, the hunting fraternity, in all its manifestations, provides an essential social glue.

In conclusion, I think that the killing of animals and cruelty to them merely for sport are not justifiable. The killing of animals for human use, with safeguards that change from generation to generation and on which this House decides, is acceptable, as long as those decisions are made openly and in consultation with the electorate. Finally, it is acceptable to kill or control wild animals for the maintenance of the countryside and its population and for reasons of biodiversity and sustainable agriculture. In that context, the continuation of hunting with hounds under a statutory licensed authority is acceptable to me and, I think, to the majority of my electorate.

Hunting should therefore be allowed: first, if it can be shown that the fox population needs to be controlled; secondly, if it can be shown that the countryside environment is maintained or improved by that method; thirdly, if deliberate acts of cruelty or interference in the hunt are outlawed. Those are the three principles that should underpin any future hunting in this country, and they must be achieved by a statutory hunting authority.

8.55 pm

Mr. Ian Cawsey (Brigg and Goole): I shall make a few brief comments on hunting with dogs—although when the Government announced that we would have three votes this evening, I thought that perhaps we did not need a debate at all, but could go straight to the votes, because I shall be surprised if, at the end of the debate, any hon. Members have changed their views since they came into the Chamber. Nevertheless, as we have this opportunity it is important to say what we feel on the subject.

I want to talk about three issues—the effectiveness and welfare aspects of hunting with dogs; public opinion and its merits or otherwise; and the liberty argument that several hon. Members have mentioned. I was delighted to listen earlier in the debate to the hon. Member for North Thanet (Mr. Gale), whom I followed as chair of the all-party animal welfare group. As he said, there are lots of other animal welfare issues for us to get stuck into, so I hope that the Government will put this matter behind us, so that the Members in all parts of the House who share a great interest in animal welfare can begin to consider some of those other issues.

I must take up one small issue with the hon. Gentleman, however, because he said that the Government had done nothing for animal welfare since they came to power. It was the late Alan Clark who said that the Labour Government had done more for animal welfare in their first 18 months in office than the Conservative Government had done in 18 years, and I rest my case on his words, not mine. None the less, there is much more to be done.

I live in, and represent, the countryside. I have spoken to many people in my constituency about the rights and wrongs of hunting with dogs and the necessity, or otherwise, of a ban. We have heard it said tonight that hunting is a seasonal activity, and many hon. Members, particularly if they are in favour of hunting, have said that it is the lesser of the evils—that foxes have to be killed somehow, and all the other methods are worse than hunting.

I do not agree, partly because I have seen many people who work in and manage the countryside and look after the stewardship of various species, and in my experience most people who use other methods do not act out of cruelty; they have an interest in protecting and enhancing the countryside that we all enjoy and love.

I think that everybody has acknowledged that, in controlling foxes, hunting is hardly used as a method at all. To say that other ways of killing foxes, such as shooting, are crueller is to accuse all those people who work in the countryside of being more cruel than they need to be. In all the time that I have lived in and represented the countryside, I have seen no evidence that those people have that view.

Lembit Öpik: The hon. Gentleman will, of course, accept what Burns said—that in some parts of the United Kingdom hunting is regarded as the most effective means of controlling fox numbers. He has already heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) that although the proportion might be 6 per cent. in the United Kingdom as a whole, hunting accounts for 60 to 70 per cent. of the control methods in areas such as ours.

Mr. Cawsey: There are issues involving gun packs and flushing out that I would be the first to acknowledge; indeed, I am on record as saying that in the past. However, in general terms it is on the record that shooting is used more by the people who work in the countryside—and they do not do it because they want to be cruel.

The only person who has offered an argument against that is the hon. Member for South-West Hertfordshire (Mr. Page), who rightly pointed out that hunting with dogs is seasonal because at certain times of the year hunts cannot go through the growing crops. He then rather gave that argument away by saying that although people can hunt with dogs only in certain seasons, they can shoot all the year round.

If the point at issue were cruelty, logic would say that people had to hunt with dogs in the appropriate season, and would be allowed to shoot only when it was not possible to hunt with dogs. However, that is not the arrangement—because the alternatives are not more cruel. I once visited an RSPCA hospital in Norfolk. I spoke to the vets working there, and asked them how many times they had had to treat a fox that had been brought in with a shooting injury. The answer from a vet who had worked there for many years was, "Not once." When I asked him why, he said, "You can take it from me that when the fox is shot in the countryside by somebody trained, it is dead." Hon. Members shake their heads, but I return to my initial point: if they are saying that that is not true, they are accusing people who live and work in the countryside,

and who manage it, of engaging in more cruelty than is necessary to do their job. I simply say that, in my experience, I have not seen that.

Mr. Barker *rose—*

Mr. Paice *rose—*

Mr. Cawsey: I shall give way to the hon. Member for South–East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice), who used to be on the Front Bench.

Mr. Paice: I am still a Front-Bench spokesman, but not on this occasion. Does the hon. Gentleman not realise the fallacy of his argument about foxes being taken into animal hospitals? The simple fact is that if a fox has been wounded with a gun, a rifle or a shotgun, it will not be readily visible for somebody to pick up and take in. It will either go to ground or hide under brambles or whatever, where it will lie until it dies, probably of gangrene. It will not be found in a place where someone will pick it up and take it to be treated.

Mr. Cawsey: I accept the point made by the hon. Gentleman who is nearly on the Front Bench tonight—and who, I understand, usually still is—but that would also apply to lots of other animals that get injured in the countryside. However, one would think that, perhaps once in those many years, someone at that RSPCA hospital would have come across a fox in that situation. The simple truth is that no one ever has. I therefore do not accept the hon. Gentleman's argument.

Furthermore, I do not accept the argument that dogs kill a mammal in the most humane way—the single nip on the back of the neck argument. Every single year—I accept that this is not the intention of those who hunt—there are instances of hunts attacking other prey or quarry. It might be people walking the dog—[HON. MEMBERS: "No, they don't."] Opposition Members are saying that they do not, but I can give them as many examples as they like of domestic pets that have had to be taken to the vet because they have been attacked by a hunt. As a result, those animals have had to be treated. There are two remarkable things about that. First, their injuries do not tend to be in the neck area—they tend to be in the hind legs or the underbelly. Secondly—we should remember that the hunt has to separate the dogs from the quarry—they are still alive. If the hunt is such a wonderful, quick way of killing mammals, why do we find, every year, examples of animals that survive the process and can be treated and returned to their owners? It is complete rubbish.

A lot has been said about public opinion this evening. I do not believe, like many Opposition Members, that Governments should legislate purely on the basis of opinion polls. What is remarkable, however, is that public opinion hardly moves. I suspect that we shall see a similar lack of movement in this place this evening. When my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Foster)—who is in his place now—introduced his private Member's Bill in 1997, a MORI poll showed that 71 per cent. of the electorate wanted hunting with dogs to be banned. The latest poll shows that 72 per cent. of the population want a ban. There is very little change in that. Similarly, a recent NOP poll showed the figure as 67 per cent. I understand that Opposition Members are quoting a telephone poll in *The Sun*, which shows 76 per cent.

Mr. Luff: A poll in *The Sun* was quoted, which I think showed a 74 per cent. result. However, we are quoting scientific opinion polls collected by NOP that show a clear majority against a ban.

Mr. Cawsey: I have not seen a single poll that has reached that result in which the question has not been geared one way. When the question is open, there is a clear result in favour of a ban. Just before the last general election, a phone poll found that 80 per cent. of people were going to vote Conservative, but that did not happen in reality.

Mr. Mike Wood (Batley and Spen): They believed that as well.

Mr. Cawsey: As my hon. Friend says, the Opposition believed that as well. So we must therefore be cautious about polls that are unbalanced.

I shall finish my speech by considering the issue of liberty. I spoke in the previous debate on this subject when I told the House that I had attended the New Forest drag hunt. When I got there, like many other people, I was subjected to a chap shoving a camera in my face. He took photographs of me and everyone else who attended the hunt. When I asked the people who had converted the old New Forest hunt into a drag hunt why that was happening, I was told, "They are taking photographs to show around the pub tonight so that everyone can see who is letting the side down." That is an issue of liberty.

I also referred to the hunt that came through the playground of a school and to a village in Essex where the villagers had held a poll establishing that they did not want it. The hunt, however, continued to go through the village and, when the leader of the hunt was questioned by the press, he asked, "What's that got to do with the people of the village? Why have they got any say?" That is the sort of libertarian issue the debate is all about. It is not about people's right to hunt, because one cannot control a hunt. It will follow the quarry and go wherever the quarry goes. Because of that, other people's liberty is affected.

Those who take a libertarian view about how people live in the countryside should vote for a ban. That is the only way of achieving their aim. The other proposals are a cop-out and should be defeated in the Lobbies, as I am confident they will be this evening.

9.5 pm

Mr. James Paice (South-East Cambridgeshire): I have listened to contributions from both sides and, unlike one speaker, I do not think that this has been a particularly good debate. I have been saddened by the superficiality of the arguments made—and not just by those who want to ban hunting.

The hon. Member for Brigg and Goole (Mr. Cawsey) clearly does not understand hunting. I accept that everyone is entitled to reach their own conclusions, but it was clear from his speech that he does not know very much about hunting. It behoves hon. Members to acquaint

[Mr. James Paice]

themselves with all the facts, as the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey) did by going to see the Thurlow hunt. I do not know whether it met in my constituency or one of the neighbouring ones, but I would have been happy for her to visit my constituency. That was an example of someone trying to find out what is going on.

When the hon. Member for Great Yarmouth (Mr. Wright) said that all his information about coursing came from the Waveney Harriers, he underlined my point about ignorance. Harriers on horseback hunt hares with packs of hounds.

Mr. Anthony D. Wright: As a matter of clarification, I never said that I received all my information from the Waveney Harriers. I received it from several other individuals who had been involved in hare coursing. I also received information from video footage.

Mr. Paice: If I misunderstood the hon. Gentleman, I shall, of course, withdraw my remarks. However, I urge him to read *Hansard*, because that was not the impression that he gave to me or to any of my hon. Friends.

Some of the arguments that have been advanced are clearly spurious. We have heard about animals being ripped to pieces. They sometimes are but, as the Burns report made clear, that is after they are dead, so that argument cannot be used against hunting. The hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) has clearly put to bed the nonsensical figure of 5 per cent. In many parts of the country, the figure is much higher than that.

I want to speak about the two central issues. The first is cruelty and the second is the rights and wrongs of people participating in acts that others may perceive as cruel. The phrase

"seriously compromises the welfare of the fox"

appears several times in Burns, and I suspect that Lord Burns wishes that he had not used it. It has been so misquoted. However, he is adamant—he said this in the debate in the other place—that the phrase should not be taken to imply that hunting is cruel; and, nor for that matter, should it be taken to mean that hunting is not cruel. It was not a comment on the cruelty of hunting, even though some people have proclaimed that it should be seen as such.

Does the animal that is pursued feel distress during the chase part of the hunt? There is no doubt that there is physical distress or exhaustion, but there is a big question mark as to whether that is over and above that which occurs regularly in nature. When Professor Bateson produced a report on deer hunting, his peers who examined it quickly took issue with his conclusions. Even he has backed away from the finding in the report.

A further issue is whether pursuit causes the animal any mental distress. There is no evidence either way, but it is wrong of people to adopt the anthropomorphic approach and say, "Well, how would you like it?" Animals do not have the same perceptions, sense of reasoning and, perhaps, the premonition of pain or death as humans; there is no evidence whatever that that is the case. Indeed, if they had all those abilities, they would no longer be the animals that they are. Anyone who knows about animals—anyone who keeps dogs or other pets—knows that an animal does not have any conception from its experience of something of what will happen next. A dog is trained by repetition; most animals are taught by being trained repetitively, which is how they learn the consequences of individual actions.

The process of death may sound like a harsh term, but it is the only way I can describe it. In stag hunting, the process of death is by shooting, so death is instant and not drawn-out; the same is true of hinds. A number of Members have spoken about coursing; my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) was rightly reported as saying that the objective is not to catch the hare; coursing is a test between two greyhounds. Only one in seven or eight hares is caught, but I am the first to accept that when a hare is caught, it is a distressing sight, and obviously dreadful for the hare. The question of muzzling was raised; I, too, have asked why the hounds cannot be muzzled. I have been told that hares are fragile animals; trials with muzzling in Ireland have shown that if hounds cannot catch the hare, they bang it hard with their muzzles; the hare suffers internal haemorrhaging, goes away and still dies. That is the reason I have been given for muzzling being unacceptable.

With mink, of course, there is a huge size difference; for them, death is instant. Foxhunting, however, dominates the debate; death, according to Burns and every other study, if not instantaneous, takes only a few seconds. There is clear evidence that alternatives are equally likely or, in some cases, more likely, to cause a lot of pain in the process of death.

Another issue is whether people enjoy what is described as inflicting cruelty. If that were so, a lot of people following hunts would be extremely disappointed. The hon. Member for Broxtowe (Dr. Palmer) spoke about someone seeing only two foxes killed in 40 years of hunting, and took that to mean that only two had been killed. I suspect, however, that he is wrong; few people following a hunt see the kill. The field is usually a couple of hundred yards or more behind, and the only person up with the hounds is the huntsman. Anybody who goes hunting to enjoy the spectacle of a fox being killed by hounds will be sorely disappointed. The issue is not relevant to stag hunting, as the animals are shot; with hare coursing, inflicting cruelty is not the purpose.

If there is an argument about cruelty, fishing must come into the frame. I know that this is not a debate about fishing, so I shall not test your patience, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but there is ample evidence that fish feel pain and respond to it. A report prepared for the RSPCA makes the point that

"it can be argued that the pain fish feel as a result of injury is likely to be just as important in their own way as human pain is to humans."

I am afraid that my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) was plain wrong; the vast majority of people who fish do not do so for food. In coarse fishing, with the exception of a few pike and eels, almost all fish are returned to the water. Given the water most of them come from, frankly no one would want to eat them anyway. In game fishing, catches of trout and salmon are consumed, but the bulk of fish is put back in the water. I would argue strongly that that is just as cruel as any form of hunting with dogs, if not more so, as there is no aim of control.

The debate has dealt with many issues, but I hope that those hon. Members who are prepared to stop and think for a moment before they walk into the Lobby in a few

minutes' time will consider the consequences of passing legislation that would criminalise a small minority that is as significant as many others in this country. Every minority has a right to be heard and, wherever possible, understood. Such legislation would not lead to a net reduction in pain or distress to animals; in many ways, a great deal of inconvenience and disruption would be caused to individual lives.

The issue is: should this House make a moral judgment on whether it is right for people to enjoy what some perceive as inflicting pain on animals? I believe that that judgment should be made by individuals, according to what is right for their soul. It is not a judgment for this House, and that is why I shall resist—as I have always done—any attempt by it to stop people hunting with hounds.

9.15 pm

Dr. Ian Gibson (Norwich, North): In the past few years, the paper by Professor Bateson and Dr. Bradshaw—entitled "Physiological effects of hunting red deer"—has been a significant feature in debates in this place, in Committee and elsewhere on hunting with dogs. Following its publication, vitriolic attacks were made on Professor Bateson. Accusations were made concerning his competence, integrity and powers of manipulation; he was even accused of slanting his report of April 1997, thereby precipitating the National Trust's decision to ban stag hunting on its land. However, after taking evidence from his opponents, it reaffirmed that decision. After listening to both sides of the argument, the Forestry Commission independently reached the same conclusion.

In his letter to me last week, Patrick Bateson—who is still alive and well and has not recanted—said that, despite attempts to discredit him, he still agrees with what he wrote in 1997. He showed that, according to the measurement of various hormones, hunting deer with hounds led to high levels of stress. If they were chased over 10 km, which is no mean distance, they had no fuel left—I shall not use technical terms—and were unable to move quickly because their muscles had gone. He pointed out that their vascular system and muscle tissue had broken down, and, interestingly, that the biochemical and physiological state of animals that had been knocked down by a car were comparable to those of deer that had been hunted over long distances. The effect on the welfare of deer was further illustrated through examining behaviour patterns during the later stages of the hunt.

A further, joint universities study on deer hunting was commissioned by the Countryside Alliance and interested parties such as stag hunts. It did not comment on the wider aspects of the behaviour of deer, but it considered all the biochemical factors. There are great similarities between the two studies, and very few differences.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Gibson: I am sorry, but I must move on.

However, there was a major difference between the two studies in terms of interpreting results. The authors of the latter study disagreed with Bateson, maintaining that the physiological effects of hunting are merely those of exercise, with suffering restricted to perhaps the last 20 minutes before the kill. They argue that deer are well-adapted to being hunted by hounds.

That is a narrow view of the demands placed on hunted deer, which are exhausted when they go to bay. The joint universities study likened their condition to that of an exhausted footballer, but it is many years since I have seen such a footballer. Given the size of modern squads, players are substituted before they become exhausted. None the less, such a comparison was drawn with an animal that is chased by a noisy pack of potential predators and suffers harassment from shouting human beings—we will still call them that—but we should remember that fear itself is a great factor in causing stress. A deer is hardly the same as a self-motivated athlete.

We need to consider what others have said about those two studies, and I shall quote one of the many eminent people who have reviewed them.

Sir John Krebs, who was head of the department of zoology at Oxford university, became chief executive of the National Environmental Research Council and now heads the very successful Food Standards Agency, says that the essence of the findings in both studies is that red deer show certain physiological symptoms at the end of the hunt. He says that Bateson concluded that hunting causes a greater degree of suffering than does stalking. According to the summary paper that he has looked at, the new work does not shed significant new light on that question. I could mention other people with the same opinion.

It has been argued that it is necessary to cull populations of animals. Bateson argued that the contribution of hunts to the necessary culling of red deer is small, and chasing wounded deer before killing them is not a contribution to the welfare of those injured in road accidents or entangled in fence wire. He recommended stalking, so he does recommend some degree of culling as against hunting.

The supporters of the middle way option argue that it would guarantee an improvement in animal welfare and boldly attempt to merge that point with arguments about human liberty and freedom—but we will ignore that one. Is it necessary to regulate animal populations, and will that lead to unregulated and uncontrolled killing? I have seen no published evidence showing that that will happen. It is a surmise by the proponents of that argument.

We may need to cull populations, and Bateson agreed. Burns was ambivalent on the need to control foxes or any animals. The report said that

"landowners and gamekeepers consider that it is necessary".

That is not the same as saying that it is necessary.

Huw Irranca-Davies: Does my hon. Friend agree with the Burns report where it says, two paragraphs below the bit he has just quoted, that

"in upland areas, where the fox population causes more damage to sheep-rearing and game management interests, and where there is a greater perceived need for control, fewer alternatives are available to the use of dogs"?

Dr. Gibson: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. There is no argument about the need in certain instances for some degree of culling. Bateson admits that and I agree, but the issue is how it is done and the extent of it. How many animals need to be killed to regulate a population? The urban fox studies in Bristol have shown clearly that no regulation is needed. The fox numbers go up when people feed them and down when

[Dr. Gibson]

the animals become infected with mange. The control and regulation of animal populations is done naturally. Studies from across the world show that. Territorial changes take place, with animals moving to bigger territories, or the animals' social interactions change. The animals control their own numbers.

I understand what people say about the comparison of suffering being a complex matter, and it is. Is one animal suffering for many days worse in welfare terms than many animals suffering for a few hours? We do not know how much time deer wounded by stalkers spend suffering. However, at least Bateson made an effort to tackle the problem by obtaining some measurements on which we can make a judgment.

Of course we need to make a moral judgment on whether culling is acceptable, but that will not rest only on the considerations that I have mentioned. It will also depend on the extent to which people who cull red deer knowingly inflict suffering and the extent to which the suffering inflicted by their method of culling may be minimised. Those are deep questions. In opposition to the views of some vets, about which we have heard, and the Middle Way Group, there is solid evidence that the regulation of populations of animals is controlled by a complex interaction of variables.

The Burns report did not conclude that we would see an inexorable rise in fox numbers if we stopped culling them. He did not accept that argument, although he was put under pressure to do so. There are some reasons for culling, but the arguments on how it should be done and to what extent require serious and proper debate. There can be no compromise on the issue. A total ban is what the public want and there is no evidence that the middle way will benefit the welfare of animals or help to control numbers. It is not a time for political fudges but time to listen to the public, the science and the House of Commons.

9.24 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice) that, in many ways, the debate is not particularly well informed. At the outset, I must declare my interest as a farmer who has hunted almost every season since the age of six and, I think, the only Member of the House to have ridden winners in point-to-points and under national hunt rules. So, I have a role to play in the debate, although which role depends on one's point of view.

There have been two important events since we last debated the matter in the House. First, the Independent Supervisory Authority on Hunting is up and running, so it is worth describing exactly what it does. The authority is chaired by an independent retired High Court judge, Sir Ronald Waterhouse, who has no bias and has seven independent commissioners who run the authority. All 11 hunt licensing bodies and all the hunts have signed up voluntarily to the authority, which has a considerable code of conduct, powers to fine masters a considerable sum and the ultimate power to suspend a hunt. On that basis, I recommend that the House seriously considers the supervision option.

The second important event is the foot and mouth epidemic, which was catastrophic for people in rural areas. Above all, it led to a system under which everybody who goes hunting must fill in a form to say that they have hunted. In other words, we have a de facto licensing system. Taken together, the ISAH and the licensing system imposed by foot and mouth are an effective supervisory system. Having said that, I am sure that all my constituents and all my hunts—I represent 10, at the last count, which is more than any other Member of Parliament—would consider some form of licensing enshrined in statute.

The foot and mouth crisis brought further misery on my constituents. We already know from parliamentary answers that 44,000 jobs have been lost in agriculture in the past three years, but the Burns report estimates that we will lose another 8,000 to 10,000 if we ban hunting, so anybody who votes for a ban is voting to put my constituents out of a job. *[Interruption.]* Those Labour Members who are laughing should be ashamed of themselves if they want to put my constituents out of a job.

In a superb speech, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague) said that hunting is the glue that binds the rural areas together. He is absolutely right. Let me give two brief examples of why that is so. First, agriculture, which is already suffering, plays a good role in disposing of fallen stock. If we do not have the hunts, farmers will have to go to a great deal of trouble and expense to find someone, if there is a knackerman out there, to get rid of dead and fallen stock from the land.

That is one example of hunts performing a useful role in rural areas; the second is less tangible, although it applies to all those in urban areas who like to go out into the countryside and enjoy it. The countryside was laid out as it is by our forefathers and by many of the current generation because they like hunting and enjoying the countryside in a proper environmental situation, so hunting is the glue that binds rural areas together. Often, hunts are the first to notice that stock has escaped on to a road and report it.

As well as job losses caused by the foot and mouth crisis and the general decline in agriculture, we have suffered a decline in tourism since 11 September. Tourism draws a significant number of people and a significant amount of foreign exchange to this country. The hotels and the bed-and-breakfast accommodation in my area and in many others badly need tourism during the winter, and they depend on the hunting fraternity to fill them so that the businesses can survive.

Some of the ignorance of the facts of the debate centres on the alternative methods of disposing of foxes. I was brought up in the countryside. I know how to use a high-powered rifle, and I can tell the House that, unless it is skilfully used, it is very difficult, particularly at night, to kill a fox with the first shot.

In paragraph 60 of the summary and conclusions, the Burns report makes it clear that high-powered rifles can be used only in certain areas. A high-powered rifle of the sort necessary to kill a fox with one shot is lethal to a distance of well over a mile, so footpaths, buildings and, increasingly, the right to roam will restrict the areas in which such a weapon can be used. Burns says that a shotgun is not a suitable instrument for killing a fox, and

anyone who has seen a fox in its lair, as I have, knows that it can suffer a slow and lingering death from shotgun wounds. Even worse, a fox that has been poisoned can go away and spend many days suffering from gangrene before it finally dies following the poisoning that has been inflicted.

I would like to address the issue of imposing criminal sanctions on people who transgress any law that we might pass. Imposing criminal sanctions on anybody is a serious matter. The resources that we have to uphold the Queen's law in this country are always going to be scarce; there is always going to be a shortage of policemen. Do we really want to use them to chase around the countryside trying to arrest otherwise law-abiding hunting people? The reason that criminal sanctions are accepted in this country is that the generality of thinking by the majority of people is that a particular crime ought to be outlawed by society. We can all identify with murder, robbery and rape attracting criminal sanctions, but to make criminal those people who otherwise want to go about their lawful business, by banning hunting, does not seem to be a very good use of scarce resources.

This country has always had a reputation for tolerance. In the 18th and 19th centuries, many poets, philosophers and authors came here because they would have been guillotined or otherwise executed in the rest of Europe, merely on account of their views. We have always been tolerant of minorities, and the way in which some hon. Members are laughing and chatting instead of listening to this speech shows that they are not tolerant of minorities, and that they do not really understand the issues. I would say to those hon. Members that, before they vote for a ban, they should think about putting my constituents out of a job, make sure that they have read the Burns report and understood it, and, above all, make sure that they are tolerant of minorities. It has been said:

"We have a fantastic wealth of history and tradition in Britain. You'd be a fool to want to turn your back on our past culture and achievements. I certainly do not."

Those are the words of the Prime Minister on 30 April 1998, when he was doing a partisan issue for *Country Life*. I say to my constituents, "Do not be beguiled by this Government saying that they will do a deal. Protest at every opportunity." We want to protect our minorities.

9.32 pm

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): I used to back a ban on hunting with dogs. I changed my view on the basis of observation, of talking to people, and of having the courage of my convictions not to try to put through the measures that I started with, but to try to win the arguments on the way that seems to be right. Far from criticising the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman), I think that the fact that he was honest and courageous enough to say that he has changed his mind is at the heart of a debate that relates to conscience. The general public are changing their minds. Soon, perhaps, the House of Lords will change its mind. What kind of Chamber is this, if it is not willing seriously to contemplate an alternative such as that put forward by the Middle Way Group, if that is genuinely in the interest of the welfare of the animals that we seek to help and protect?

Let us be clear—this debate is not about whether we kill foxes. All three options, including the ban option, acknowledge that it is acceptable in some circumstances to control—in other words, to kill—foxes. Even the Scottish ban makes provision for various loopholes allowing the use of dogs. So, let us be clear that this debate is about improving the welfare of wild animals in a context in which we still kill such animals. Crucially, Lord Burns accepted that point. He accepted that, in some circumstances, killing a fox with dogs was not necessarily the most cruel way of doing it. It seems strange, therefore, that so many speakers in this debate are using Burns to argue something different. We all know that an animal's welfare is compromised if it is killed. The question for all of us is whether there is such compelling evidence about this one specific method that we should criminalise the people who think that it is the most fair.

I do not support the status quo; nor do I agree with those who say that self-regulation has worked.

Mr. Savidge: The hon. Gentleman says he does not support the status quo. Am I not right in thinking that he has voted for it in the past?

Lembit Öpik: The hon. Gentleman will find that I am voting against it this evening. Moreover, I do not see the relevance of his point to the philosophical and practical points that I am trying to make.

I have spoken to an organisation called Protect Our Wild Animals. I am indebted to, in particular, Anita Knittel and Penny Little for the time they devoted to discussing the issue with me, although I accept that they are implacably supportive of a ban. Such cross-organisation dialogue has helped the Middle Way Group to develop its ideas.

I know that I did not convince those two people, but they gave me a series of videos illustrating unequivocally the failure of self-regulation to do away with some of the harm and damage that hunts currently cause. Dogs killed on roads, dogs dead on railway tracks, the physical intimidation of individuals monitoring hunts and many examples of trespass were all on film.

Let no one pretend that the Middle Way Group is sitting here saying that the status quo is acceptable. By the same token, however, although I understand why people support a ban—because I once did myself—I no longer believe that it will deliver the welfare benefits that we all say we want to achieve.

Let us think about the contradictions. If welfare is the key issue, why are Members focusing on a method that, on their own admission, involves only 6 per cent. of fox kills? If the welfare of the fox is the primary concern, why are they not dealing with the 94 per cent. of kills that are carried out in other ways? If we care about animal welfare we must maximise the benefits of the regulations, and we will not do that by focusing on a minority pursuit. Let us also remember that the damage done by focusing on that minority pursuit is tremendously important to certain sectors of British communities, such as the fell packs and the mid-Wales packs. Lord Burns said explicitly that in those areas it is probably the best way in which to control the fox population.

People describe the middle way as a compromise. That ignores what we are trying to do. The hon. Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson) said that it was not possible to compromise on cruelty. What an irony! As we know from the Scottish so-called ban, the ban option itself is the biggest compromise on offer. As I have said, it does

[Lembit Öpik]

not deal with the 94 per cent. of foxes killed by other methods; but, even more important, it would be forced to include various exemptions that would not be necessary in the context of regulation. That is why the Middle Way Group regards the middle way not as a compromise, but as a potential solution in all our interests.

Let me remind Members that we propose the establishment of an independent hunting authority with statutory powers to enforce a legally binding code of practice and tough penalties to ensure that it works. We want that to apply to all methods of fox control, not just one. Our proposal goes further than any other option in the Bill. *[Interruption.]* Shouting about it does not change the reality: the Middle Way Group has taken the issue very seriously indeed.

We also propose the appointment of inspectors—paid for by a licence fee—who could drop in unannounced on all hunts that must be licensed to ensure that the code was adhered to. Unlike a ban, the middle way does not depend on an overstretched police force to police the countryside. It would be manifestly ridiculous to imagine that it would have the necessary resources.

I ask Members to acknowledge—even if they have problems with the details of our proposals—that we have created a coherent and comprehensive policy. Not only do we seek sincerely to ensure that all wild-mammal control is regulated; we do not expect a police force to implement a policy that it does not even consider to be workable.

The idea has been tried elsewhere. There is licensing across Europe in many different ways. In Finland, for example, there is a sophisticated procedure that really works.

We have heard a lot about polls. Hon. Members will know that the Middle Way Group has consistently improved its rating in the polls on tiny resources: on five-figure investment compared with the seven or eight-figure sums that the larger organisations have invested. The hon. Member for Brigg and Goole (Mr. Cawsey) cited polls. He will know not only that 47 per cent. cite regulation as acceptable, compared with 53 per cent. citing a ban as acceptable—far too close a call to justify a ban—but that 64 per cent. said that it was not an issue that we should be discussing in Parliament.

If our ideas are so weak, why have four directors of the League Against Cruel Sports decided that we have a more acceptable proposal? If our procedures are so weak, why do so many independent arbiters, including two out of three vets, think that there should be something other than a ban in the interests of animal welfare? I bet it is because they understand what a ban means and how limited its achievements would be.

There is a public mood developing—not necessarily a public mood that hon. Members want to hear. It says, "Do we really want to criminalise honest people who genuinely think they are doing the right thing and that they are not imposing cruelty?" The Middle Way Group is looking not for victories but for solutions. Long after the foxhunting debate ends in this Chamber, we will be picking up the pieces of the results in the wider community. We have not been rich, except in our idea, which seems to have gained some resonance.

We do not ask hon. Members to feel a sense of victory or defeat—quite the opposite. We ask hon. Members to think sincerely about our proposals, to accept that, whatever they think the flaws of our idea are, we have tried to reach out to people on all sides and improved our proposals on the basis of that.

The Middle Way Group proposals may not be perfect but they are a genuine attempt to move the debate forward. Again, should there be a split decision between this Chamber and the upper House, we hope that hon. Members will do what the Minister said they should do at the beginning: have a constructive and positive dialogue towards a result. If we achieve that, we will have proved that conscience votes are exactly what they say: votes based on commitment and principle, not on personalisation and emotion.

The Middle Way Group stands up to be counted in what it has put forward. I hope that in the months ahead we can achieve something significant, something humane and something that is practical and fair, and that hon. Members will find it in their hearts to think about our proposals and to vote for them in the minutes ahead.

9.42 pm

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): I will be brief because hon. Members have come here this evening not to hear me but to hear the winding-up speeches and to vote in about 20 minutes.

I should declare an interest as well because I used to hunt a great deal. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown), I have ridden in point-to-points and under rules, and have had some winners, so he is not the only hon. Member who has won a race. I also own two bits of land across which the hunt comes from time to time.

I do not believe that this debate has anything to do with Labour's concern about the welfare of foxes, deer or hares. It has much more to do with the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions. It also has quite a bit to do with Labour's concern about membership of the party. I saw a letter that was sent to Back Benchers from Millbank, which says:

"Retention of members"

of the Labour party

"is our most important activity . . . make the most of legislation coming up"

in the near future

"such as the free vote on hunting with dogs on March 18".

so I do not think that this debate has anything to do with Labour's concern about the welfare of foxes.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague) said, we should be debating issues that really concern people such as health, transport, education and housing. If I were to knock on 50 doors in my constituency and asked people what the top 50 issues were, I do not believe that hunting would crop up once. People are not that concerned about it.

In the past, the opinion polls showed a majority of people in favour of banning hunting, but the results are very different when the question asked is, "Do you want to criminalise and lock up the people who go hunting?" My hon. Friend the Member for South-West Hertfordshire (Mr. Page) spoke about recent opinion polls, as did the hon. Member for Brigg and Goole (Mr. Cawsey). In an NOP Solutions poll only four days ago, 48 per cent. said that they supported hunting being made a criminal

offence, and 49 per cent. said that hunting should continue. Of that 49 per cent., 22 per cent. thought that it should continue in its present form, and 27 per cent. supported licensing. In other words, 1 per cent. more were in favour of keeping hunting in one form or another, so I do not believe that there is an overwhelming demand to get rid of hunting.

As my hon. Friend the Member for North Thanet (Mr. Gale) pointed out, there are other animal welfare issues that cause concern—issues such as experiments on animals, and welfare on farms and in slaughterhouses. Let us consider welfare on pig farms. I saw in the papers this weekend a story about the Labour Chief Whip in the Lords. On a farm that he owns, pigs were crammed illegally into tiny pens, where they had no room to turn round or lie down. Others were said to have died from heat exhaustion and related conditions. I tend to agree with Joyce d'Silva, the director of Compassion in World Farming, who said:

"I am appalled"—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The House must come to order. The hon. Gentleman is addressing the House.

Mr. Bellingham: Joyce d'Silva said:

"I am appalled that a member of the Government allegedly was linked to the keeping of animals in illegal conditions".

We should be discussing the welfare of farm animals, not hunting.

Many hon. Members have spoken about cruelty. I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer,) who said that there is cruelty in any form of field sport. Of course there is. There is cruelty in shooting. There is cruelty in fishing. There is particular cruelty in coarse fishing. There is cruelty in any form of killing animals. There is cruelty in slaughterhouses. We eat meat for our pleasure. We wear leather shoes for our pleasure. Any form of killing animals is cruel, but the question is how cruel it is.

I believe strongly, as a number of hon. Members have argued this evening, that if we ban hunting, foxes will suffer more and more. More foxes will be shot, snared or gassed. As we heard a number of times this evening, a fox that is shot is rarely killed cleanly. Frequently, the fox will be wounded and it will die a lingering death from gangrene.

I shall deal with the social fabric of hunting in the community. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks said, hunting is crucial in many areas. At a time when foot and mouth has caused devastation in the countryside, hunting may provide only a small number of jobs—perhaps 6,000, 10,000 or 14,000—but every one of those jobs is precious and deserves our concern and our interest.

If it were not for hunting, we would not have point-to-point racing. Point-to-point racing depends on hunting. If it were not for hunting, we would not have the knackerman. In my constituency, when farmers have [illegible] stock, or a pony that is too old and needs putting down, it is the hunt that comes along and removes that cow or sheep, or puts down that pony. If hunting goes, the knackerman goes.

Finally, we are dealing with the freedom of the individual. The Prime Minister has made a great deal of noise about tolerance in our society. We do not want any more divisions in this society, and by picking on a minority we will sow a huge amount of discontent in the countryside, a great deal of anger and many more divisions. That is why this evening I will vote firmly against a ban and if we do not win that vote, I will vote for the middle way.

9.50 pm

Mrs. Ann Winterton: I want to sum up after a very interesting debate in which there have been good contributions from Members on both sides of the House. There have been some stars—the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey) was, as ever, courageous, full of common sense and had the best motives in supporting the middle way. The biggest star of all was my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague), who was scintillating—a real tour de force. He reflected the view of the countryside and of Yorkshire.

The hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) showed equal courage in changing his view and deciding not to vote for a total ban. He gave his speech amid much heckling from his own side. My right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) gave a thoughtful and philosophical speech that even preached tolerance. In contrast, my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) was as feisty as ever but her arguments would, at a stroke, have brought to an end all angling competitions, which would not be very popular.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) repeated a point that was made many times: there is no compelling public interest in introducing a ban on hunting and, in his view, it should not be part of the criminal law. My hon. Friend the Member for North Thanet (Mr. Gale) made his usual passionate speech. As the voice of Wales in this debate, the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) referred to the cruelty in the Animal Health Bill and in the Government's proposals. There was a trenchant contribution from my hon. Friend the Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown), and the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik), who is going to buy me a drink later, was as articulate as ever in promoting the middle way option.

We have heard powerfully held views on both sides of the argument—some polarised and others more reflective. Many speakers have commented on the timing of the debate, which they believe is insensitive and a distraction from more important national and animal welfare issues.

In a matter of individual judgment and conscience, there are practical difficulties, some of which were not addressed, especially by Labour Members. What will replace hunting? How will the fox population in particular be controlled, especially when they are predatory? Will gassing, poisoning or shooting be the answer? What of the wounding of animals after they have been shot and the lack of retrieval of the wounded? Is that not an issue? Is hunting not the more humane method of controlling the fox population?

I do not envy the Minister. He is in a difficult situation, but it is of the Government's making. At the end of the day, this is a class warfare issue—we saw that rear its ugly head during the debate. It is nothing to do with animal welfare. This is them against the countryside. This is class warfare on the Labour Benches, while on this side of the House the argument is freedom, freedom, freedom.

9.54 pm

Alun Michael: I said that I hoped that the House would rise to the occasion, as it sometimes does in a difficult and contentious debate that ends in a free vote. That is difficult when an issue has been debated on many occasions, so it is to the credit of the House that the quality of debate tonight has been high.

Let us remember that the Government have stayed neutral on this issue; right hon. and hon. Members have made this a parliamentary issue that has to be resolved. The normal mechanisms of the private Member's Bill or Back-Bench amendments have not enabled Parliament to reach a conclusion. Neither the Burns report nor enabling the three campaigning groups to give legislative form to their preferred option revealed a simple way forward. There is no magic wand. This debate is the first stage of a process that rightly starts with listening to Members of this House. I assure right hon. and hon. Members that they will not have wasted their time in this debate or in the Lobby.

The right hon. Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague) said that the Government are entitled to have a debate on hunting. Actually, it is the House that is entitled to have a debate on hunting. He made an entertaining speech, but he is clearly unaware of the Government's efforts to aid rural recovery, to support parish councils and to help the enormous success of "your countryside, you're welcome" by supporting some 50 organisations in promoting visits to the countryside and bridging the perceived divide between town and country. He is unaware of our work to implement the rural White Paper, even in a year when foot and mouth disease swept the country.

This is not a town versus country debate. It is a debate on three motions to enable all Members to exercise their individual vote.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Alun Michael: I shall not give way; we have cut our speeches to give Members a chance to contribute.

It is nice to see tonight's turnout of Conservative Members, who are rarely present when we debate rural issues in the House. *[Interruption.]*

Mrs. Ann Winterton *rose—*

Alun Michael: No, I shall not give way.

There were some puzzling contributions, such as that of the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer), who did not explain whether his opposition to whale hunting is based on a belief that it is a sin or a crime. We are legislators.

I reject the view of the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas), who is a nationalist and not a supporter of devolution, that the House should abrogate its responsibility on a non-devolved issue. I was disappointed to hear the class warrior, the hon. Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton), allege arrogance on the part of Government in allowing time for debate. We have made it clear that education, health, transport and care for the elderly are our priorities. All MPs who want this matter to be dealt with have said time and again that it is not their most important issue, but that it needs to be brought to a conclusion. I understand that message, which was made with passion by my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), my hon. Friends the Members for West Ham (Mr. Banks) and for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) and others. My hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Dr. Palmer) dealt with how things could be done and with the principle.

There were some excellent contributions, with a good deal of memorable wit and humour. If I had to choose one sentence of advice to the House, it would be from the speech of the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe), who said that neither side should assume that the views of the other have been reached on the basis of prejudice. She was not suggesting that we should listen to the views of others and always accept them. Conservative Members will have noticed that she made a robust contribution and argued passionately for a ban on hunting. Hers was a challenge to listen and think.

In pursuing our beliefs, we should be practical about the application of any principle. Often, when pursuing a principle, the devil is in the detail, and those whose views we dislike may say things that are worth hearing. That is why I have listened tonight to opinions on all sides of the argument. I will listen to all sides in the other place tomorrow. Of course I will have regard to the votes cast on the three motions tonight. Respect for democracy requires attention to basic arithmetic. That is the point of having a vote.

I must refute the suggestion that a deal is being done behind closed doors, or that there is to be a sell-out. I ask hon. Members to cast that notion aside, and to accept that the Government are trying to enable Parliament to reach a conclusion on this issue. That was the commitment that we made in our manifesto at the time of the election. This is an issue for Parliament, and our commitment is to enable Parliament to reach a conclusion. Having been given that responsibility, I shall do my best to ensure that the process has integrity, and that Parliament can reach a conclusion. After the two days of debate, I shall come to the House to make a statement on the way forward, and I hope that I shall carry the House with me. It is now time for Members to express their choice.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 154, Noes 401.

Division No. 197] **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cameron, David
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Donaldson, Jeffrey M
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen

Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat–Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Keetch, Paul
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell–Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Prisk, Mark
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Thurso, John
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Tony McNulty and
Mr. John Heppell.

NOES

Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Amess, David
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Baker, Norman
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brake, Tom
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Cable, Dr Vincent
Cabom, Rt Hon Richard
Cairns, David
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Carmichael, Alistair
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Daisley, Paul
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Fabricant, Michael
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Heath, David
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Hermon, Lady
Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Holmes, Paul
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin

Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Irranca–Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness W)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lamb, Norman
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laws, David
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Price, Adam
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Pugh, Dr John
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Randall, John
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Timms, Stephen
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Willis, Phil
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek
Younger–Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Anne McGuire and Dan Norris.

Question accordingly negatived.

HUNTING WITH DOGS: HUNTING UNDER LICENCE

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Order [this day],

That this House considers that the hunting of wild mammals with dogs should be required to be regulated in accordance with arrangements similar to those set out in Schedule 2 to the Hunting Bill as introduced into the Commons last session [Bill 2].—*[Alun Michael.]*

The House divided: Ayes 169, Noes 371.

Division No. 198] **[10.14 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bellingham, Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cameron, David
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim

Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Donaldson, Jeffrey M
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Fisher, Mark
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Garnier, Edward
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gibb, Nick
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Hunter, Andrew
Irranca–Davies, Huw
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Keetch, Paul
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell–Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Price, Adam
Prisk, Mark
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Sheerman, Barry
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Tony McNulty and
Mr. John Heppell.

NOES

Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Amess, David
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Baker, Norman
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brake, Tom
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Cable, Dr Vincent
Caborn, Rt Hon Richard
Cairns, David
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Carmichael, Alistair
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Daisley, Paul
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*

Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Holmes, Paul
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness W)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laws, David
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marris, Rob
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Pugh, Dr John
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stringer, Graham
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Willis, Phil
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Anne McGuire and Dan Norris.

Question accordingly negatived.

HUNTING WITH DOGS: BAN

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Order [this day],

That this House considers that the hunting of wild mammals with dogs should be prohibited in accordance with provision similar to Schedule 3 to the Hunting Bill as introduced in the Commons last Session [Bill 2].—*[Alun Michael.]*

The House divided: Ayes 386, Noes 175.

Division No. 199] **[10.27 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Amess, David
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Baker, Norman
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blears, Ms Hazel

Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brake, Tom
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Cable, Dr Vincent
Caborn, Rt Hon Richard
Cairns, David
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Carmichael, Alistair
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Daisley, Paul
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gale, Roger
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Holmes, Paul
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness W)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laws, David
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Pugh, Dr John
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Randall, John
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John

Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Willis, Phil
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wyatt, Derek
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Tony McNulty and Mr. John Heppell.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cameron, David
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Donaldson, Jeffrey M
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Keetch, Paul
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Price, Adam
Prisk, Mark
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Sheerman, Barry
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Steen, Anthony
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Anne McGuire and Dan Norris.

Question accordingly agreed to.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Mr. Speaker: With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to European Community Documents.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 119(9) (European Standing Committees),

European Transport Policy

That this House takes note of European Union documents No. 11932/01, Commission White Paper: European Transport Policy for 2010: Time to Decide, and No. 12597/01, draft decision of the European Parliament and of the Council amending decision No. 1692/96/EC on Community guidelines for the development of the trans-European transport network; and endorses the Government's approach to discussions on these document.

Cosmetic Products

That this House takes note of the unnumbered explanatory memorandum dated 14th November 2001 from the Department of Trade and Industry on the amended draft Directive of the European Parliament and the Council amending for the seventh time Council

Directive 76/768/EEC on the approximation of the laws of member states relating to cosmetic products; and welcomes it as a positive step towards maintaining the current high levels of protection for human health and safety whilst promoting animal welfare.—*[Mr. Stringer.]*

Question agreed to.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Mr. Speaker: With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to delegated legislation.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

Local Government Finance

That the Local Government Finance (England) Special Grant Report (No. 90) (HC 611), which was laid before this House on 14th February, be approved.

Government Trading Funds

That the draft Royal Mint Trading Fund (Extension and Variation) Order 2002, which was laid before this House on 28th February, be approved.

Electricity

That the draft Electricity and Gas (Determination of Turnover for Penalties) Order 2002, which was laid before this House on 28th February, be approved.

Social Security

That the draft Social Security Administration Act 1992 (Amendment) Order 2002, which was laid before this House on 28th February, be approved.—*[Mr. Stringer.]*

Question agreed to.

REGULATORY REFORM

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 18(1)(a) (Consideration of draft deregulation orders, etc., orders),

That the draft Regulatory Reform (Golden Jubilee Licensing) Order 2002, which was laid before this House on 26th February, be approved.—*[Mr. Stringer.]*

Question agreed to.

Fire Safety (Storage Premises)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Stringer.]*

10.40 pm

Helen Jones (Warrington, North): I am pleased to have this short Adjournment debate on the question of fire safety in warehouse distribution and storage premises. My interest in the matter arose from a fire that took place in my constituency in premises that were used for food storage and distribution. However, it is fair to say that there are several constituencies such as mine which, because of their position on the way to a port or at the junction of several motorways, have acquired a large number of distribution premises, so we need to take a particular interest in ensuring the safety of those buildings and of those who work in them.

I visited the site of the fire in Warrington after it took place with officers from the Cheshire fire service. I wish to place on record my appreciation of those officers for the work they do generally and also for their patience in answering my questions on points that must have seemed to them blatantly obvious. The mistakes in what I am going to say are mine: the good bits are probably theirs.

What was obvious, even to someone like me, was the startling speed with which the fire took hold. The premises were not far from the local fire station and officers were on the scene in a few minutes. Nevertheless, the building had partly collapsed 15 minutes after the fire had started and the firefighters had to withdraw. Within 30 minutes, the building had totally collapsed. It was completely burned out, together with several lorries that had been parked nearby.

Cheshire fire service estimates that the immediate cost of the fire was some £30 million. Other costs are more difficult to quantify, but they include damage to business, loss of jobs and damage to the environment. Sad to say, fires in such premises are not rare. It is difficult to get exact figures because of the way in which records are kept, but an answer my hon. Friend the Minister gave me on 25 October 2001 showed that, in the nine years to 1999, there had been between 702 and 883 fires in storage and distribution premises. Many of those fires will, thankfully, have been small, with the damage resulting from smoke or late calls.

It is not unusual for blazes to occur in such premises. Indeed, the Chief and Assistant Chief Fire Officers Association considers that the figures are much higher. It believes that some 25 per cent. of the fires that occur in the retail and distribution and industrial and transport categories are warehouse fires. It puts the number at some several thousand each year.

Many of those fires are serious. The Fire Protection Association estimates that there have been some 240 large fires in warehouse distribution and storage premises since 1990, leading to insured losses of hundreds of millions of pounds. Its figures are likely to be an underestimate, because it deals only with fires that cost more than £50,000 and it believes that insurers do not report all losses to it.

It is strange that we allow that situation to continue when we could do simple things to minimise the risk, such as changing building regulations and ensuring that sprinklers are fitted.

[Helen Jones]

Although approved document B on fire safety recommends that sprinklers be fitted in single storey retail buildings, it does not do the same for single storey warehouse premises, which reflects a fundamental misunderstanding of how the sector has developed. Single storey buildings may be very large indeed, covering up to 140,000 sq m, and may be up to 30 m high. The nature of the business demands that the most cost-effective use of space be made, so buildings are often densely packed and goods stored on high racking systems.

That in itself poses a danger to the people who work there and any firefighters who have to tackle a blaze. Fires can spread very quickly in such an environment. Indeed, research by the Building Research Establishment shows that fires started in a flue formed by boxes stacked on 10 m racking more often than not reach the top of the stack within two minutes. Multiplying that by the amount of goods and racking in big buildings gives some idea of the scale of the problem.

The problem is compounded by the fact that many modern buildings often have no windows and few doors, which makes it difficult for people to get out and extremely difficult for firefighters to gain access if there is a blaze. Once inside, they may find themselves dealing with fires that are above ground level, approachable only through a maze of unprotected steelwork and facing the hazard of that steelwork collapsing during the fire.

A further hazard is caused by the sandwich panels that are often used in such buildings to create a closed environment in which food may be kept chilled, although they are used for other food hygiene purposes as well. Such panels usually have an inner core sandwiched between sheets of galvanised metal, usually steel, and PVC fixing. That inner core may consist of several materials, usually polystyrene or a mix of polystyrene and rock wool. As such, it is highly inflammable.

Approved document B sets out the hazards of such a construction—it may cause toxic black smoke in a fire, it allows fire to spread unseen in the sandwich panels and it may create flashovers—and a number of fire services have reported on the problems it causes. For example, the Norfolk fire service reported on a fire in 1995 that it believes started against the outside wall of a building. The heat transferred through the wall and ignited the sandwich panels. The fire then spread inside.

The London fire brigade graphically described a fire in these terms:

"The heat caused the polystyrene filling to melt and the metal sheets to distort. The heat and fire travelled through the panels and into the false ceiling and through the remainder of the sandwich panels."

Humberside fire brigade has reported on several such fires, one of which destroyed a building.

The cost of all those fires is hard to estimate because of the way in which we keep our records, but we ought to include in the equation not just the insurance costs, which, in the end, we all pay, but the cost of fighting the fires, the benefits paid to those who unfortunately lose their jobs, the revenue loss to the Exchequer when firms cease to trade and clearing up the resultant environmental pollution.

The Warrington fire took place at a food distribution depot, so afterwards residents nearby suffered what I can only describe as a plague of flies, which were attracted to the food. I was surprised to find that milk, which we think of as harmless, can seriously pollute a water course if it gets in after a fire, and clearing it up costs a great deal.

Set against those costs, the cost of providing sprinklers in these buildings is negligible. Cheshire fire service estimated that the cost of putting sprinklers into the building in Warrington when it was built 10 years ago would have been about £30,000, which is nothing by comparison with the cost of the fire.

I am not primarily making an economic argument, however, although I believe that it is a strong one. My argument is about the safety of the public. The people who work in these buildings, and the firefighters who have to go into them to tackle the fires, face unacceptable risks which could be greatly reduced. The theory has been that single-storey retail buildings required sprinklers where possible, because of the possible loss of life. The same did not apply, however, to single-storey warehouse buildings. I hope that I have said enough to make it clear that the situation on the ground is much more complicated than that.

These buildings are very large. They are often crammed with goods and can be difficult to get out of. The fire service knows that, in these circumstances, managers are often reluctant to confirm that everybody has got out of the building. If that happens, firefighters have a duty to enter the building and search it whenever possible. When they do so, they face hidden fires, toxic smoke and the possible collapse of panelling and racking around them. That is an unacceptable risk for any public servant to have to face when it is not necessary to do so.

In these cases, it is certainly not necessary, because we have known what needs to be done for many years. Committees have reported to successive Governments about what needs to happen with these buildings, but the measures have never been enforced. As far back as 1946, the post-war building studies that aimed to learn the lessons from firefighting in the second world war recommended that warehouses of more than 10,000 sq ft should have sprinklers fitted. I am not very good at converting feet into metres, but I think that that is about 940 sq m, a tiny area by comparison with the buildings that we are dealing with here.

In 1970, a departmental committee on the fire service under the chairmanship of Sir Ronald Holroyd drew attention to the fact that fires could spread unseen in this type of building, and recommended the installation of sprinklers and automatic fire alarms. A report produced for the Home Office in 1980 suggested that 90 per cent. of our industrial buildings could effectively be protected by sprinklers. Yet we have not legislated for this. We prefer the risk assessment option, but that option has clearly not worked. We continue to have a great many of these fires, and people continue to be put at risk.

It is time for the Government to act. I say to my hon. Friend the Minister that I know many local authorities, including my own, that are very concerned about these buildings. They are afraid to act on their own, however, because they are afraid of chasing away jobs and investment. What is needed is Government action. We should, through our building regulations, be limiting the size of unsprinklered compartments to 2,000 sq m, and requiring the fitting of sprinklers in buildings such as these.

I hope that the Minister will also think seriously about ensuring that proper research is carried out into the use of alternative materials for sandwich panels and, if possible, about moving to require non-combustible cores to be used in them. I hope that, in any regulatory impact assessment that is undertaken, we will put into the equation not only the insurance costs but all the other costs that I have mentioned, which we, as members of the public, have to pay in the end.

The issue is about more than cost, as I have said. It is about whether we are prepared to put people's lives at risk inside these buildings. We hear a lot about reducing red tape, and I am not in favour of imposing unnecessary bureaucracy on anyone. However, I am not in favour of removing a single piece of red tape if it puts someone's life at risk.

I think my constituents who work in such buildings are being put at unnecessary risk, and I think that those in the fire service who have to deal with fires in them are also being put at unnecessary risk. I hope we will act to minimise that risk in the future. I hope we do not have to wait until, tragically, someone is seriously injured or killed before the necessity to act has been realised. We have seen that happen in the case of retail buildings; we should not wait for a similar tragedy to happen in a large single-storey warehouse before being prepared to amend the regulations to deal with such warehouses.

10.55 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Dr. Alan Whitehead): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington, North (Helen Jones) on securing the debate, and on her speech. She clearly takes considerable interest in the subject, not least because of local experience, and she also has great expertise. She has raised this important issue not just in written parliamentary questions, but in early-day motion 241.

I am concerned about the number of fires that occur each year in all buildings, not just those that occur on warehouse, distribution and storage premises. This is a serious matter. It is important to learn lessons from fires that have occurred, and important for us all to take reasonable steps to prevent losses—and not just those in relation to death and injury—through fires.

The last decade has seen a considerable increase in the number and size of single-storey warehouse buildings. However, when we consult the supporting fire statistics we note that the occurrence of death and injury has remained reasonably static during the last seven years, and, in comparison with those in other buildings, is thankfully very low. I refer to the last seven years because our fire reporting system was revised in 1994, and before that a separate category for warehouses did not exist. According to our provisional figures for 2000 there were 630 recorded fires in warehouse-type buildings in England and Wales, giving rise to 30 injuries and—I am glad to say—no deaths.

My hon. Friend raised a number of issues relating to potential fire hazards on single-storey warehouse, distribution and storage premises. As in her early-day motion, she called for the building regulations to limit the compartment size of such single-storey buildings, and to require the installation of sprinklers in buildings where compartments exceed 2,000 sq m and the use of only non-combustible cores in all sandwich panels.

The building regulations—which are important in terms of the regulation of construction of such buildings—apply to most building work undertaken in England and Wales, typically the erection or extension of a building. The fire safety aspects of the regulations are intended to secure reasonable standards of health and safety for persons in or about buildings. However, they do not in themselves address economic loss or the effect of fire on the environment. The issue of economic loss is generally something that individual companies, in liaison with their insurers, are best placed to quantify. They are also best placed to establish what additional measures may be necessary to reduce the potential risk of property damage or business interruption from fire.

As my hon. Friend said, guidance on fire safety measures that will meet the requirements of the building regulations is given in approved document B, on fire safety. The guidance aims to ensure that buildings are as safe as can reasonably be expected, while giving designers as much flexibility as possible. The latest edition of approved document B, which came into force on 1 July 2000, includes a new provision limiting the compartment size of single-storey shops to 2,000 sq m, where previously there was no limit. The provision suggests, however, that where sprinklers are provided there should be no limit to the floor area of compartments. The need to restrict compartment size in single-storey shops was first proposed following a number of high-profile fires in large supermarket and DIY-type outlets, which led to concern about public and firefighter safety.

It is important to note that the definition of "shop", as given in approved document B, includes premises used

"for a retail trade or business".

It therefore generally includes all single-storey retail buildings, including the increasingly popular discount warehouse-type stores that are open to the public.

The provision of a 2,000 sq m threshold was set after consideration of the comments that were received as part of a much larger public consultation on approved document B, which closed in March 1998. The original proposal was for a compartment size threshold of 4,000 sq m in single-storey shop premises. However, we considered that a threshold of 2,000 sq m would ensure an even greater level of safety for occupants and firefighters alike.

The decision to limit the guidance on the use of sprinklers in the 2000 edition of approved document B to single-storey shops, as opposed to other types of building such as warehouses, was based on the central fact that there is greater potential for loss of lives in fires in shops. That is because of the large number of people who will be present within a shop, the fact that they will generally be unfamiliar with their surroundings and the level of managerial control that can be placed on members of the public, which is somewhat different from that which can be placed on staff in, say, a warehouse-type building. The decision to provide such guidance on single-storey shops was arrived at following a full regulatory impact assessment.

Owing to the recognised fact that the level of risk to occupants and firefighters can increase with height, the approved document already suggests maximum compartment volumes, both with and without sprinklers, for multi-storey storage-type buildings.

[Dr. Alan Whitehead]

My hon. Friend suggested that only non-combustible core materials should be used for sandwich panels that are provided within single-storey warehouse and distribution buildings. The 2000 edition of approved document B offers guidance for the first time on the use of sandwich panels within buildings generally. The approved document recognises that the potential for problems in fires involving non-combustible cores is less than those for polymeric core materials and offers guidance accordingly.

The guidance suggests the type of core materials, including polymeric, that may be used in various circumstances, and recommends that where deviation from that guidance occurs, a risk assessment should be undertaken and appropriate additional fire precautions put in place. It also offers design recommendations in relation to the associated jointing and fixing systems that typically support such panel installations.

Given those amendments to approved document B, there are no immediate plans to introduce further amendments in relation to other single-storey premises. However, we are continuing to keep the issue under review. As with any new guidance within an approved document, any decision with regard to single-storey premises would need to take account of a range of views and expert advice, and be subject to a full regulatory impact assessment.

We shall consult in the summer on proposals for the reform of fire safety legislation for buildings in use, using an order under the Regulatory Reform Act 2001. The purpose of the reform is to rationalise and modernise fire safety legislation, which is currently spread over numerous different statutes. It would provide for a risk-based approach to fire safety allowing more efficient and more effective enforcement by the fire service. We shall also aim to remove legislative overlap where possible.

Under our proposals, warehouses in use would be subject to one fire safety regime, which will apply to all occupants, not just employees. We shall also be considering whether the regime may protect people in the vicinity of a warehouse in case of fire. I would stress that the reformed legislation will not be prescriptive, but require fire precautions to be provided on the basis of risk assessment. Employers will be free to arrive at their own fire safety solutions so long as they meet the basic and central fire safety requirements. The regulatory reform order giving effect to these changes will, of course, be subject to a full regulatory impact assessment.

In the mean time, and in order to address concerns that have been raised in relation to large warehouse-type buildings, my Department has supported and contributed to the development of a guide for fire precautions in large storage and distribution buildings. The working group that has produced the guide was chaired by a member of the Chief and Assistant Chief Fire Officers Association, and the Fire Brigades Union is also a member of the working group.

The guide will provide information and advice on issues to be considered in relation to fire precautions and firefighting in large warehouse-type buildings. It has been written to assist developers, designers, property owners and managers in satisfying their statutory duties and aiding their commercial considerations.

In addition, the guide is intended to assist building control bodies and fire authorities to take an informed and consistent approach to the application of building regulations, firefighting precautions and the enforcement of fire precautions legislation, with respect to warehouse and distribution buildings. I understand that the guide is soon to be published by the Fire Protection Association.

My hon. Friend expressed concerns about ongoing fire safety in warehouses and the fact that even warehouses that are not frequented by a large number of members of the public often have poor escape routes. She suggested that that was a further cause for anxiety. In addition to guidance note B, there are fire precautions that are required in warehouses once they are in use. Those are normally governed by the Fire Precautions (Workplace) Regulations 1997 and, where the warehouse has been designated as a factory, by the Fire Precautions Act 1971.

The Fire Precautions (Workplace) Regulations apply to virtually all places where people are employed to work, not just to retail establishments. The regulations, together with the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations, require employers, first, to carry out a fire risk assessment; secondly, to identify the significant findings of the risk assessment; thirdly, to provide and maintain such fire precautions as are necessary to safeguard those who use the workplace; and lastly, to provide information, instruction and training to employees about the fire precautions.

Where certain processes are carried out at a warehouse, it may be designated as a factory and may therefore require a fire certificate under the Fire Precautions Act 1971. The fire certificate will be prepared by the fire authority, which in practice will be the local fire brigade. Before issuing a fire certificate, fire brigade officers will inspect the premises and satisfy themselves that adequate fire precautions are in place including the means of escape in case of fire, the means of fighting fire, and the means of giving warning in case of fire.

As with the building regulations, fire safety legislation is concerned with life safety. The requirement for any fire safety measure, such as a sprinkler system, will be determined according to whether it is necessary for the protection of employees or other occupants of the building.

I hope that my hon. Friend appreciates from my remarks that we fully recognise the importance of fire safety in all buildings, including warehouse, distribution and storage premises. I can assure her that the merits of any changes to the fire safety guidance in support of warehouse-type buildings will be a subject for consideration as part of our regulatory reform order proposals, on which we will be consulting over the summer, and any future revisions of the building regulations.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at seven minutes past Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 19 March 2002

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

ROYAL ASSENT

Mr. Speaker: I have to notify the House, in accordance with the Royal Assent Act 1967, that the Queen has signified her Royal Assent to the following Acts:

Consolidated Fund Act 2002

Office of Communications Act 2002

PRIVATE BUSINESS

MERSEY TUNNELS BILL *(BY ORDER)*

Order for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second time on Tuesday 26 March.

Oral Answers to Questions

SCOTLAND

The Secretary of State was asked—

Minimum Income Guarantee

1. **Jim Sheridan** (West Renfrewshire): How many pensioners in Scotland will benefit from the increases in the minimum income guarantee in April. [41515]

3. **Rachel Squire** (Dunfermline, West): How many pensioners in Scotland will benefit from the increases in the basic state pension in April. [41517]

The Minister of State, Scotland Office (Mr. George Foulkes): In Scotland, around 181,000 claimants will benefit from the increase in the minimum income guarantee in April and around 900,000 people will benefit from the increase in the basic state pension. Once again, a Labour Government are delivering for Scotland's pensioners.

Jim Sheridan: I thank my hon. Friend for that response. No doubt, he will be aware that many of my constituents receive the minimum income guarantee, which provides a crucial safety net, but what worries me—this is the substance of my question—is that many people may not be aware of it. The minimum income guarantee is no accident. It is a direct result of sound economic policy and the Government's social responsibility, and it is coupled with the national minimum wage and the principled politics of socialism. I came into politics to deliver those kinds of benefits to our people. However, I emphasise that there are a number of—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is making a speech, but perhaps the Minister can answer from the information that he has already.

Mr. Foulkes: But it was a good speech, Mr. Speaker. As my hon. Friend knows, the minimum income guarantee will increase in line with earnings, and that is welcome for the poorest pensioners. We have also, thankfully, made it easier to claim the minimum income guarantee. The form has been reduced from 40 pages to 10, and we have introduced a new telephone claim service, all of which has made it easier for pensioners to claim the minimum income guarantee.

Rachel Squire: I certainly welcome what my hon. Friend the Minister has said, and so will 10,760 pensioners in Dunfermline and west Fife when they receive their increases. Does he agree that a sizeable group of pensioners, who have worked hard all their lives and put a little aside in savings or extra pension, still lose out, especially as their increases go to pay extra council tax, water charges or fuel bills? Will he join me in saying that we must all work together to ensure that the pension credit, when it is introduced next year, delivers to those pensioners and provides decency and dignity in their retirement?

Mr. Foulkes: My hon. Friend, like myself, represents a mining area and knows that many miners and widows on very small additional pensions are affected in the way that she describes. The pension credit will benefit about half the pensioner households in Scotland. Pensioner couples with incomes below £200 and single pensioners with incomes below £135 a week will benefit, and it will reward those with savings on low and modest incomes. We are the first Government ever to reward thrift in pensioners.

Mr. Peter Duncan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale): Has the Minister found time in his busy diary to read the recent MORI survey that reported that only slightly more than one in four people in Scotland were content with the Government's attempt to tackle pensioner poverty? Bearing in mind his links with Age Concern Scotland, which co-sponsored that survey, what is he doing to make representations to the Department for Work and Pensions to ensure that future Government policy tallies with Age Concern Scotland's requests?

Mr. Foulkes: I also made time in my busy diary to vote against foxhunting last night, and the hon. Gentleman might have managed to do so, because, after all, he claims to be a Unionist. He is right to suggest that I used to work for Age Concern Scotland, and I know that pensioners in Scotland now feel better than they have ever done under any previous Government, which was shown very strongly when they voted in the last election to return a Labour Government with a majority almost as large as in 1997.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): Will the Minister confirm that, on 21 January 2050,

he will be 108 years old? Would he care to contemplate PricewaterhouseCoopers' recent estimate that, in that year, the basic state pension will be worth 6 per cent. of average earnings? Does he think that a weekly income of less than £30 a week at today's prices is an adequate foundation on which to build future retirement incomes?

Mr. Foulkes: The hon. Gentleman will know that, on 4 July this year, I will have been married for 33 years—he was there in a very particular role on that occasion. He will know that with the basic pension, minimum income guarantee, winter fuel allowance and a range of other measures, and with the way in which we are tackling the problem of private pensions, the Government are taking every possible action to ensure that pensioners, including members of the Government who might soon be pensioners, are well off in future. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions has great concern about the implications for company pensions, about recent announcements, and especially FRS17, which I know will worry my hon. Friend. He has asked the Accounting Standards Board, which is independent of government, to consider these matters, which may be out of line with international accounting standards.

Mr. David Marshall (Glasgow, Shettleston): Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the best ways of increasing pensioners' income has been the introduction of the £200 winter fuel allowance? Will he take steps to ensure that any pensioner aged over 60 in Scotland who has not yet claimed this year's allowance will be advised that he or she must do so before the end of March? We must ensure that everyone in Scotland benefits from this generous allowance.

Mr. Foulkes: My hon. Friend is right. I ask everyone—colleagues, Opposition Members and the media—to publicise the fact that men who are over 60 and eligible for the allowance can still claim up to the end of this month—*[Interruption.]* No, I am not eligible, but almost.

Winter fuel payments are paid in addition to the cold weather payments. The Scottish National party wants weekly payments, which we already provide. Last year, 945,000 Scots received cold weather payments. In addition, they received £200 in winter fuel allowance, at a cost of £8 million. They would receive much less in an independent Scotland.

John Thurso (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross): Would it surprise the Minister to know that at a recent gathering of pensioners in my constituency, 14 of the 22 present were not receiving their proper benefits or credits? Given that those numbers are probably replicated throughout Scotland, is it not time that the Chancellor of the Exchequer ditched his complicated credits and gave pensioners the decent pension that they deserve?

Mr. Foulkes: They are getting a decent pension and much more besides. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will take that on board and let his constituents know. Members have a responsibility to spread this information. They must ensure that it appears in their local newspapers and make it known in their surgeries. They must talk to Age Concern groups and pensioner groups. Labour Members are doing that and Opposition Members should do it as well.

Mr. James Wray (Glasgow, Baillieston): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is the Government's policy to eradicate poverty, especially pensioner poverty? I am concerned that the latest statistic shows that four of the 10 worst areas in the United Kingdom are in Glasgow. Could we make an extra effort through the UK Government and the Scottish Parliament to do something about the problem?

Mr. Foulkes: We are the first Government—the Scottish Executive support this—to commit ourselves to ending pensioner poverty and child poverty. It will take some time to achieve that after 18 years of Tory Government, but we are determined to do it.

Mrs. Jacqui Lait (Beckenham): I am sure that we will not forget, but in case we do, may I congratulate the hon. Gentleman and his wife on their wedding anniversary in July? Given the Government's ambition of increasing substantially the number of people who can to rely on private pensions, is the hon. Gentleman aware that the number of retired people on means-tested benefits will increase from 40 per cent. to nearly 60 per cent. next year? How does he plan to encourage people to save for their retirement when the Government take £5 billion a year from pension funds and will not reform annuities? Is not the pension system in a crisis of the Government's own making?

Mr. Foulkes: No. We keep being told about the £5 billion a year that is taken from pension funds and advance corporation tax. There were the exact equivalents in the reductions of ACT. We do not hear about that. The main problem with pension funds recently has been the fall in the stock market and FRS17, which I mentioned earlier. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions has taken action on FRS17. He has also set up the Pickering review, which will report by June or July 2002. We are therefore taking swift and effective action. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State had to sort out the mess of the mis-selling of private pensions created by the previous Government.

Europe

2. **Mr. Mark Lazarowicz** (Edinburgh, North and Leith): What steps she will be taking to promote Scotland's interests in the future of Europe debate. [41516]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mrs. Helen Liddell): The Government wish to encourage a wide-ranging debate on the future of Europe in advance of the intergovernmental conference in 2004. I will continue to contribute to that debate. Indeed, the Spanish presidency of the European Union is organising a major seminar on that issue next month in Segovia, where I shall speak.

Mr. Lazarowicz: I am glad that my right hon. Friend is taking part in that conference. As she is aware, one of the key issues facing Europe is enlargement. As she knows, enlargement will mean that more than 70 million

people will join the eurozone. Does she agree that Scottish business and Scottish jobs are likely to suffer if more countries join the eurozone while the United Kingdom remains outside? Does she therefore agree that Scottish business and Scottish jobs need more than ever an early decision on British membership of the single currency?

Mrs. Liddell: Scottish business and Scottish jobs need to be certain that the economic conditions are right for Britain's membership of the single currency. We are the only Government ever to have said that we have no objection in principle to the single currency, but joining it must be within the context of meeting the five economic conditions set by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor. I acknowledge my hon. Friend's point about enlargement, which may mean something like £175 million per annum coming to Scotland; however, that money will come to Scotland only if Scottish companies are prepared.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Can the Secretary of State identify for the House the precise benefits that will accrue to Scottish workers from the Prime Minister's new right-wing alliance with Silvio Berlusconi? Can she draw on her own experience to warn him of the dangers of becoming entangled with unscrupulous media tycoons?

Mrs. Liddell: I am intrigued that the hon. Gentleman does not think that the Prime Minister should have any contact with democratically elected Prime Ministers. Indeed, as well as working with the Italian Government—I take it that the hon. Gentleman is talking about that Government—the Government have worked with all the other 14 members of the European Union. Consequently, we now play a leading role in the European Union. As a direct result of the Government's policies on a flexible work force, increasing skills, and developing the knowledge economy, we have the lowest unemployment for more than a generation, more people in employment than for 40 years, the lowest interest rates and one of the most prosperous economies in Europe.

What a big difference from what the hon. Gentleman is suggesting—Britain as part of the European Free Trade Association or the European economic area. Under an independent Scotland, our partners would be Iceland, Liechtenstein and Switzerland.

Mr. Ian Davidson (Glasgow, Pollok): Does the Secretary of State accept that Scotland has a greater interest in European prosperity because we have a much greater proportion of trade with Europe than does the rest of the UK? Does she accept that if we consider joining the euro, we must ensure that we do so at the right rate? Joining at the present rate would lock in a degree of uncompetitiveness that would not serve us well in future. Does she accept that the devaluation that would be necessary if we changed the rates in the short term would cause inflation, which would be in no one's interest?

Mrs. Liddell: The Government's policy on exchange rates is that they will fluctuate and find their own balance in the medium term, which is as it should be. I repeat to my hon. Friend the point that I made to my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz); it is important that the five economic tests are met. A key issue is ensuring that we have a robust place in the European Union and are able to withstand external shocks; I believe that my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Davidson) was referring to that.

The Government's logical position of prepare and decide is a lot more sensible than the position expounded by Baroness Thatcher, who said that we should never enter the European Union and, indeed, blamed everything that has ever gone wrong in Europe on our partners in continental Europe; her angle was narrow-minded, regressive and backward-looking.

Mr. Greg Knight (East Yorkshire): Does the Secretary of State accept that there is a world of difference between promoting Scotland's interests and doing what she has been doing—trying to promote the interests of the Prime Minister? Is it not the case that the Prime Minister wants a united states of Europe, with a single constitution, a single currency, a single foreign policy, a single economic policy and a euro-army? Is not that why Ministers are not standing up for Scotland against the rising tide of euro-federalism? Would not Scotland's interests be better served by a free market, flexible union of member states, to enable Scotland to retain its national identity and its own currency?

Mrs. Liddell: Every time the right hon. Gentleman comes to the Dispatch Box, he displays his lack of knowledge about Scotland. Scotland benefits more than other parts of the European Union from our membership. A greater proportion of our exports goes to our European partners than goes to the United States of America, for example. We have benefited from the Government's policy of playing a leading role in Europe, rather than the previous Government's bonkers policy of trying to pretend that we could pull up the drawbridge on Europe. Businesses the length and breadth of Scotland are appalled by the attitude that the former leader of the Conservative party propounds in her most recent book. I urge him to come to the Dispatch Box and repudiate the views of Baroness Thatcher.

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): Can my right hon. Friend assure me that she will take no cognisance of the Conservative party, which wants to come out of Europe? That is the honest message that the Conservatives should be putting across. When she discusses the future of Europe in Spain next month, will she keep in mind the cities of Edinburgh and Glasgow, where the number of financial services jobs now exceeds 250,000? Apt financial regulation and EC directives are extremely important if the industry is to flourish in the future.

Mrs. Liddell: My hon. Friend makes an important point. The financial services sector in Edinburgh is a major engine for growth in the Scottish economy. Last Thursday, representatives of the financial community met my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary and me to discuss liberalisation and the completion of the single market in financial services. One of the great successes of the Barcelona summit was the movement towards completion of the single market in financial services. Already 25 measures have been approved; seven more are likely to be approved by the end of the year. Such measures are crucial to Scotland and represent a great opportunity for Scottish financial services. If we listen to the Conservative

party, we hear euroscepticism that is damaging to Scotland's best interests. If we listen to the nationalists, their policy is to take us out of the European Union, because two former eurocrats said that perhaps, if they were awfully good, an independent Scotland might get into the EU. That is backward looking and regressive. We speak about the real issues; they speak about separation.

Strategic Rail Authority

4. **Mr. Bill Wiggin** (Leominster): What recent discussions she has had with the Scottish Executive on how the Strategic Rail Authority's strategic plan will affect Scotland. [41514]

The Minister of State, Scotland Office (Mr. George Foulkes): My right hon. Friend and I have regular discussions with Scottish Executive Ministers on a wide range of matters.

Mr. Wiggin: I am sure that the Minister is appalled, as I am, that Scottish rail passengers—[HON. MEMBERS: "It says here."] It certainly does. I am sure that he is appalled that Scottish rail passengers are again being inconvenienced by strikes by the drivers. What action are he and his counterpart on the Scottish Executive taking to tell the unions that the strikes are out of order? If he does not take action, does he realise that the strikes will continue for two days a week until the end of the year? Can he tell me what part he played in the £34 million handout?

Mr. Foulkes: We are concerned at the way that the Scottish travelling public will be inconvenienced—and have been inconvenienced—by the strikes. Our first concern is for the Scottish passengers. Both the Scotland Office and the Scottish Executive believe that the operators and the trade union representatives should get back round the table as quickly as possible to resolve the dispute. I take the opportunity today to call on the management and the unions to resolve the matter through negotiation as soon as possible.

Dr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East and Musselburgh): Last week, at a meeting with the leader of East Lothian council, the chief executive of Great North Eastern railway confirmed that the company still wants to build a new Edinburgh Parkway station at Musselburgh. Does he agree that such a station will encourage more people to travel to London by rail rather than by air, which itself would be a good thing, and provide a better service for commuters into Edinburgh, which would lead to more people travelling by rail to Edinburgh, which would also be a good thing? Will my hon. Friend give such a station his full support?

Mr. Foulkes: The SRA wants to encourage more people to use the railways and a 50 per cent. increase in passenger kilometres is envisaged. My right hon. Friend will know that the £400 million redevelopment of Waverley station is included, and he will welcome that. I shall certainly take on board his specific suggestion, discuss it with my colleagues in the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions and the Scottish Executive and write to him in due course.

Mrs. Jacqui Lait (Beckenham): As the unions have announced another 11 days of strikes against commuters in Scotland, will the Minister take any action or will he just talk about taking action? What plans does he have in his busy diary to champion the commuters and stop that disruption to the wealth-creating community in Scotland where growth is still below trend?

Mr. Foulkes: I thought that I answered that in reply to the hon. Member for Leominster (Mr. Wiggin). Unlike the hon. Lady, I am a regular user of trains—trains in Scotland and to and from Scotland—so I understand the concerns. I even travel to Tynecastle by train occasionally, and very fruitful it has been recently. What I said earlier is important. We do not want to interfere. Interfering Governments can create more problems. I suggested earlier that negotiations round the table between the unions and the management should take place as quickly as possible to resolve the matter and, once again, I repeat that that is what should happen.

ADVOCATE-GENERAL

The Advocate-General was asked—

Devolution

26. **Annabelle Ewing** (Perth): What devolution issues have been raised since 12 February under the Scotland Act 1998. [41539]

27. **Mr. Tam Dalyell** (Linlithgow): What devolution issues have been raised in the last month under the Scotland Act 1998. [41540]

29. **Miss Anne McIntosh** (Vale of York): What devolution issues have been raised since 12 February under the Scotland Act 1998. [41542]

The Advocate-General for Scotland (Dr. Lynda Clark): Since 12 February, 36 devolution issue cases have been intimated to me, and 17 of those concerned questions of delay in criminal proceedings in relation to article 6.1 of the European convention on human rights. Last week, I argued a case in the High Court of Justiciary over four days, which may help to resolve some of the difficulties in devolution cases based on delay.

Annabelle Ewing: I draw the Advocate-General's attention to another important devolution issue that was raised in the House a couple of weeks ago and in the Scottish Parliament last week, and that concerns the important issue of planning consent for new nuclear power stations in Scotland. Will she take this opportunity to clarify the matter once and for all and to agree with her colleague in the Scottish Parliament, the Deputy Minister for Enterprise, Lifelong Learning and Transport, who, on 14 March in the Scottish Parliament, said that the final decision lay with the Scottish Parliament and that there

could be no question of Westminster reclaiming jurisdiction on the matter without the consent of the Scottish Parliament?

The Advocate-General: I do not think that the hon. Lady fully understands my role, despite my best efforts. My role is to consider devolution issues when they are intimated to me and, in due course, if a devolution issue is intimated to me on that matter I shall certainly consider it, but I am not here to give answers to hypothetical questions in relation to legislation that does not yet exist.

Mr. Dalyell: What advice does the Advocate-General have as to the proper authority to address the concerns of my former constituent, ex-Woman Police Constable Mary Boylan, about the alleged suppression of police evidence in relation to Lockerbie?

The Advocate-General: I am certainly aware of my hon. Friend's long interest in these matters and I am sure that he will make his usual strenuous efforts on behalf of his former constituent but, as he knows, these matters are devolved. The matter is for the Scottish Executive under the Scotland Act 1998 and he should direct all inquiries to them.

Miss McIntosh: With regard to the vexed issue of who will have the final say on planning future nuclear power stations, the Advocate-General will understand that the particular problem is who will have the last word. Is it an energy problem, and will it be the Department in London, or is it a planning problem, and will it be the Scottish Minister?

The Advocate-General: The hon. Lady must understand that that depends entirely on how the legislation is framed and the form in which it comes. The legislation can be framed in a variety of ways, and if and when it is passed by the Scottish Parliament—or if it comes to me in my role as Advocate-General—I shall deal with it.

Inland Revenue

28. **Sir Robert Smith** (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine): How many cases she has been asked to pursue by the Inland Revenue; and how many she has pursued. [41541]

The Advocate-General for Scotland (Dr. Lynda Clark): There has been provision in legislation since 1857 to the effect that proceedings in the Court of Session raised by the Inland Revenue shall be in the name of the appropriate Law Officer. Following devolution, the Advocate-General became the appropriate Law Officer. The Advocate-General has no responsibility for raising or conducting proceedings. That responsibility, along with all policy decisions, remains with the Commissioners of the Inland Revenue. Proceedings are instructed or conducted by the office of the solicitor to the Inland Revenue, and, since May 1999, more than 1,300 Inland Revenue actions have been dealt with, as I have just explained.

Sir Robert Smith: I am disappointed to hear that there does not seem to be discretion as to whether to take those actions forward. Perhaps the Advocate-General will consider whether, once legal advice has been sought, some actions should not be pursued on the grounds that there may have been a genuine mistake. In particular, will she consider whether a growing number of cases are having to be pursued because of the complexity of the tax system? Perhaps she will encourage the Chancellor to consider simplifying the tax system, especially in the light of self-assessment.

The Advocate-General: As I tried to explain to the hon. Gentleman, policy matters and the conduct of litigation in Inland Revenue cases are not matters for me as Advocate-General. In my role as a constituency Member, however, I shall pass on the hon. Gentleman's comments.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

The Parliamentary Secretary was asked—

Lay Magistrates

31. **Simon Hughes** (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): How many serving lay magistrates there were in *(a)* 1979, *(b)* 1987 and *(c)* 2001; and how many are expected to be serving in 2003. [41544]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. Michael Wills): In 1979 there were 24,021 magistrates; in 1987 there were 27,926 magistrates; and in 2001 there were 28,735 magistrates. It is impossible to say how many magistrates will be serving in 2003. I would expect that there will be more or less the same number as were serving in 2001, but the number appointed and the numbers leaving the magistracy fluctuates inevitably from year to year.

Simon Hughes: Will the Minister accept that the figures show that there was growth in the number of lay magistrates every year from 1979 to 1997, but, that since 1997, there has been a considerable net reduction? Indeed, there are now fewer magistrates than there were 10 years ago. Is it Government policy that more lay people should be encouraged to be lay magistrates taking part in the criminal justice system in that way? If so, why have the numbers tailed off in the last five years of the Labour Government? What will the Government do to make sure that the numbers get back on the upward trend that they were following in each year of the predecessor Government?

Mr. Wills: The Government's policy is to have adequate numbers of people joining the lay magistracy. We feel that that is currently the case, although, inevitably, numbers fluctuate. The important point lying behind the hon. Gentleman's question is that we want people to continue to apply to become lay magistrates, as they play a very important part in our system of justice. We are making considerable efforts not only to encourage more people to apply but to ensure that we have a proper range of diversity, in terms of class and ethnic composition. We are doing pretty well on gender at the moment, but we need to drive our efforts forward. The Lord Chancellor's advisory committees are doing a

splendid job at the moment, but we will shortly announce a national recruitment strategy to keep the pressure up and to make sure that we get the magistrates that we deserve.

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley): Does the Minister feel that the Lord Chancellor and the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster are succeeding in their efforts to try to make magistrates benches more representative of the areas in which they serve? Does he feel that there are sufficient numbers of working people in many areas on magistrates benches? Is the work load of magistrates increasing and becoming impossible to manage?

Mr. Wills: I shall take my hon. Friend's questions in sequence. We are having considerable success. I want to pay tribute to the work done by the Lord Chancellor's advisory committees in broadening the diversity of the magistrates bench. To give one example, 9.3 per cent. of magistrates recruited last year were from ethnic minorities. The proportion is therefore increasing, and we are having considerable success. There are not enough people from as wide a social class base as we would wish, and we need to do better on that, too. The work load of magistrates has not been increasing unduly, and there is no evidence that that is a disincentive to people joining the bench.

Mr. William Cash (Stone): Does the Minister accept that there was a degree of complacency in the way in which he has addressed this question? After all, there has been a sharp drop in the number of lay magistrates—down by 5.2 per cent. between January 2000 and April 2001. As he tacitly admitted, under the Conservative Government between 1979 and 1997, the number of justices of the peace increased. Despite what the Prime Minister said in Prime Minister's questions last week, does the Minister accept that the sharp drop in the number of magistrates—together with the recent admission by the Lord Chancellor that the number of criminals brought to justice last year fell by 80,000—is the primary reason why more and more criminals are getting away scot-free? The Government have flaunted their manifesto commitment in this respect.

Mr. Wills: It is extremely unwise of the hon. Gentleman to pray in aid the previous Conservative Government's record. Under them, crime doubled and the system of criminal justice came very close to collapse, not least because they invested nothing like the funds that need to be invested. We are now investing them.

However, to pass on from the Conservative party's record in government—I would have thought there is nothing that the hon. Gentleman would like to remind anyone about—I shall now give him the good news about what we are doing. There is no complacency in any area, so he was obviously not listening to what I said. Let me tell him some of the things that the Lord Chancellor's advisory committees are doing to make sure that adequate numbers of people come into the lay magistracy and that they are from the diverse backgrounds that we require. The committees are advertising and putting articles in local newspapers, they are targeting leaflet drops, they are holding open days in courts, they are putting poster displays in public places, they are talking to local groups and employers and they are establishing many contacts with local organisations. That shows no complacency, but a determination to make sure that we get the lay magistracy that we deserve. I very much hope that, instead of criticising the efforts, the hon. Gentleman will support them.

Witness Allowance Act

32. **Dr. Doug Naysmith** (Bristol, North-West): If he will review the provisions of the witness allowance Act to ensure that those appearing as witnesses are not out of pocket. [41545]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Ms Rosie Winterton): There is no single witness allowance Act. Allowances are set in various regulations and are paid to non-expert witnesses in both criminal and civil cases. Financial loss allowances, which are reviewed annually, are set payments whose size depends on the time that a witness spends at court. The current levels are calculated to ensure that those with average earnings or less should not be out of pocket. Travel and subsistence are paid separately.

Dr. Naysmith: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply, but wish to point out that being a witness can be both stressful and time consuming. People are also sometimes left out of pocket. When she reviews the payments, will she undertake to consider the other measures that could be taken to make the whole process a much less stressful experience, especially for those witnesses who are particularly vulnerable?

Ms Winterton: My hon. Friend is right to raise this issue, about which we have been concerned. We have introduced a number of changes, such as video links and witness liaison officers. The Crown court in Bristol is already up and running with a witness support centre and it is using the new pager system, so that witnesses do not have to wait around court for hours on end. Such measures will particularly help vulnerable and intimidated witnesses.

Tony Wright (Cannock Chase): We know that we have a long-standing problem about providing proper support and facilities for witnesses and particularly in trying to ensure that the physical structure of the courts provides proper places for witnesses to go and to be supported. Will my hon. Friend say something about progress on that front?

Ms Winterton: My hon. Friend is right to raise that point. Such important facilities should be available, in particular for family cases. We are making progress in all courts to ensure that proper facilities are available, including witness support centres, and that there are also facilities for the separation of witnesses when that is necessary.

Queen's Counsel

33. **Mr. Andrew Dismore** (Hendon): If he will make a statement on progress with the Office of Fair Trading report with reference to the Queen's counsel system. [41546]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. Michael Wills): The appointment of Queen's counsel is one of a number of issues relating to

the legal profession raised in the OFT report that fall to my noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor to consider. We will consult shortly on the issues raised.

Mr. Dismore: I remind my hon. Friend that the OFT report questioned

"whether . . . it was right for the Government to have responsibility for conferring on selected practitioners . . . a title that manifestly enhances their earning power and competitive position",

stated:

"There remain concerns . . . that there is no continuous quality appraisal . . . inadequate peer review . . . and . . . no professional examinations",

and concluded:

"it is questionable what the value of the system is to consumers."

We do not have Queen's plumbers, Queen's electricians, or even Queen's metalworkers. How can there be any justification for the anti-competitive, price-rigging cartel which is the Queen's counsel system? My hon. Friend promised the consultation many months ago, but nothing has happened. It is about time we had some action to end that appalling practice.

Mr. Wills: As always, my hon. Friend states his views with great eloquence and force. As he is well aware, those matters raise complex issues of law, which have taken time to consider. We will make an announcement shortly about the process of consultation on action in respect of those matters.

Judges

34. **Mr. Elfyn Llwyd** (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): What initiatives are being pursued to improve the rate of recruitment of judges to the High Court bench; and if he will make a statement. [41547]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. Michael Wills): My noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor is satisfied that he continues to be able to appoint practitioners and circuit judges of the highest quality to the High Court bench. The Government have decided to accept the Senior Salaries Review Body's recommendation that the salaries of High Court judges be increased by 8 per cent. over two years. That recognises the importance of maintaining the high quality of appointments to the High Court bench. The increase is in addition to a wide range of other initiatives, including the creation of a commission for judicial appointments.

Mr. Llwyd: I thank the Minister for that reply. There is an increasing body of opinion that many able candidates are not putting in for appointment at the present time because of the package available to those on the High Court bench. I appreciate that salary is not the only issue, but there is now a huge gulf between the earnings of senior silks and those of those on the High Court bench, which might in future undermine the quality of appointments made.

Mr. Wills: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point, but as he acknowledges salary has never been a factor deterring people from taking up an appointment to the High Court bench. Those who have refused appointment in the past three years have cited lifestyle and family reasons. Judges being appointed earlier in life—in their 40s—but having families rather later in life may provide reasons to decline the Lord Chancellor's offer. It has long been the case that those in practice at the senior Bar take a significant drop in income if they decide to undertake public service by going on to the High Court bench, but there is no shortage of candidates: 52 practitioners and seven circuit judges applied for appointment in 2000, and of those 25 were determined to be appointable.

Lord Chancellor

35. **Vera Baird** (Redcar): Whether the Lord Chancellor intends to continue sitting as a judge; and if he will make a statement. [41548]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Ms Rosie Winterton): It is important to the Lord Chancellor's role as head of the judiciary that he should sit from time to time on appeals, as all previous Lord Chancellors have done. In deciding whether he is eligible to sit on an appeal, the Lord Chancellor is guided by the same principles as apply to all judges.

Vera Baird: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply, but since there are—rightly or wrongly—concerns, especially since the Human Rights Act 1998 was passed, about the Lord Chancellor's position as both a judge in the House of Lords and a senior Cabinet Minister, and since there is not a single woman in the House of Lords judiciary, would he not be praised far and wide if he announced that he would not sit again and appointed a women judge to fill the gap?

Ms Winterton: The Government believe strongly that the Lord Chancellor's combined role as head of the judiciary and a member of the Cabinet is important to maintaining the independence of the judiciary. As I am sure that my hon. Friend is well aware, the Lord Chancellor is hardly the retiring type, nor is it up to him to nominate his successor, but I am sure that he will make careful note of her application.

Criminal Sentencing

36. **Ian Lucas** (Wrexham): If he will make a statement on how judges and magistrates are trained in the comparative efficacy of criminal sentencing. [41550]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. Michael Wills): Judicial training is the responsibility of the Judicial Studies Board, which is an independent and non-departmental public body that also supervises the training of magistrates.

All newly appointed recorders and deputy district judges are required to attend a residential induction course before they commence sitting, and to visit the probation service and a prison. Thereafter, every three years both judges and recorders attend residential continuation seminars, which cover both sentencing policy and practice. They also attend sentencing seminars, which are run by their presiding judges.

Magistrates are trained by their legal advisers in their local courts, and they receive guidance on sentencing from the Magistrates Association.

Ian Lucas: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that reply, but does he accept that magistrates, in particular, do not receive sufficient detailed information on the effectiveness of non-custodial sentences, which is perhaps reflected in the disproportionate number of custodial sentences handed down by magistrates courts? Will he therefore look into the matter further and try to increase the number of non-custodial sentences imposed by magistrates courts?

Mr. Wills: I can assure my hon. Friend that we are constantly looking at the best way to achieve efficacy in sentencing. He will be well aware of the recommendations of the Halliday report. They are still under consideration, and the Government will announce their decision shortly.

PRIVY COUNCIL

The President of the Council was asked—

House of Lords Reform

44. **Fiona Mactaggart** (Slough): What recent discussions he has had on reform of the House of Lords. [41558]

50. **Mr. Chris Bryant** (Rhondda): If he will make a statement on responses received to the Government's public consultation on reform of the House of Lords. [41564]

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Robin Cook): The Government are giving careful consideration to the responses to their consultation paper. More than 1,000 were received, and the Lord Chancellor has promised that we will publish them.

I also welcome the Public Administration Committee's thoughtful contribution to the debate, which has proved that it is possible to find a centre of gravity on the composition of reform among those who want a reformed second Chamber.

Fiona Mactaggart: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply, but what discussions—if any—have taken place between Cabinet Ministers since the conclusion of the consultation process? What work is under way to produce within seven weeks a response to the Public Administration Committee's report, and to produce plans for reform of the House of Lords that are acceptable to this House? In a recent speech, the Prime Minister described that as a necessary part of the "third phase" of new Labour.

Mr. Cook: Like my hon. Friend, I read that speech with great care, and I was encouraged by its commitment to House of Lords reform as part of the Government's "third phase". She asks whether members of the Government have discussed this issue, and I can assure her that there are constant discussions between us. I have no doubt that my noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor is considering when it will be appropriate to bring us together to consider the responses formally.

We have undertaken that we will respond to the Public Administration Committee's report within the normal two-month period. I hope that we can indeed do so, but I ask the House to bear it in mind that that period includes three weeks in which the House is in recess.

Mr. Bryant: It is interesting to learn from my right hon. Friend how many people have replied to the consultation exercise, but it would be particularly interesting to know how many of those respondents prefer an elected element to the second Chamber, especially bearing it in mind that almost half the Members of this House signed an early-day motion calling for a wholly or substantially elected second Chamber. We should also remember that, in giving evidence to the Public Administration Committee, the Lord Chancellor said that a majority of Members oppose a large elected element.

Mr. Cook: A number of Members of Parliament and peers responded to the White Paper, and their views are on the record. As I said, we will publish the responses in full in due course, so the House will understand if I do not go into them in detail. However, my hon. Friend asked me a direct question, and I would be misleading the House if I did not say that the overwhelming majority of respondents favour a substantially elected second Chamber.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): Does the Leader of the House consider that the outcome of this evening's vote on hunting in the other place could affect the time scale for House of Lords reform? Have the discussions to which he referred dealt with the way in which the Parliament Act could be employed in such circumstances?

Mr. Cook: I was rather hoping that our questions might provide a 15-minute interlude in the debate on hunting. The answer to the hon. Gentleman's question is no—I cannot see that that has any bearing on the timetable for House of Lords reform.

Mr. Greg Knight (East Yorkshire): Does not the right hon. Gentleman face a real dilemma, in that a majority of members of the parliamentary Labour party, of the Opposition parties, of the Public Administration Committee and of the public want a largely elected second Chamber, but just one man—the Prime Minister—wants to sustain a House of cronies? Will the right hon. Gentleman properly represent the views that exist in the House by going to Downing street this week and telling the Prime Minister that he has got it wrong on this issue, and that he should back down? Or is he afraid that, if he did that, he might be sent to the other place?

Mr. Cook: I entertain no such apprehensions. I invite the right hon. Gentleman to read with more care, as I am sure that he would wish to, the speeches my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. They are always rewarding, and frequently inspiring. In my right hon. Friend's most recent speech, he will find a very clear commitment to reform.

If a dilemma exists in the House, it rests with the Opposition. How on earth do they square their commitment to having an 80 per cent. elected second Chamber with a lifetime opposition to having any elected Members of that Chamber?

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): Should not House of Lords reform aim to give future Members of that House a greater spirit of independence? Would not measures such as long, non-renewable terms, the exclusion of Ministers and the development of an investigative rather than legislative role weaken the grip of Whips, and reduce the often malign influence that they exert, in this House and elsewhere?

Mr. Cook: I cannot hold out any prospect of a second Chamber without Whips, but my hon. Friend touches on what I think is a broad consensus in the debate—that the purpose of the second Chamber should be to revise, deliberate and advise, and not to usurp the role of the first Chamber. That is why it is important that we get the balance right: the second Chamber must be legitimate, in that it represents the British people, but it must not compete with this House in terms of the democratic mandate.

Joyce Quin (Gateshead, East and Washington, West): What is my right hon. Friend's definition of the phrase "in due course" in relation to the response to the consultation? Does he agree that the experience with appointed second Chambers in other countries is that they are as likely as elected second Chambers to flex their muscles and disagree with their lower Houses? Might not the debate taking place in the other House today be a further illustration of that?

Mr. Cook: I do not want to predict the outcome of today's debate in the other place, although I shall follow it with close interest. My right hon. Friend asks about the definition of "in due course", but the House should bear in mind that—quite rightly and properly—we delayed the end of the consultation period so that we could take account of the report from the Select Committee on Public Administration. We have committed ourselves to responding to that report in the course of April. I think that it would be sensible to publish the responses in the same period.

Select Committees

45. **Vera Baird** (Redcar): What plans he has to pursue the reform of Select Committees. [41559]

46. **David Cairns** (Greenock and Inverclyde): What plans he has for implementing reform of the Select Committee system. [41560]

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Robin Cook): The Modernisation Committee published last month its proposals to strengthen the Select Committees, including a more independent and impartial system of nomination to the Select Committees, more specialist staff to support them, and a larger Committee size to enable more members to take part in scrutiny.

I warmly welcome today's report on our proposals from the Liaison Committee. It concludes that the Committee can support "most of the proposals", and welcomes our statement of core tasks as a valuable contribution to improving the focus of Committee work. Good scrutiny makes for good Government, and I believe that the House is on course for better scrutiny through stronger Committees.

Vera Baird: Given my right hon. Friend's view that good scrutiny makes for good Government, and that Select Committees are the most developed vehicle for scrutiny, will he do his best to ensure that, in future, Bills are produced in draft in sufficient time to allow thorough scrutiny before they are brought to this Chamber for Second Reading?

Mr. Cook: I very much agree with my hon. Friend's proposal, and with the thrust of her question. I have said repeatedly to the House that, if we want the House of Commons to shape legislation, it is important that it and its Members have an opportunity to intervene early, when a Bill is still in draft form. It will take time to achieve the objective of making pre-legislative scrutiny the norm and the routine for most Bills, but I hope that we will produce more draft Bills in the course of this Session than was the case in the previous Session, and that we continue to increase the number in the next Session.

David Cairns: I begin by declaring an interest to my right hon. Friend. Under the current system of appointing Select Committee members, and despite my best endeavours, I have been completely unsuccessful in getting on to one, so I welcome any reform.

I warmly welcome the plans described by my right hon. Friend to strengthen the role of Select Committees. Does he agree that if that reform is to be successful it must be funded reform, and that if Committees are to be given more tasks, especially in scrutinising legislation, they will require more in the way of clerking and expert advice? What plans does he have to ensure that Select Committee reform will be accompanied by an increase in resources?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend will be encouraged by the proposal to increase the size of the membership of Select Committees, which will allow another 50 Members to join them. I hope that his ambition will thereby be fulfilled when the report is accepted.

On resources, we have proposed that specialist staff should be appointed, especially to help Committees with financial scrutiny. I am grateful to the National Audit Office for its willingness to second staff to carry out that role. In return, we ask Select Committees to apply more discipline and consistency in the way in which they tackle financial scrutiny.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): Has the Leader of the House noted—I am sure that he has—the strong view expressed by the Liaison Committee that all Select Committees should get more involved in Departments' estimates? Has he further noted the willingness of the National Audit Office to get involved in the work of advising Committees? Does he agree that Parliament built

up its powers on the basis of financial scrutiny and that there is much more that Select Committees can do to hold the Executive to account on financial matters?

Mr. Cook: Yes, and I am grateful to the Liaison Committee for welcoming our proposals on providing staff. I referred to the National Audit Office; its offer is very helpful. If the Select Committee system is to be successful in carrying out the high-quality standards of scrutiny that we all desire, it must be able to tackle financial estimates and to look at outturns at the end of the financial year.

Tony Baldry (Banbury): The Leader of the House is correct that the Liaison Committee broadly supported the proposals by the Modernisation Committee, but does he accept that one suggestion that did not command support from the majority of its members was that the number of Select Committees should be substantially increased, and that many Chairmen and members of Committees take the view that the present number of Committees is an optimum number that enables effective scrutiny and effective participation in the work of Committees?

Mr. Cook: The hon. Gentleman is correct that we did not get a 100 per cent. score, but in his press release the Chairman of the Liaison Committee described the reports as excellent, and I shall happily settle for that as a pass mark.

The hon. Gentleman will have heard my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (David Cairns) say that he and many others are excluded from participation in Select Committees. I do not think that a Committee of 15 members, which is after all the size of the Modernisation Committee, should preclude us from reaching consensus.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): Before 1997, I served for eight years on the Select Committee on European Legislation—now European Scrutiny—which scrutinises European Union matters and does valuable work for the House. Does my right hon. Friend agree that its authority should be extended so that it can deal with individual nations in the European Union—taking that brief away from the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs—and its work can be much more substantial as regards dealing with matters that go beyond procedural issues and are concerned with the entire politics of the European Union?

Mr. Cook: I got myself into some hot water with the Foreign Affairs Committee last July, and I would not wish to repeat the experience. However, my hon. Friend is right that we need to consider how we scrutinise European policy and regulations. I am looking forward to the forthcoming report from the European Scrutiny Committee on that issue, and I give hon. Members an undertaking that we will look sympathetically at ways in which the House can improve its scrutiny of European affairs.

Legislation (Programming)

47. **Mr. Graham Brady** (Altrincham and Sale, West): What assessment he has made of the implications for legislative scrutiny of the experimental arrangements for programming of legislation. [41561]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office (Mr. Stephen Twigg): I am delighted that anticipation of my answer to the question seems to have filled the Conservative Benches. When hon. Members from all parties have worked together constructively, I believe that programming has achieved its objective of providing a more robust framework for scrutiny of legislation.

Mr. Brady: Does the Parliamentary Secretary share my concern that under the new programming arrangements, Committees are all too often denied the opportunity properly to scrutinise legislation, especially through the operation of what have become known as knives, used by Government Whips? Are not important aspects of legislation undebated by hon. Members? The Education Bill, which has gone to the House of Lords, included powers for the Secretary of State to form companies, powers for school governors, provisions for forming federations of schools and for admissions, exclusions and attendance. All were undebated by the House of Commons and we now have to depend on another place to do our job for us. Is not that regrettable?

Mr. Twigg: We shall, of course, keep the progress of programming under review. Flexibility is built into the programming regime. For example, an additional day was provided for discussion of the Education Bill on Report. Programming can benefit all hon. Members, but the Opposition have a choice about whether they want to use it for delay and obstruction or for genuine scrutiny and debate. I remind the hon. Gentleman of the memo that the shadow Leader of the House sent last September. It stated:

"We should be more discriminating in targeting Bills in Standing Committee, putting 'A' teams on the bigger . . . Bills to ensure searching scrutiny, testing out Ministers, and that the Bill cannot be completed in the allocated time, thus passing it to the Lords imperfectly scrutinised."

The Opposition have a choice about how to handle their tactics. Better programming gives an opportunity for better scrutiny, better debate and therefore better law.

Afghanistan

3.31 pm

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 24, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely, the war in Afghanistan.

Yesterday's announcement by the Secretary of State for Defence about the deployment of a British battle group of 1,700 soldiers for combat operations came as a surprise and represented a major escalation of British combat operations in Afghanistan. It was inevitable that yesterday's exchanges only touched on some issues, such as complications arising from the split chain of command, the intended length of 45 Commando's tour and the fact that it is unusual to deploy such a large force in combat operations without dedicated air support. The House is entitled to discuss such urgent matters fully before 45 Commando is deployed; it will already be deployed by the time we return from the Easter recess on 9 April. The subject cannot wait until after Easter.

Yesterday's statement also compounded the uncertainties that surround the future of the peacekeeping force under British command. On 10 January, the Government led the House to believe that Turkey had made a firm offer to take over the leadership of the international security assistance force. We expected the Turkish Prime Minister to confirm that at 4 pm our time yesterday, but no announcement was made and the question continues to hang in the balance.

The matter is also urgent because by the time we return from the Easter recess Turkey may have refused to lead ISAF. The House has had no opportunity to discuss that eventuality. We should hold such a discussion before decisions are made in our absence.

Moreover, yesterday I asked about the financial contribution that Britain is being asked to make to support Turkey's leadership. I understand that Turkey is now demanding $300 million for a six-month operation to be funded by the United States and the United Kingdom alone. If ISAF's mandate is to be extended, we should discuss it before it is a fait accompli. The Government should account to the House before entering into any unforeseen financial commitment on our behalf.

Let there be no doubt that we shall continue to stand shoulder to shoulder with the Government in the war against terrorism. As I said yesterday, we support the decision to accede to the US request for 45 Commando. However, that does not absolve the House of its obligation to debate all the urgent issues. We have only four sitting days before we rise for the Easter recess. Without such a debate, we shall fail in our duty to hold the Government to account.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman seeks leave to move the Adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 24 for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter, which he believes should have urgent consideration, namely the war in Afghanistan. I am satisfied that the matter is proper to be discussed under the Standing Order.

The leave of the House having been given, the motion stood over under Standing Order No. 24 (Adjournment on specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration) until the commencement of public business tomorrow.

Points of Order

3.35 pm

Mr. Quentin Davies (Grantham and Stamford): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I am afraid that I have to draw your attention to one more case of Parliament being bypassed on a very serious matter.

Yesterday afternoon, there was a break-in at Castlereagh police station in Belfast. A number of people broke into the Special Branch office and subsequently made good their escape. It is not known what they took, or what information they obtained, but it will be clear to the House that any breach of the security of special branch, particularly in Northern Ireland, is an extremely sensitive matter. The information held by special branch, and the identity of the people who may have made that information available, is crucial to policing operations.

I understand that the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has said this afternoon that the operations of Special Branch are

"crucial not only for the safety of people in Northern Ireland but for national security more generally."

The trouble is that he made that statement not here in the House but to the press. He has answered questions from the press, but he has not made himself available to answer questions in the House.

This is not the first time that I, or other colleagues, have had to bring to your attention, Mr. Speaker, abuses of this kind by this Government over the last few months. Under the powers available to you, can you do anything to bring home to the Government their responsibilities to Parliament? Given that I cannot see on tomorrow's Order Paper any question to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland that would provide the opportunity for us even briefly and superficially to get to grips with this serious matter, can you do anything to give Members a chance to ask vital questions about the unfortunate situation following the break-in?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has put the matter on the record; the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland will therefore be aware of his concerns.

Lady Hermon (North Down): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I bring to the House's attention the fact that the break-in at special branch's office at Castlereagh occurred on Sunday evening, not yesterday? The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland was in America at the time, and returned only this morning. In the interim, there has been extreme speculation about the origins of those who committed the break-in. The Secretary of State spoke to the Chief Constable this morning—it was the right thing to do in the circumstances—and ordered that a review be conducted in conjunction with the criminal investigation that had already been ordered by the Chief Constable.

In his press interview, the right hon. Gentleman declined to give details of the break-in, saying:

"I think you will understand that I may have to make further details available to Parliament."

[Lady Hermon]

He will have an opportunity to do so at Question Time tomorrow, and I hope that you will agree, Mr. Speaker, that that would be an appropriate time for him to address what he has acknowledged to be a very serious breach of national security.

Mr. Speaker: I heard what the hon. Lady had to say, and it is not a matter for the Chair. Once again, however, I am sure that the Secretary of State will take note of the concerns that have been expressed.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. It is clear that this break-in represents a catastrophic failure of security. It is not an everyday occurrence, or one of those ordinary run-of-the-mill situations in Northern Ireland that we have learned to live with over the past 30 years. It is a total failure of security in the most sensitive area of Government policy in Northern Ireland.

I understand your situation exactly, Mr. Speaker, but would it not be possible for you to issue—even in the most veiled terms—a direction to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to discuss the matter when he comes to the House tomorrow?

Mr. Speaker: The best thing I can say is that, obviously, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland will involve himself in a full investigation. I am sure that when it has been completed he will come to the House.

Mr. Roger Gale (North Thanet): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Speaker: Order. We are entering into a debate about this matter. There is not much more that I can say about it.

Mr. Gale: The issue directly concerns your own powers, Mr. Speaker, and the defence of the privileges of Back Benchers.

It is clear that the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has sheltered behind the opportunity to make a statement to the House. Surely it is open to you, as Speaker and as defender of Back-Bench privilege, to say to the Secretary of State that the opportunity is available to him to come to the House tomorrow and make the statement that he has already indicated to the press he is willing to make.

Mr. Speaker: There is no evidence that the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has shown the House any discourtesy. I repeat that he will endeavour to be involved in a full investigation, and I am sure that he will come to the House. I think that the matter is now best left alone.

Age Discrimination

3.41 pm

Mr. Paul Burstow (Sutton and Cheam): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make it unlawful to discriminate against persons on grounds of age in connection with employment or the provision of goods; to establish an Age Equality Commission with the function of working towards the elimination of such discrimination and promoting age equality generally; and for connected purposes.

We have a caste system in this country. It is not a caste system based on race, creed or class; but on age.

Ageism is rife in our country. Ageist assumptions lead employers to cast thousands of people on the scrapheap, and to ignore the pool of talented over-50s. Ageist attitudes lead to arbitrary rationing of access to care on the basis of a person's age rather than a personal assessment.

There is no such thing as a typical older person, and age is a poor proxy for ability. My Bill is intended to confront this ageist mindset head-on.

A poll conducted for Age Concern and published earlier this year found that 70 per cent. of our fellow citizens believe that age discrimination occurs in this country. The same poll found that 65 per cent. believe it is time Parliament legislated to make discrimination on the ground of age illegal.

Quite apart from any moral case for anti-discrimination legislation, there is a powerful economic case. The Employers Forum on Age estimates that age discrimination costs UK plc £31 billion a year. At present one in three people between 50 and state-pension age are out of work—2.8 million. Only a minority of those affected have made early retirement a lifestyle choice. Almost half depend on benefits for most of their income.

Help the Aged recently published the results of a survey of employers. In the case of half the companies surveyed, fewer than 10 per cent. of employees were over 50, and one in 10 employed no one over that age. That is not surprising given that, according to research by the Institute of Employment Rights, more than 50 per cent. of managers admit that they have used age-based criteria for recruitment purposes. The Government's own research reveals that for every £100 spent by companies on training, just £10 is spent on training older workers.

Over the past five years, the Government's response to ageism—particularly in employment—has been to promote a voluntary code of practice to extol the virtue of change, but not to extend the right to protection against discrimination. The code has not worked: it has had little or no impact on employers. Research by the Employers Forum on Age reveals that just one in four know of its existence.

When we delved further, we discovered that employers do not understand the code. Half of them thought that it deals with age limits in advertisements; five per cent. thought that it is about fast-tracking younger workers; and 30 per cent. had no idea what it covers.

In four years' time, the Government will be obliged by the EU directive on equal treatment in employment to introduce age discrimination legislation. Four more years is a long time to wait for legislation that is already long overdue. Legislating now on age discrimination would provide the necessary time and space for a body of

practice, case law and expertise to develop. Delay runs the risk that age discrimination will always be the poor relation of discrimination.

My Bill addresses ageism not just in the labour market but in the provision of goods and services. Last year, the Government published the national service framework for older people, which aims to tackle age bars in health and social care, but a King's Fund survey of health and social care managers found them ill-equipped to implement the fine words of the framework.

The use of upper age limits across a range of health and social care services is well documented. Most recently, Help the Aged has compiled a comprehensive picture of age discrimination cutting across public policy.

In January, the King's Fund report, "Old Habits Die Hard: Tackling age discrimination in health and social care", reported that three out of four senior health and social care managers believe that age discrimination exists in their local services. Those include policies that restrict access to units, facilities and treatment by setting upper or lower age limits. For example, in several areas specialist rehabilitation services for patients with brain injuries focus on return to work and so have an age restriction of 65. Those findings led the King's Fund to call for age discrimination legislation.

I do not pretend that legislation by itself will make discrimination go away, but it will give public and private service managers the incentive and the leverage to make meaningful changes in their organisations. It may even stop us trying to get care of the elderly on the cheap. The fact that we pay so much less for residential care for the elderly compared with other age groups is itself discrimination—it should not take a Rose Cotter presenting a petition to Downing street to tell us that.

Legislation will send a signal. Lessons from abroad suggest that legislation has a positive effect on the employment rates of older workers. However, age discrimination legislation will only be as effective as the way it is enforced. That is why the Bill also proposes an age equality commission with powers to conduct research and issue promotional material, to carry out formal investigations of individual or group complaints and to issue compliance notices and back them up with judicial orders if compliance does not take place.

Since 1997, 15 attempts have been made to put age discrimination legislation on the statute book; all have foundered or been blocked. Today, 30 Acts, 38 statutory instruments, 11 codes of practice and 12 EU directives and recommendations make up the body of UK anti-discrimination law. Age barely gets a mention.

Ageism is economic madness—it is costing this country a fortune. Age is a very poor indicator of a person's competence or ability to contribute. It is time that the House put age at the centre of our discrimination law. I urge the House to support the Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Paul Burstow, Ms Candy Atherton, Mr. Quentin Davies, Mr. Roger Berry, Andrew Selous, Hywel Williams, Mr. A.J. Beith, Dr. Vincent Cable, Mr. Steve Webb and Dr. Evan Harris.

AGE DISCRIMINATION

Paul Burstow accordingly presented a Bill to make it unlawful to discriminate against persons on grounds of age in connection with employment or the provision of goods; to establish an Age Equality Commission with the function of working towards the elimination of such discrimination and promoting age equality generally; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 10 May, and to be printed [Bill 113].

Opposition Day

[12TH ALLOTTED DAY]

Education and Skills Training

Mr. Speaker: I inform the House that I have selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

3.49 pm

Mr. Damian Green (Ashford): I beg to move,

That this House notes the mounting crisis in education; regrets that unauthorised absences from secondary schools are rising, and that examination standards in mathematics fell last year among 11-year-olds; further notes that morale among teachers has fallen so low that three teaching unions are currently engaged in industrial action, including an unprecedented ballot on industrial action among head teachers; regrets the early departure from the teaching profession of so many qualified teachers; notes that teachers themselves blame the excessive workload caused by Government interference for many of these early departures; condemns the Government for its lack of support for teachers seeking to cope with disciplinary problems in schools; asks the Government to explain fully the precipitate ending of Education Action Zones; calls on the Government to restore confidence in the examination board system after the various fiascos faced by Edexcel; notes that morale among university teachers and students is also low because of funding problems; further condemns the way decent training providers, including FE colleges, were let down by the failure of Individual Learning Accounts (ILAs); and calls on the Government to make an immediate announcement about how it intends to help those affected by the ILA collapse, and what scheme it proposes to replace ILAs.

This Government are energetic at peddling myths. It is one of the defining characteristics of the Government that they never let the truth get in the way of a good story. Nowhere is this more true than in the field of education. Relentlessly, the Secretary of State rushes out press releases announcing how our schools are prospering as never before; how teachers gladly welcome each new day and each new initiative; how head teachers open their post each morning, thrilled by the prospect of another 100 pages of guidance about how to do their jobs; how students and university teachers are grateful for the decisive way in which the Government are dealing with higher education funding; and how training providers and their customers were so impressed by ILAs that the whole system had to be closed down because it was so successful.

The myth is polished every day, and the Secretary of State is to be congratulated on the fact that the central core of her Department—the press office—still functions, unlike in some other Departments. So the polish goes on but, sadly for the Government, the truth is beginning to emerge from beneath the polish. Five years in, the real failures cannot be disguised any longer. When parents see teachers on strike for the first time in 20 years; when they see head teachers threatening industrial action for the first time since state education was introduced; when they notice that teachers are leaving the profession earlier and faster than ever before; and when they see that initiatives such as education action zones are introduced one year and ditched the next, they know that the crisis is getting worse, and they know who is responsible.

Mr. James Plaskitt (Warwick and Leamington): The hon. Gentleman talks about five years on. In 1997, there were 1,100 infant children in Warwickshire in classes of over 30. Today there are none. Is that a myth?

Mr. Green: We are talking about standards—*[Interruption.]* The Government may not find standards important, but many of us do.

The Department's problems stem from four distinct causes: broken promises, weakness, policy failures and sheer Government incompetence. Let me deal with these in reverse order. It is plain incompetence on the part of the Government to say that they want to relieve teachers of unnecessary red tape and then continue tying teachers up in it.

The hon. Member for Warwick and Leamington (Mr. Plaskitt) talks about facts and figures. Let us look at the facts, as revealed in a series of written answers to me from the Minister for School Standards. I asked for monthly totals of the paperwork sent to schools by the Department. Last April, documents 853 pages long were sent to every primary school in the country. Let us assume that a conscientious head teacher takes two minutes to read each page. That means that those documents would take over 28 hours just to read. That is three and a half normal working days for each head teacher, even before any action is taken on the basis of the documents.

April may have been the cruellest month for head teachers, but others were nearly as bad. Last December, secondary schools received 510 pages of wisdom from the Department: probably not the most helpful early Christmas present any school received. Even in September—which most people involved in education, although not, apparently, the Department, recognise is rather a busy time, at the start of the school year—primary school heads had to cope with 402 pages and secondary heads 388 pages; over one and a half working days per head teacher to read these alone.

The full magnitude of the Government's imposition on schools is revealed by a simple addition exercise. If we add all the documents sent between April last year and February this year—the last date for which the Government will give me answers—we find that there were 4,333 pages for head teachers to plough through. If every head teacher in Britain fulfilled their duty to read all this stuff, that would create 859 years' worth of work; nearly 900 years' worth of bureaucracy in just 11 months.

That is the true monument to the education policy of new Labour: heads prevented from managing; teachers prevented from teaching; and standards prevented from rising, all because the gentlemen and ladies in Whitehall still think that they know best. When will they learn to get off the backs of teachers and let them get on with their proper job?

I would like to use this debate to give the Secretary of State the chance to recant something that she told the House on 10 January this year. She said:

"I say to the House and to head teachers that sending teachers less paper will neither raise standards nor satisfy them of our ability to give them the support that they need".—[*Official Report*, 10 January 2002; Vol. 377, c. 661.]

Can she really believe that? If she does, she should get out more. I hope that she will withdraw that absurd view today.

Mr. Nigel Beard (Bexleyheath and Crayford): The hon. Gentleman is giving a chapter of woe in the education service. Would his case not be stronger in some respects if he acknowledged that since the Conservative Government left office in 1997, the number of children achieving the appropriate standard in numeracy has gone up from 50 per cent. to approximately 80 per cent; and likewise, the number of children achieving appropriate standards of literacy at 11 has risen by a similar amount from 50 per cent.? How does he square that with his tale of denigration and crisis?

Mr. Green: I will come to standards in a moment. Labour Members are interested in the fact that standards started rising after the 1980s reforms and carried on rising until, coincidentally, last year. I find it instructive that the Whips' handouts all refer backwards. I am interested in looking at what is happening in our schools now and what is likely to happen as the Government's policies move forward. That, I think, will convince Labour Members who have an open mind on the subject that any of the benefits that may come from their Government's policies are already beginning to wear off. That is the most significant fact that the Government need to address.

I was giving various examples of incompetence, which is one of the problems faced by the Government. I know—I just feel it—that the Secretary of State will talk about investment. Indeed, the Government's amendment refers to sustained investment. It may be worth while drawing the House's attention to what that means. The Government continually boast about investment, but unfortunately, in another written answer to me, they have been forced to admit that, in 2000-01, they underspent the money allocated to the Department by £1.7 billion.

The Government appear to be adept at finding initiatives and other ways in which to spend money. The next time we hear the Secretary of State or the Prime Minister boasting about how much sustained investment they are putting into schools, perhaps they will tell us why they cannot even spend the money given to them. That money could have paid for laptop computers for all 429,300 teachers in England. The Government are keen on laptops and they could have provided them—a measure that I support—if they were not so incompetent. They cannot even spend the money that the Treasury gives them.

Mr. Chris Mole (Ipswich): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the first two new primary schools to be built in Ipswich for 25 years have been built since 1997? One is at Ravenswood and one at Raeburn and, at a cost of more than £1.5 million apiece, they have replaced the concrete and chicken-wire prefab schools that had been there since the 1920s and 1930s. Does he further accept that since 1997 my Suffolk local education authority area has had the best capital settlement for many years, and that the backlog of minor works in schools that had accumulated while the Tories were in Government, and which stood at £9 million, has been reduced to less than £2.5 million?

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must give the hon. Member who is addressing the House an opportunity to speak.

Mr. Green: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman has the two new primary schools in his constituency—he will soon learn their names without having to read them. However, he should talk to the teachers in those primary schools and see what they say about all the bureaucracy and paperwork that the Government are imposing on them, which I have been talking about. He will recognise over time, when the shine wears off, that teachers' morale is as low as it ever has been in this country, and that that is entirely due to the actions of this Government.

Mr. Tom Levitt (High Peak): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Green: Certainly—I will always give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Levitt: I can assure the hon. Gentleman, as one who taught for 20 years—most of that time under the Tories—that morale today is considerably higher than it was in those days.

Mr. Green: I invite the hon. Gentleman to visit any school in London—many of them were closed last week by the first National Union of Teachers strike for 30 years—where he will find that the Secretary of State has reduced the morale of teachers in London to historically low levels. In case he missed the beginning of my speech, may I point out that since state education was created in this country in 1870, never have our head teachers united to ballot on industrial action? This Government, who the hon. Gentleman says have made teachers happier than ever before, have reduced head teachers—of all groups in society—to considering industrial action. If he thinks that they are happier than ever before, he is deluding himself.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): The Government set themselves some ambitious targets. The former Education Secretary, now Home Secretary, said that if he did not achieve certain targets within five years, he would resign. The only Minister who has been in the Department for the whole period of the Labour Government is the Secretary of State. Is she not honour bound to follow what her predecessor said and resign if those targets are not met?

Mr. Green: My hon. Friend is right. I have pursued that point with the right hon. Lady in the past and I admire her prudence in refusing to follow her predecessor's policy of promising resignation if the targets are not met. We shall see in a few months whether her conscience has been pricked.

Let me move from incompetence to policy failures. There are many, but by far the biggest is retaining teachers. I suspect that the right hon. Lady will boast about teacher recruitment. I point out gently that there is

[Mr. Green]

no point in recruiting ever higher numbers of trainee teachers if most of them leave within a few years. Pouring ever larger amounts of water into a bucket with a hole in the bottom is not a rational policy. *[Interruption.]*

Government Members do not want to take that from me, so perhaps they will take it from Ofsted, whose most recent report admitted that there was a crisis in teacher recruitment and retention. It says—and Government Members waiting with quotes from 1997 should take note of it:

"these problems have got worse over the past two years."

Ofsted states that the recruitment and retention of primary school staff is

"no longer just an inner city issue, but is beginning to affect schools in all regions and all kinds of locations."

The crisis that we once all knew was happening in our inner-city schools has, according to Ofsted, spread over the past two years under the present Government. The right hon. Lady will be concerned that more than 20 per cent. of teachers leave within three years of joining the profession.

I further adduce the evidence of the National Union of Teachers, whose survey found that the annual resignation rate in 2001 was 4 per cent. higher than the previous figure provided by employers in 1999. Under this Government, things are getting worse. I have one more piece of evidence before I give way again. About 85 per cent. of teachers who leave the profession—and this figure should worry the whole House—say that they do so for negative reasons connected with the teaching profession rather than because of the attraction of doing something else. People who are keen to be teachers are leaving because they are put off by the education system that they are forced to work in.

Mr. Phil Willis (Harrogate and Knaresborough): With respect to the hon. Gentleman, we have heard exactly the same speech from the Tory Front Bench for the past five years. What plans does he have to resolve the problems to which he referred?

Mr. Green: The simplest way for the Government to do so is by doing less. Instead of producing 1,000 years' worth of bureaucracy every 11 months, doing less would reduce the work load on teachers who would then have less unnecessary paperwork from the Government. *[Interruption.]* I know that Ministers believe that everything that comes out of the Department is a pearl of wisdom, but it does not work with teachers.

As ever, faced with the problems to which I have alerted the House, the Department tries to disguise them. As ever, the Government's first reaction to bad news is not to deal with the problem, but to bury the bad news. When, in February, they published "Statistics in Education: Teachers in England 2001", some statistics mysteriously did not even appear on the departmental website. It is rather a good website, often containing loads of information. Funnily enough, however, some figures did not appear. For example, nearly 300,000 qualified teachers under 60 are no longer in the education system; 83,400 people hold teaching certificates that they have never used, in an era of acute teacher shortages; and the number of teacher vacancies in England and Wales rose to 5,000 in 2001—an increase of nearly 60 per cent. from 2000. All the figures are pointing the wrong way. All the surveys show that the main reason teachers are being driven out of the profession is work load. Teachers think their work load excessive—that is even more important to them than pay.

The Government have made a response, however. I must be fair to them. The Government have noticed that the work load is a problem and their response is—a poster. At first glance, I was relieved that they had produced a poster rather than a 50-page document, but when I actually read the section "Advice and guidance on what schools can do", I found that the first piece of advice was to read circular 2/98. So the Government have produced a circular telling teachers how to reduce their work load.

The poster has three other sections: one is pure party political propaganda—paid for by the taxpayer. A second section consists of a pie chart telling teachers what they already know—that they are wasting their time reading Government information when they could be teaching or planning lessons. The final section states that:

"The following common tasks need not routinely be carried out by teachers".

Sadly they did not include the instruction, "Do not waste your time putting up useless posters on the staffroom wall".

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): My hon. Friend is probably aware that the Government commissioned a report from PricewaterhouseCoopers which highlighted the embarrassing fact that head teachers were working up to 60 hours a week. The Government's response was to bury the report so deep in the departmental website that the search engine could not even find it.

Mr. Green: My hon. Friend has great technological skills and he is right. Departments are consistent throughout Government: if there is bad news they will try to bury it.

The Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Estelle Morris): That is a serious accusation. I should not normally intervene during the opening speech of an Opposition spokesperson, but if someone was trying to bury that bad news, why is that very report currently before the School Teachers Review Body? The STRB is receiving evidence not only from the Government but from every teacher union and association. It will report in public in due course and we shall respond in public. That is the worst way of burying bad news I have ever heard of.

Mr. Green: Even the right hon. Lady could not keep a report commissioned by the STRB from the STRB. What she did not want was that it should be found by journalists, Opposition politicians or people who might be interested in studying it.

The right hon. Lady can argue until she is blue in the face but the plain fact is facing her: she, as Secretary of State, is presiding over the current rash of strikes. Like her, I do not approve of industrial action that damages the education of children. I am happy to admit that she is right about that.

Helen Jones (Warrington, North): I am unconvinced by the hon. Gentleman's comments: I, too, taught under the previous Tory Government and I remember what teacher morale was like then.

If the hon. Gentleman is so keen on cutting teachers' work load, will he explain whether he supports the policy of his right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard), who wants to cut public spending to 35 per cent. of gross domestic product? How will those cuts do anything other than increase the work load in the education system and destroy the morale of teachers?

Mr. Green: The hon. Lady should pay greater attention to the extremely good speeches of my right hon. and learned Friend the shadow Chancellor. He has made it clear that the first priority of the Conservative party is to match public spending on our essential public services. Those services are our main priority. I know that the Government find that difficult because, to refer to a topical subject, their fox has been shot.

To return to the current rash of strikes, which the Government are understandably not keen to talk about, many parents feel a degree of sympathy with teachers who have been driven to the brink by the type of Government interference and micromanagement that I have been outlining. The latest edition of the NUT magazine, *The Teacher*, states:

"Such is the sense of grievance and frustration felt by these teachers, not just because of the difficulties they face in finding affordable accommodation, but because of the disturbance and disruption of children's education caused by the staff turnover and the acute teacher shortage."

All those Members who say that they know teachers better than the NUT does should pay attention to the NUT.

I particularly recommend this month's edition of *The Teacher*; it has a good centre-page spread detailing my trip to Germany with a senior NUT official. It sets out the points on which we agreed and disagreed. The House may be relieved to know that at least one of the major parties can still have friendly relations with trade unions even when we disagree on several points. I commend that lesson to the Government, which is run by a party that used to aspire to that as well.

Mr. David Chaytor (Bury, North): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Green: I think that I have given way enough, to be fair.

I am delighted to be assured by both head teachers' unions that, if they end up taking industrial action, it will not affect teaching in schools. I hope that the Secretary of State would agree that, if they do take industrial action, it is much better that it should not affect teaching and learning. However, I hope that the Government are taking on board the historic nature of the possibility of industrial action by the two head teachers' unions. I am afraid that the aggressive rhetoric that Ministers are using about head teachers is making the situation worse, not better.

David Hart, the general secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers, has rightly said:

"The last persons in the education world who need a lesson from the Secretary of State on public service reform are head teachers".

Head teachers have put through a lot of reforms in the past 15 years, under Governments of both parties. Head teachers are naturally most concerned with the performance of their schools, and they are happy to preside over proper change and reform, not to try to implement half-baked, ill thought-out Government policies that reduce morale even further in the staff room.

Mr. Chaytor: Does the hon. Gentleman recall speaking to the north of England education conference in January of this year, in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman), the Chairman of the Select Committee on Education and Skills? Does he specifically recall being forced to admit in his opening remarks that he could not say very much because his party did not have a policy on education? Have things changed since January? If there has been a change, given that he has been speaking for more than 20 minutes, will he tell us what it is?

Mr. Green: I very much enjoyed the Huddersfield conference—I was applauded and given a friendly reception. Everyone there—except possibly the hon. Gentleman—thought that what I told them in my opening remarks was entirely sensible. I said that, at the beginning of a Parliament, it is entirely sensible for Opposition parties to think through their policies, so that what they produce is not half-baked. If Labour Members are saying that we should have a fully fledged policy in six months, it is not unreasonable to ask why the Government have miserably failed to produce a coherent education policy after five years in power, following 18 years in opposition.

The Government have to take decisions day after day on the basis of no coherent policy. We shall work out a coherent and robust education policy that will improve standards in our schools, rather than relying on the hand-to-mouth, initiative-driven system that the Government have been forced to introduce, precisely because they have no coherent thinking on education.

Ministers frequently say that head teachers are paid to make tough choices, but that just gives rise to hollow laughs in staff rooms around the country. With every month that passes, head teachers' ability to take decisions is restricted by the Government's constant interference. But suddenly, when the decision is tough, there is no Government guidance at all—just a cry of "yours" as the hospital pass is delivered.

The third group of problems stems from the Government's weakness in tackling issues that they find inconvenient. The best example of that is their many and varied policies on excluding disruptive pupils. For a long time, the Government simply set a target for permanent exclusions to be cut by a third. Understandably, the result has been a decline in the number of exclusions. Those targets prevented head teachers from expelling violent or disruptive pupils, damaging the education of thousands of pupils throughout the country.

The Secretary of State should know that the NUT has found that 45 per cent. of teachers leaving the profession cited pupil behaviour as the reason for doing so. She should also know that that is a direct consequence of a policy introduced by her predecessor. Ofsted cited

"the poor behaviour of a minority of pupils"

as the major reason why teachers leave the profession; it is more important than pay or even work load. The Government's policies on discipline and their weakness on enforcing good discipline in schools are a principal

[Mr. Green]

reason why teachers have been driven out of the profession. So much damage has been done that some of it is permanent.

Let me quote an example sent in response to a survey on our own education website—www.conservatives.com/education, which I commend to all who are interested in education. I believe that there is no provision in "Erskine May" to prevent me from reading out a website address, and I hope that it will be helpful to the House to do so.

Some serious problems are revealed. I shall quote one pupil who responded to the website. There were three questions:

"Have you or a friend ever suffered from bullying?"

The answer was as follows:

"Yes I ended up suicidal and had a nervous breakdown and a lot of my friends have been bullied too."

The second question was:

"What is the worst disciplinary problem at your school?"

The answer:

"There is no discipline. At the worst they get suspended for a few days, which isn't a punishment in anyone's eyes. It's just a good excuse to have a few days off."

Thirdly:

"Do you think bullying and discipline in your school have been getting worse or better?"

The answer:

"Worse, definitely. That's why I am home educated."

That was the response that we received from a pupil. *[Interruption.]* Labour Members find this a laughing matter. That shows how distant they are from the real problems. The Government have undermined discipline in schools. They are damaging standards in schools. That is making many school children's lives a misery. *[Interruption.]* Labour Members find that a laughing matter too.

The fourth area where the Government have contributed to the crisis is their broken promises. The worst of these is on truancy. In 1998, the Government announced that they planned to cut unauthorised absences from school. They promised a reduction of one third in school truancies by 2002. There has been no reduction in the percentage of half days missed a year through unauthorised absence. It remains at 0.7 per cent. Indeed, the percentage has risen since 1996-97 in maintained secondary schools, from 1 per cent. to 1.1 per cent. Perhaps that is not one of the figures handed out by the Government Whips to Labour Members who wanted to quote figures from 1997 onwards.

A helpful written answer from one of the Department's Ministers told us that if we add together the authorised and unauthorised absences in every category, including primary schools and secondary schools, the number of half days missed increased significantly between 1999-00 and 2000-01. It has risen from 5.7 per cent. in primary schools to 6.1 per cent. In secondary schools, it has increased from 8.6 per cent. to 9 per cent.

Given these alarming figures, the social exclusion unit—the Government's central unit dealing with these matters—says that the national truancy rate has remained static. That requires a flexible use of language—the rate seems to be increasing rather than remaining static.

Another broken promise is on higher education. The Government promised us their review of student support early in the new year. It is 19 March, and quite late in the new year. There is still no sign of the review. I recall a Minister talking about June. It is one of the Government's announcements that is always three months away. We think that the Government should publish their findings as soon as possible and end the uncertainty in which they have left both students and universities.

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Green: No. I have given way enough.

There are four reasons behind the crisis in education, and we know that the Government are in denial of them. Instead of dealing with the problems, the Secretary of State is doing her best to distract attention. On Thursday last week, I was delighted to be informed by Demos that she is launching a new pamphlet on secondary education. We are told that it will contain her vision. We are told that we need to combine this with "ongoing transformative change." Any improvement in the quality of English does not seem to have spread as far as Demos.

The serious point is that the right hon. Lady prefers publishing pamphlets to dealing with the mess in our schools, colleges and universities that her policies are creating. There is another vision of education, which I commend to the Government. We, the Opposition, believe, as we argued consistently throughout consideration of the Education Bill, that central Government need not and should not take every important decision on education. We support the activities of Ofsted—regular testing and the publication of test results and league tables. Most importantly, we believe that with all that outside inspection the Government do not need to tell schools how to run every minute of the school day.

The same thinking applies to the organisation of schools. We are relaxed about different types of schools emerging. We have no hang-ups about grammar schools or specialist schools. If a faith school is doing a good job, it should be supported, not have its ethos destroyed, as the Liberal Democrats and many Labour Members want. We are deeply sceptical about the Government's concept of earned autonomy; autonomy earned from a centralising Secretary of State is unlikely to be much autonomy at all. We want real autonomy for schools and an objective, independent, outside inspection system to ensure that they are doing their job for the community.

The Opposition therefore urge the Government to stop telling teachers how to do every aspect of their job; they are demoralised by constant nagging interference and far too many of them are leaving. The Government must stop introducing new gimmicks and instead sort out the problems in existing policies—a press release is no substitute for competent policy. The Government must stop producing education Bills that centralise power in the hands of the Secretary of State under the cloak of rhetoric about diversity. Schools and local government deserve more trust than the Government are prepared to give them. The Government must stop blaming everyone else for the difficulties caused by their mismanagement.

Teachers are not wreckers; they are hard-working professionals who are doing their best under increasingly difficult circumstances. The Opposition want an education

system that transmits values as well as skills, promotes genuine diversity in schools, and allows good teachers to teach without the constant irritation of a Government directive telling them how to do their job. We want a university system that promotes excellence in learning, and vocational education that provides genuine skills for life for all.

After five years of this Government, it is increasingly clear that an education policy run by centralised diktat will not, and does not, work. Our schools, colleges and universities deserve better; if the Government cannot provide that, they will rightly stand condemned for failing to deliver on a vital commitment for the future of everyone in this country.

4.21 pm

The Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Estelle Morris): I beg to move, To leave out from "House" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

"recognises an education system which is benefiting from an unprecedented period of sustained investment on an unprecedented scale, in parallel with the Government's strategy to raise standards through an ambitious series of reforms of the curriculum, the teaching profession and the organisation of schools; welcomes Ofsted's latest annual report showing the highest ever proportion of good and excellent lessons in schools, and the OECD's PISA Report that the UK performance was above the OECD average across all three domains of reading, mathematical and scientific literacy; notes the other tangible signs of increased investment and reform such as higher academic standards at primary and secondary level, the dramatic reduction in the numbers of infants in large classes, more teachers in schools than at any time in the last decade, extra resources and more people than ever going into Higher Education, with 45,000 new places since 1997; notes further the huge increase in the number of adults who are now acquiring basic skills and learning for their futures; recognises the clear commitment of the Government to address teacher workload in partnership with the unions and other agencies; welcomes the positive proposals the Government has given to headteachers on school exclusions, reinforcing their right to manage their schools and enforce discipline as they see fit; recognises that working closely with parents, police and health professionals is key to tackling unacceptable levels of absence and supports the Government's work in this area; and supports the measures being taken by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority to ensure that examination results are delivered successfully."

The hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) thinks that it is acceptable to wipe the slate clean on policy, and seems to have done the same to his memory. While I accept entirely that after five years in government we are accountable for what we have done during that period, it is appropriate to remind people of our starting point. In 1997, it was true, as my hon. Friend the Member for Warwick and Leamington (Mr. Plaskitt) said, that nearly one third of our infants were in classes of more than 30; there were 11,000 fewer teachers; there were 44,000 fewer education support staff; and four out of 10 of our 11-year-olds were starting secondary education without the literacy and numeracy skills that they needed to access the secondary curriculum. Schoolteachers witnessed year on year cuts in expenditure and year on year increases in class sizes; it took 25 months to turn round a school that had been put in special measures; and there was a £2,800 cut over a number of years in the amount of money given to higher education students.

I am immensely proud of what we have achieved in five years, but I am not complacent. In one of the most important of all public services, we still have a long way to go. As we defend our record today against the attack, if one can call it that, from the hon. Member for Ashford, I feel more complacent than I should, if that is the worst that the Opposition can pin on us after five years.

I want to refer to three or four key issues in the motion and in the hon. Gentleman's speech. First, the process of teacher recruitment and retention is far more complicated than he would have us believe. As I have said time after time in the House, I accept that schools, particularly in London and the south-east, but also in Swindon, Reading and Oxford, find it extremely tough to recruit and retain sufficient teachers. I know that head teachers are taking on teachers whom, if they had had more of a choice, they may not have appointed. To pretend otherwise would not be facing up to reality.

However, another set of statistics shows another aspect of reality that must be considered if we are to make any progress. It was right to ask the hon. Gentleman the question, "What would the Tories do?" because they have come up with only one solution—cut paperwork. However, the problem is more complicated than that. Those of us who believe that recruiting and retaining the best people in the teaching profession is a key challenge must look at the statistics and confront reality.

The reality is this: there are 11,000 more teachers now than there were in 1997. There are 7,000 more teaching posts this year than there were last year. We are recruiting 8 per cent. more into training to be teachers this year, and that is on top of 5 per cent. more last year.

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): More are leaving.

Estelle Morris: No. Think about the maths. The hon. Gentleman should have had the numeracy hour. If there are more teachers now than there were in 1997, more must be joining than are leaving. That is what produces the net increase.

Applications this year are up on last year—20 per cent. up in maths, 10 per cent. up in English, 8 per cent. up in science, 4 per cent. up in modern foreign languages, 15 per cent. up in technology, and 3,200 have been recruited on the graduate teacher programme, yet there are still vacancies.

The challenge is to reconcile those two sets of information. There are more teachers, there are more posts, and there are more vacancies in some areas. Not to accept that reality, and to think that sending out fewer bits of paper would solve the problem shows that six or seven months after the general election, the Opposition have still thought of nothing beyond that.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): One piece of paper that my right hon. Friend sent to schools last week—I have visited several schools in the intervening period—was especially welcome. I do not support every jot and aspect of Government policy, but the tone and content of my right hon. Friend's call to teachers to focus on contact time and productive areas of activity and to withdraw from marginal areas was most welcome. It was a motivating influence in the staff rooms of the schools that I visited. I congratulate her on it.

Estelle Morris: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. That was the poster to which the hon. Member for Ashford

[Estelle Morris]

referred. I had not intended to mention the poster, but as we have had the NUT magazine brandished about because it has a picture of the hon. Gentleman on the centre pages—I must remember not to open my copy—*[Interruption.]* He has not made page 3 yet; he is on the centre pages. The interesting thing about the poster is that it was not sent just from me. It was sent with the support of every teacher union and both head teacher unions. It was an honest attempt by Government and teacher representatives together to find the real answer to teacher work load, recruitment and retention.

There is a challenge facing us. Teachers are working harder than they have ever worked before. More is being asked of them than ever before. More is being demanded, more is expected, and more is being achieved. When people choose to work in a job as important as teaching, that is what they sign up to. What they do day in, day out makes a difference. We have a choice. We can take away some of the aspects that have caused a burden and led to increased standards, such as the literacy hour, the numeracy hour, the excellence in cities programmes and key stage 3—all of which featured in those pieces of paper that we sent out in the past year—or we can look at the tasks that teachers have historically done and should not be doing.

The PWC report is absolutely in the public domain, and I would be surprised if anyone participating in the debate has not read it. It found—this is the key point in the poster—that 20 per cent. of the tasks that teachers are doing could be done by somebody else. That includes everything from filling in forms that they do not have to fill in, to dinner duty, bus duty, collecting dinner money, washing the paint pots and beyond.

I shall be dead straight about the issue. We must take some decisions about teacher work load, but I will not take away the literacy hour, the numeracy hour, key stage 3, performance management or the excellence in cities programmes, because it is those that have made the difference. I applaud the teacher representatives for coming together with the Government, acknowledging the issues, and working with us to try to take away the tasks that could be better done by other people. That resulted in a poster. Okay, I made myself the subject of a cheap joke by the Opposition spokesman. So be it. But we are engaged in a broader and more serious debate about modernising and reforming the profession so that it can hang on to what it should be doing and free up teacher time to do that better. I am delighted that the poster was well received in my hon. Friend's constituency.

Mr. Willis: In her spirit of honesty, will the Secretary of State accept that in the region of 289,000 teachers are qualified but not in our classrooms, 70,000 of whom have been in our classrooms during the past five years who are aged under 50 and who would be a ready source of recruitment for our schools, yet she does not know where they are and is making no attempt to attract them back? What will she do to ensure that that huge multi-million pound resource is not simply lost to the teaching profession but recruited directly to our schools?

Estelle Morris: Some of them are in the Chamber at this moment. However, I want standards to continue to rise, so I shall keep the two of us out of the classroom. The hon. Gentleman has made that point before, and I am happy to consider it. We have spent a lot of money and expended much effort on teacher recruitment and retention and I would not wilfully turn my back on anything that could help us. One of his better jokes in the Chamber was to brandish a letter that he had received from the Department inviting him to go back into teaching because he was down as someone who had recently left. That was a better joke than that of the hon. Member for Ashford. I think that the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) would generously admit that that showed that we were doing what we could where we had the data to write to former teachers. However, if he knows of ways in which we could do more, I should be happy to consider them.

I want to concentrate on the matter for a few minutes because the statistics are important. Every time I open the paper—sometimes I do not have to open it because it is on the front page—there is another figure that almost bemuses one about teachers, whether in or out of the profession. There is an issue about retention, and I am not avoiding that. I want to come on to why teachers leave. Some leave because the profession is tougher than when they joined a number of years ago, and we must acknowledge that. But consider what happens at the moment.

Of those who start teacher training, 17 per cent. do not finish, and the drop-out rate for graduates as a whole is about the same. Teacher training is tougher because it is tied to a professional qualification; the training is more demanding. If someone does not want to teach, it is almost no good finishing the course because a teaching certificate is not a generic qualification. Therefore, 17 per cent. of those who are recruited never finish, and some of those do not want to and are not good enough. That is fine because I do not want them. If they are not good enough and they fail, keep them out. The job would be too tough if they did not want to do it. I do not say this lightly, but I do not overworry if they or the universities make such a decision.

Of those who qualify, 80 per cent. are still there four years later, and 95 per cent. of those who gain qualified teacher status will, at some point in their working life, teach. They might not have done so in the first four years. They might have gone abroad. Strangely enough, they might have taught in the independent sector and so not appear in our statistics.

I say no more than this. For a profession still to have 80 per cent. of those who qualify in the profession four years later, for 95 per cent. to use that teaching qualification at some point during their working life, and for 13,000 of those who leave each year to come back is not a bad record and probably stands well against any other profession, but there is more to be done.

There is a real issue about retention and recruitment, but although it might serve Opposition policies, it serves not one child, parent, head teacher, teacher or governor for the issue to be blown up beyond the challenge that we already face. I am not, for a minute, saying that the hon. Member for Ashford did that, but the only statistic that we heard from the Opposition was the old one—I do not know whether it was 60 per cent. or 80 per cent., as it changes from time to time—relating to not teaching. The only solution that we heard was, "Don't send out as much

paperwork." The solutions cost more than that. Better policies and better worked-out ways of moving forward are needed. When we considered the matter, we came up with bursaries, golden hellos, training salaries, wiping off student loans, and keeping people in teaching by offering them professional support. Those policies have resulted in more people coming into teaching than at any time this decade.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Estelle Morris: I give way first to my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Tony Cunningham) and then to the hon. Member for East Antrim (Mr. Beggs).

Tony Cunningham (Workington): Many quotes from head teachers have been bandied around this afternoon. Let me tell the House about a head teacher in a school in my constituency, who said to me that the quality of year 7 pupils coming from primary school to secondary school is higher now than he has ever known it to be. Is that not a direct result of this Government's policies in recent years, and particularly of the introduction of literacy and numeracy hours?

Estelle Morris: The story that my hon. Friend tells is exactly the one that I hear from head teachers and parents almost everywhere I go. He will know that that was not the story one year into the strategy. When I visited primary schools then, things were fairly tough. The schools did not want us to be so prescriptive, and they wanted to continue to do what they had done year after year, which had led to four out of five children not reaching the required standard. I applaud the profession for having accepted the strategy and for having been courageous enough, when it saw that it worked, to admit that it was wrong and that the strategy has done well. There are hardly any head teachers in this country who are not pleased that this strategy was introduced. We must remember that, had the Tories been in power during those years, there would have been no literacy strategy and no numeracy strategy. That is the central prescription that I defend. Those initiatives were introduced to ensure that those who might not otherwise have considered best practice had to do so, and they learned in due course from evidence that it works.

Mr. Damian Green *rose—*

Estelle Morris: As I promised, I shall give way to the hon. Member for East Antrim, and then I shall make progress.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): As a former teacher, vice-principal, and currently chairman of a board of governors, it is my experience that young teachers coming through now are better qualified and even more committed than in the past. Does the Secretary of State feel that policies pursued by governing bodies could further assist in the retention of young women teachers who want to maintain teaching experience in the classroom and have an opportunity to spend more time raising young families?

Estelle Morris: The hon. Gentleman raises an interesting point. I feel that, across the whole labour market, women and men ought to have that opportunity. That is more of a challenge in teaching than in other areas because parents tend to want continuity, especially at primary level. If one were to stop 10 parents in the street and ask them whether, in order to give women the choice of part-time work, they would agree to their child having two teachers during the week rather than one, there would be a real debate. That is one of the extra demands that we must face when considering flexible working. Some 80 per cent. of the teaching work force are women, and it is the responsibility of the teaching profession—and my responsibility—to do what we can to offer that flexibility, but, at the same time, to try to make sure that we offer continuity, especially for little ones who are at school.

Mr. Green: I am grateful to the right hon. Lady for giving way. Like her, I do not like intervening on Front-Bench speeches, but I am trying to prevent her from inadvertently misleading the House. She will be aware that literacy and numeracy hours were being piloted before 1997. Had they proved a success, a Conservative Government would no doubt have carried on with them. Therefore, the sharp line that she seeks to draw is simply not there.

Estelle Morris: The hon. Gentleman must face up to two facts. I do not believe that any Tory Government would have implemented a national strategy for literacy and numeracy; they would not have found the resources. He must also accept that, even if they had implemented the literacy and numeracy strategy nationally—that was not in the Conservative manifesto in 1997—it would have been centralist and prescriptive. They would also have had to send out reams of paper to schools. That is exactly what the hon. Gentleman has just told us that he would not do, so it is not unreasonable for me to assume that his only policy to aid the recruitment and retention of teachers is not to send out all the bits of paper that he referred to earlier. Let me tell him what those bits of paper are. They are the key stage 3 strategy, the literacy and numeracy strategies and the papers on performance management. He cannot have it both ways.

At first, developing the literacy and numeracy strategy meant being centralist and rather prescriptive and sending out paper, much of which was about extra funding. The strategy then became embedded and, having learned best practice, teachers were allowed to get on with it.

Mr. Levitt: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Estelle Morris: No. The House will agree that I am taking far too much time.

I want to touch on two further issues. The first is teachers' pay, which is the source of the present dispute in London. I was pleased to hear the hon. Member for Ashford say that he does not agree with teachers taking industrial action—or industrial action that damages children. However, if teachers do not do their job, that damages children. It seems from what he said last Thursday that he was bordering on supporting the NUT strike in London—so be it.

Let us consider what has happened to teachers' pay in London. In general, pay for good, experienced teachers has risen by 30 per cent. since 1997. However, a teacher in London in the second year of the profession will get a

[Estelle Morris]

13.2 per cent. pay increase in September this year, because we have shortened the spine. Every teacher in London in the second year of the profession will get that rise, and it will not be spread over two years. Every teacher in London in the sixth year of the profession will get a 15 per cent. pay increase. By September, teachers who started teaching in London when we were elected in 1997 will earn 63 per cent. more than they did then.

Many teachers are worth their weight in gold, but in terms of delivering on public sector pay, we have rewarded them financially more than the Tories ever did. We have not staged pay increases; we have accepted every single recommendation of the STRB; we have introduced a threshold and we have seen a 30 per cent. pay increase over seven years. However, unlike any other serious pay increase in my memory of working in education, it has been accompanied by steady, sustained investment and a strong economy. Steady, sustained pay and investment in education have brought about current standards. That is what matters.

Mr. Chaytor: Are we not now discussing the bottom line to the debate about teaching recruitment and standards? Is it not a fact that, as the title of a Conservative website suggests, under the last Conservative Government, education spending was slashed year on year and as a proportion of GDP? Under this Government, has not spending increased in each of the past three years? However, does my right hon. Friend accept that some OECD countries, such as Finland and Canada, which perform better than we do have much higher education spending? Can she give a commitment that she will continue to push for higher levels in the United Kingdom as well?

Estelle Morris: My hon. Friend is right. Yes, other countries—strangely enough, some of them do not perform as well as we do—spend a higher percentage of their GDP on education. He will be aware of our manifesto commitment to increase investment in education year on year. He referred to the Tory years. The only time that the Tories increased education spending as a proportion of GDP was when GDP fell. The increase tended to be the result of poor outturns and poor productivity and not because the then Government decided to invest more out of generosity or a commitment to education.

I also wish to refer to pupil behaviour, which represents a real challenge not just to teachers, but to the whole of society. I tend to think that teachers reap the ill wind of the breakdown of discipline in many areas of our community and society. Some people do not give the issue much thought. We bemoan youth crime and the problem of drugs and their availability to young people, but those children end up in someone's classroom on Monday morning. That is the nature of the challenge facing schools, and we have to do all that we can to support teachers.

Although we have done a great deal, by no stretch of the imagination have we conquered the problem. In some schools, where the children suffer multiple forms of deprivation, are often subject to community and family breakdown and face the temptations of drugs being available on the streets in a way that they were not when I were young, and where there is huge family and pupil mobility, the challenge of getting behaviour right is more difficult than ever before. Our approach to the problem is to invest £600 million over three years on improving behaviour. That is why we have 1,000 learning support units and 1,500 learning mentors. That is why we have worked to ensure that excluded children no longer receive only two hours of education every week.

I will not accept from any Tory Member an assertion that before 1997 the Tory Government spent a penny farthing or expended an ounce of energy to support teachers in coping with problems of pupil behaviour. They did not. We have invested, and much of our investment has brought about good results, but we are not there yet—nowhere near. Ofsted has reminded us that although behaviour did not deteriorate this year, neither did it improve, and two years ago it declined. There is a real problem with no easy solutions. The Government have a responsibility, but so do mothers, fathers, families and community leaders.

Helen Jones: Does my right hon. Friend agree that one way to improve pupil behaviour is to use more classroom assistants to support and assist teachers? Some of the work I saw last week in Dallam community primary school, which is in a deprived area of my constituency, shows what can be achieved when classroom assistants are involved in helping pupils to modify their behaviour and they take some of the burden off teachers.

Estelle Morris: My hon. Friend is, as ever, right. Adults with a range of skills are needed in schools, and that is precisely what the poster was about. Schools in our communities need good teachers and good leaders most of all, but if we can supplement them with learning mentors and other adults with a range of skills, we have a chance of conquering what is often a vast cycle of deprivation in some of our most disadvantaged communities.

The Government seek to be judged. We will be judged on whether our investment and policies lead to children in our schools achieving better exam results and emerging as more rounded citizens, ready to take their place in the world. I am immensely proud of our teachers and all those who work in our schools. Between 1998 and 2001, key stage 2 English results rose by 10 percentage points, maths by 12 percentage points, GCSE results by more than 2 percentage points, and A-levels by 16 percentage points, and the number of students leaving school with no GCSEs fell by half a percentage point. That achievement is in large part due to the hard, solid work of everyone who works in our schools, but the Government have played a key role in leadership, innovation, investment and support.

The Opposition may not want to believe me. Let them look at the reports by PISA—the programme for international student assessment—and Ofsted. We have better teachers, more satisfactory lessons taught and higher standards than ever before. Not only do we have the finest ever generation of teachers, but we now have an education system that is raising its sights and increasing its expectations. My vision is to have an education system that starts in the early years and runs

throughout schooling so that children leave school committed to lifelong learning; a system that gives young people opportunities for further and higher education; a system in which everyone understands that it is both their right and their obligation to be committed to learning.

We have played a part. There is much of which are proud and much for which we are immensely thankful to those who work in our schools and education institutions. We know that we have not got there yet, but we have made progress from a very low starting point in 1997.

4.50 pm

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): I was pleased to hear—and to some extent impressed by—the Secretary of State's support for teachers, but I was disappointed that the hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) did not offer such support in his opening speech. I was also disappointed by his hardly mentioning higher or further education. He merely offered criticism, and seemed to think that by far the most important aspect of the higher education crisis is that the Government's review will be published rather later than was expected. I, too, am disappointed that the Government have not seen fit to push forward their review, and that so many people remain uncertain about their financial position on going to university, but there is much more to the higher education crisis than the slowness of publication of the Government's review.

I want to pick up on some of the Secretary of State's comments on teachers. Teachers, lecturers and others involved in education should be congratulated. They work very hard in often difficult and trying circumstances, and usually to the highest standards. I am disappointed that the Conservatives have chosen to talk about a crisis in education. The Government might not be delivering on their side of the bargain, but teachers certainly are—despite the fact that there are too few of them, despite their being the most audited, inspected and regulated teachers in Europe, and despite the Government's failure to invest adequate resources.

Too often, our teachers are undervalued and talked down to by politicians. The Conservatives were as guilty of that as new Labour is. The approach has been to name and shame, rather than to value and encourage. Is it any wonder that teachers resort to industrial action when the Government deny them the professional status that they deserve?

Mr. McLoughlin: Does the hon. Gentleman think that the job of teachers will be made easier by the policy of legalising cannabis use, which, I believe, he intends to follow?

Mr. Rendel: As a matter of fact, a lot of things would probably be made easier. Certainly, the legalisation of cannabis—if it takes place—is one way in which some of the problems associated with our young people could be reduced.

During my party's recent serious and mature debate in Manchester, the point was repeatedly made that a lot of the problems associated with drugs stem from the fact that we treat alcohol and tobacco—comparatively dangerous drugs—in an entirely different way from cannabis, which is less dangerous. If the Conservatives are not prepared to address the problem seriously and maturely, so much the worse for them.

Mr. Chaytor: The hon. Gentleman said that there are too few teachers, and that more are needed in the classroom. How many additional teachers—over and above the 10,000 promised in the Labour manifesto—would a Liberal Democrat Government provide? How much would that cost, and has the cost been budgeted for?

Mr. Rendel: The answer is 5,000, and the cost was budgeted for.

Mr. Chaytor: Is the hon. Gentleman saying that the Liberal Democrats would provide 15,000 additional teachers in total, and if so what would be the cost?

Mr. Rendel: We would provide 5,000 over and above the Labour party's proposal. I do not know the precise cost off the top of my head, but it was included in our manifesto. If the hon. Gentleman is determined to have the exact figure, he can look it up or I can write to him.

Mr. Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that, in Sheffield, the Liberal-Democrat controlled council has taken on 800 extra teachers whom the local newspaper said that it would not touch with a bargepole? Does not that strategy smack of desperation on the part of the council, and show that the Liberal Democrats do not know which way they are going?

Mr. Rendel: I am afraid that I did not understand that question, and we have taken long enough over interventions as it is.

Is it any wonder that we are witnessing a terrific recruitment and retention problem, given that the Government are denying up to 90 per cent. of schools the freedom to innovate? The other 10 per cent. will get the freedom to innovate only on the say-so of the Secretary of State.

Our education system is failing. The Government are letting it down because the concept of employability lies at the heart of their education and skills policy. Even if one accepts that narrow definition of what education is about, it is clear that the Government have failed. Last year, half our 16-year-olds failed to achieve the Government's benchmark of five good GCSEs, and 30,000 pupils left school without a qualification between them. There are 160,000 16 to 18-year-olds who are not in work, training or education. What is the Government's answer to that problem? It is the new deal.

I am a member of the Public Accounts Committee, which considered the National Audit Office report only the other day. That report found that 30 per cent. of people leaving the new deal programme have no recorded or known destination. The report also found:

"many of those who participated in the programme and found employment would have found a job anyway because of natural labour market turnover, the help available through other employment programmes, and the general expansion of employment in the economy."

There are two specific problems, and the first is the failure to invest enough. In their first term, the Labour Government spent even less on education, as a proportion of national wealth, than the Conservatives managed under John Major—4.6 per cent., compared with 5 per cent. I shall give some examples of the results.

Official figures show that £754 million needs to be spent on priority 1 school repairs, which are defined as urgent work that will prevent the immediate closure of

[Mr. Rendel]

premises, and/or address an immediate high risk to the health and safety of occupants, and/or remedy a serious breach of legislation. I accept the Secretary of State's contention that the problem has existed for some years. We have had under-investment for many years, and not only for the past five. However, this Government have failed to pick up on the problem sufficiently quickly.

Moreover, figures from the House of Commons Library show that public funding per student in higher education fell year on year during this Government's first term. By 2003-04, real-terms public-sector funding per student will be 7 per cent. lower than when the Conservatives were in power.

The second problem is the dead hand of central control. The Government want to run education from Whitehall—or, rather, from Downing street. The Education Bill now before the House of Lords is based on the novel proposition that more regulation equals more freedom to innovate. Clause 1 defines the Bill's purpose, stating that it is to

"facilitate the implementation by qualifying bodies of innovative projects that may in the opinion of the Secretary of State contribute to the raising of educational standards achieved by children in England."

That is, freedom will be benevolently bestowed on the say-so of the Secretary of State—but only for a few, as only 10 per cent. of schools will win earned autonomy. The Government insist that it is all for our own good, as happens in all cases of benevolent authority, and that we need not worry about the Government misusing the powers, because they would not do that. Of course, it is not in our hands to determine who might use such powers in future. Liberal Democrats believe that all schools other than those under special measures should be given the freedom to innovate.

The two fundamental flaws in Government policy—the failure to invest and the dead hand of central control—have led to several other problems.

Tony Cunningham: It is interesting that, in outlining their education policy, Liberal Democrat Members criticise the Conservatives' policy, or lack of policy. In Cumbria, the county council is run by a Conservative-Liberal alliance. Can the hon. Gentleman tell me which of the policies he agrees with?

Mr. Rendel: I am not sure which policies the hon. Gentleman means. If he is asking whether I agree with Liberal Democrat policies or Conservative policies, I usually tend to agree with Liberal Democrat policies.

I return to the problems created by the two fundamental flaws in Government policy. First, there is the crisis in the teaching profession. The 2000–01 Ofsted report reveals that problems in recruiting and retaining teachers have worsened during the past two years. Provisional figures show that the vacancy rate in English secondary schools has doubled in the past year, and in recent years the maintained system has lost around 10 per cent. of its teachers each year. More than one in five newly qualified teachers leave the profession during their first three years in teaching. Those problems are particularly acute in London and the south-east, owing to high housing costs, and in areas of high socio-economic disadvantage.

Rising pupil numbers and increased resource availability will create a demand for an extra 70,000 teachers by 2004, dwarfing the 10,000 promised by new Labour in its manifesto. Meanwhile, teachers are leaving in droves. Why? In response to a National Union of Teachers survey, 82 per cent. of teachers who had left the profession said that an important factor in their decision was the pressure of the work load. Fifty-six per cent. felt undervalued and undermined by negative publicity and constant criticism, which is stoked by the Government and the press. Sadly, teaching is now seen as a low-status profession. It never was in the past.

The Government's response is fast track, which last year cost the Department for Education and Skills £4,630,058 but recruited only 111 teachers into training. Ten of those have already left, several will not enter teaching and some have already accepted posts in the private sector. The cost per entrant is a staggering £46,000. The cost of placing a student on a postgraduate certificate of education course through the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service is £15.57. This year, the Government have allocated a further £8.53 million to the scheme.

Another problem, which Conservative Members did not mention, relates to the teaching of mathematics, science and technology. Three years ago, about one in 10 secondary school maths teachers had no subject qualification beyond A-level. Now as many as 45 per cent. of staff teaching the subject to 11 to 14-year-olds have limited knowledge of maths and little or no training in the subject. Ofsted found that only 77 per cent. of teachers who teach some mathematics in secondary school have a post-A-level qualification in the subject. UCAS figures show a steady decline since 1997 in the number of applicants for courses in biological sciences, physical sciences and engineering and technology. We are getting into a vicious cycle, which is a real worry for the future. The figures amount to a 17 per cent. drop between 1997 and 2001, or 12,000 fewer applicants.

That is ironic, given that creationism has been allowed to make a comeback in our school system. Will the situation at Emmanuel college in Gateshead be repeated as more schools come to rely on private funding? Is that the science teaching of the future? It is worrying that Sir Peter Vardy, the evangelical Christian entrepreneur who funds Emmanuel college, is investing £12 million in six other city academies. Science teaching is suffering enough without his intervention.

Mr. Andrew Turner: Is the hon. Gentleman saying that the Liberal Democrats would ban that viewpoint being taught in schools alongside Darwinism?

Mr. Rendel: Personally, I do not regard creationism as scientific in any sense, and I certainly would not want it taught as a scientific explanation of how the world was created.

Perhaps the worst problems are in higher education, although it was the matter least mentioned by the Conservatives. Since the 1998 reforms, average student debt has doubled from about £3,000 to £6,000, according to the Barclays student debt survey. Students now expect to graduate with a five-figure debt of as much as £20,000 according to the National Union of Students. The situation is particularly bad for students on longer courses.

The British Medical Association's annual survey of medical students' finances found that their average final-year debt had increased by 23.6 per cent. on the previous year, up to £13,350, and that more than 40 per cent. of final-year students had debts of more than £15,000. There is a further problem for students living in high-cost areas such as London.

The National Audit Office report on student participation confirms that young people from poorer backgrounds are significantly less likely to participate in higher education. That is precisely the problem that the Government think that they need to address, but are failing to address. The NAO report states:

"Since 1998-99 . . . final removal of the means tested grant is likely to have widened the gap between social classes."

What did the Labour party come to power for in 1997? Was it to widen the gap between social classes? That seems absurd, but, sadly, it has happened.

Forty-seven per cent. of full-time students now have to work in term time. According to the NUS, the average number of hours worked per week is 11. Research carried out by Newcastle university suggests that 35 per cent. of its students who have jobs could have achieved a higher grade for the year if they had not been in employment.

Two consequences follow. First, debt and the fear of debt are a big disincentive to young people who want to enter higher education. They also have an impact on the quality of students' university education once they get there. There are solutions, however. In Scotland, tuition fees have been abolished and means-tested grants restored. In Wales, means-tested grants have been reintroduced for further and higher education students. That makes a difference, and we can see the results. According to the most recent UCAS figures, the number of Scottish students applying to Scottish universities is up by 8.8 per cent., while the number applying to English universities is down by 4.5 per cent. Scottish students are voting with their feet. The contribution of Scottish students to the overall increase in applications is disproportionately high, with an increase of 8.8 per cent. overall, compared with just 2.7 per cent. in England.

Mr. Levitt: Under Liberal Democrat policy in Scotland, do not all students have to pay an exit fee on leaving university, whereas in England and Wales, half of all students do not pay such fees at all?

Mr. Rendel: That is not true. The exit fee will be paid by approximately the same proportion of people, because it will be paid on the same means-tested basis.

Mr. Andrew Turner: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Rendel: No, I have given way enough. I need to make progress.

The Government have announced a review of higher education. Indeed, the Prime Minister said recently in this Chamber:

"I am very happy to congratulate the Welsh Assembly on its decision . . . We are looking at how we can achieve a fairer balance between the contribution the state makes and the contribution students make . . . We are looking particularly at how we can help poorer students"—[*Official Report*, 13 February 2002; Vol. 380, c. 200-201.]

That is good news. Let us hope that the review does just that.

What about the famous 50 per cent. target? How is participation to be measured? Interestingly, we recently discovered exactly what the Government are going to do when they announced to the Public Accounts Committee something called the initial entry rate. Instead of looking at the proportion of 18 to 30-year-olds who are actually in higher education in 2010, when they come to measure the figure against their target, the Government are simply going to guess how many of that group will go into higher education at any time over the next 12 years. All that they will have to do is work out what increase they need to guess to meet their target, and, lo and behold, they will meet it. It could not be easier. That is not a calculation but simply guesswork.

Where are we starting from? What is the figure now? The Public Accounts Committee revealed that the Government seriously overestimated the existing participation rate. In her evidence to the then Education and Employment Committee a year ago, the Minister then responsible for higher education put the figure at 44 per cent., which was 6 per cent. off the Government's target. In evidence to the PAC, however, the permanent secretary at the Department for Education and Skills has admitted that the real figure is 41 per cent., 9 per cent. off their target.

Not surprisingly, the Government are gradually including more and more groups to meet their target. Government statements have variously defined the target as "50 per cent. going to university", "50 per cent. entering higher education", "50 per cent. having the opportunity to enter higher education" and "50 per cent. having higher-education experiences", whatever that may mean. Perhaps it refers to an open day to help people decide whether they want to enter higher education.

There are real problems in our education system, but there are things that we can do about them. We must remove the dead hand of central interference, and end the destructive notion that Downing street always knows best what is right for our children. We must value the professionalism of teachers and academic staff, and trust them to make their own judgments. We must provide genuine freedom, removing the constraints that hold back innovation and creativity throughout the system. Above all, if the original policy was "education, education, education", surely what the Government must now do is invest, invest, invest.

5.11 pm

Mr. David Miliband (South Shields): I am delighted to be able to contribute to this debate. I hope to describe some of the changes being made in education in South Shields, but also to illuminate some of the problems that I think should be the subject of national debate. This is an opportunity for some honest talking. I welcomed the tone of the speech delivered by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

I am sorry that the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) has had to leave. When I last appeared on a television programme with him, his first answer was so long that I had no chance to make my own contribution at the end. Having also spent some 50-odd hours in a Standing Committee with him, I must say that my sorrow at the fact that he could not open the debate

[Mr. David Miliband]

for his party today was tempered by the thought that, as a result of his modesty in not speaking, I might have a chance to speak myself.

I deplore the unremitting negativism of the Opposition motion and also the tone of the speech made by the shadow Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green). According to my calculations, he spent about 30 minutes denouncing everything about the education system, 12 seconds saying that his policies were under review and could not be revealed, and about a minute producing warm waffle about his long-term aspirations. I wonder what message that sends to the 430,000 teachers in the education system. I wonder what prospect they see of politicians having much to add to their daily work—sometimes a daily grind—given the negativism of the hon. Gentleman's approach.

The hon. Gentleman gloried in the fact that he is now best friends with the National Union of Teachers. In fact, his observations reminded me more of the NUT as it was when I was at school in 1981 or 1982 than of the more balanced statements that have emerged from some NUT leaders recently. I also think it unworthy of him to denounce achievements in maths in the motion and then to praise the national numeracy strategy, even claiming at one point that he had invented it. I suppose that we should be grateful for small mercies: unlike some of his colleagues, he did not call for the Secretary of State's resignation. None the less, the word "crisis" was bandied about several times, not just in the motion but in the hon. Gentleman's speech. Such hyperbole does no one any good.

Those of us who are interested in education have a common interest in ensuring that the fact that it is not currently appearing on the front pages of the newspapers does not mean that its importance is lost. I find it regrettable that the Leader of the Opposition has only once, to my recollection, chosen to raise education at Prime Minister's Question Time; those of us who care about it should make sure that it remains a top legislative and budgetary priority as we approach the Budget statement and the spending review.

My perspective is framed by experience in South Shields and the borough of South Tyneside. The area has a strong sense of community pride. It would not deny the existence of its problems, not least the second highest unemployment in Britain, but it has enormous potential. That is brought home to me every time I visit one of the 30-odd schools in South Shields; I have visited more than half of them so far.

The daily experience of education in South Tyneside simply does not tally with the picture presented by the hon. Member for Ashford. It tells a very different story—a different story about some of the things that are wrong, as well as about what is going well. The changes taking place in my constituency are significant and, in some cases, staggering. The delegated schools budget, which in 1996-97 was some £42 million, will next year rise to £64 million—a cash increase of more than 50 per cent. In concrete terms, that means more than £1,000 extra per pupil for books, computers and extra teachers, which are important for any thriving education system.

Next year, primary schools will receive around £2,700 per pupil. Secondary schools will receive £3,200 per pupil—as I say, that is up by about £1,000. For the under-fives, the increase has gone from £1,800 per pupil in 1996–97 to some £2,500 per pupil next year. For secondary education for those over the age of 16, the increase is from £2,400 to over £3,500 next year. The hon. Member for Ashford, the shadow Secretary of State, called the funding figures a myth. They are certainly not a myth to the teachers and pupils in my constituency.

The hon. Gentleman said that he agreed with the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) that public service budgets should be protected. He should listen more carefully to his own leader who, in an interview in the *Financial Times* in December, slapped down the shadow Chancellor and made it clear that tax cuts came before public service investment. Someone else said, rightly, that the Conservatives' website—Conservatives slash education—is a better indicator of Conservative education policy than the warm words of the shadow Secretary of State.

Another important aspect of educational improvement concerns the under-fives, where South Tyneside has traditionally had a strong record. One hundred per cent. of parents are offered a nursery place for their child. Some 88 per cent. take it up in a mix of public, private and voluntary provision. That has been supplemented for 2,000 families through the introduction of the sure start programme.

On primary schools, which were an important part of the contribution by the shadow Secretary of State, 30-plus primary schools in South Shields have embraced the national literacy and numeracy strategy. Significantly for a constituency of socio-economic disadvantage, the primary schools perform better than the national average in the key stage 2 tests. In the past six months, there have been positive Ofsted reports on Marine Park and Harton junior schools. That is an indication of the trend.

On teacher numbers, the situation outside London and the south-east is very different from that within it. There is a stable and committed teaching force in the north-east. Its work is complemented by 50 learning mentors and more than 190 classroom assistants, who take care of precisely the sort of bureaucracy and tasks that teachers do not want to do and in fact should not be doing, but who none the less make a vital contribution to dealing with some of the discipline problems that were mentioned in passing by the shadow Secretary of State. The learning mentors in Mortimore comprehensive school, which I visited last week, make a significant contribution to tackling some of the problems of poor discipline that are a serious issue for many children.

There is no point in denying the significant strains connected with recruitment in some subjects, but that should not be used as a basis for denouncing the whole approach to teacher education. I thought that the facts presented by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State were compelling in that regard.

In relation to adult skills, which the shadow Secretary of State did not mention at all, South Tyneside further education college has just been made one of the pathfinder centres of vocational excellence in Britain. About 16,000 students pass through its doors in any one year. Its specialism is marine studies; my constituency occupies the corner of the Tyne and the North sea.

The college is doing important outreach work into the community. Some 1,500 adults now have access to community places for learning through learndirect, which has not been mentioned today and which was helped by the individual learning accounts, whose demise I regret.

Those achievements are a tribute not only to the Government but to the thousands of people who work day in, day out—not just the teachers but the support staff—in schools in my constituency. They present a far more accurate picture of education in Britain than the overblown rhetoric of the Opposition, but it would be remiss of me to pretend that everything in the garden was rosy and that all the problems had been solved. That would be absurd. I would like to pick out four issues where local experience in South Tyneside can illuminate some national questions that need to be dealt with.

The first relates to the need to raise expectations in secondary schools. As I mentioned earlier, primary school performance in South Tyneside now outstrips the national average, but in secondary schools there is a significant dip in performance. Sometimes there is a dip straight after the holidays for 11-year-olds. By the time they enter the first year of secondary school, we can see that they are being turned off education. Despite a recent positive Ofsted report on Harton comprehensive school in my constituency, there remains a huge issue about how we tackle a low expectation/low performance equilibrium in too many of our secondary schools.

Mr. Mark Hendrick (Preston): Could I bring to my hon. Friend's attention a recent example from a visit to a low-expectation primary school in my constituency, which is providing a refuge for many children who live in problem homes where the parents are on drugs or are unemployed and on benefit? The children are sneaking out of the house to go to the school, which has become a refuge. However, when they go to Ribbleton Hall high secondary school, they find attendance difficult because they are locked into a culture of low expectation. Could my hon. Friend comment on his experiences of that nature in his constituency?

Mr. Miliband: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that interesting point. One of the significant things about English education that may be different from Scottish education is that the two transitions—first at 11 and then at 15 or 16—are points at which we lose far too many students from the education system. We lose their commitment and their interest. The example that my hon. Friend gives of pupils being given extra help up to the age of 11 who then slip back once they enter secondary school is a genuine problem in many constituencies. That lies behind some of the debate about the restructuring of the school year that has been started by hon. Friend the Minister for Lifelong Learning. Perhaps that will be one way of tackling the secondary dip, which is a significant problem.

The Government took some important steps in the last Parliament to tackle the serious problem of low expectations, first, in relation to target setting, where the determination to set ambitious targets for schools and pupils has been important in raising expectations; and secondly, in their determination to tackle the problems at key stage 3. It is too simplistic to talk about extending the literacy and numeracy strategies from key stage 2 into key stage 3. However, some of the principles that underlie the key stage 2 strategy—above all, the determination to learn from best practice as it is implemented by teachers around the country and then to spread that best practice—give an important example of how central Government can play a useful role in our education system.

At Mortimore comprehensive school, the maths teachers were clear that far from being over-regulation, the new key stage 3 strategy exposed them to best practice and helped them to improve their own provision.

Having said that, I do not believe that we can be in the least complacent about expectations, especially in areas of socio-economic need. The culture of high expectations needs to be reinforced, not simply in schools but in homes and in the community. I am delighted that South Tyneside local education authority, which last year failed its Ofsted report and is now under new leadership, has put at the centre of its new vision statement a determination to have high expectations of itself, as well as of pupils and teachers. If we are to have a culture of high expectations, it must apply to every institution in the education system.

It is also important to think long term. I wish to put on record some ideas that I think will be important in raising expectations, especially in areas where children do not have the exposure to university life that is perhaps the common experience elsewhere. First, in South Tyneside, two comprehensive schools are being closed to make way for a new school that is going to be opened in co-operation with the local further education college, creating a genuine 14-to-19 institution in the borough for the first time. That will break the divide at 16 which I believe does so much damage in the education system. That will contribute to a culture of staying on rather than dropping out.

The second idea concerns the role of universities. Many of our inner-city areas that have the poorest achievement levels are side by side with pioneering universities that are at the cutting edge of science and social studies. The role of universities in areas of poor achievement needs to be looked at more closely. I understand that the university of Teesside now requires that every undergraduate mentor a young person in the Middlesbrough area. That sort of interaction between university and school students is to be applauded.

I am pleased that the South Tyneside transformation commission, which was set up to consider the social and economic future of South Tyneside, is thinking about how to attract a university campus to the town. That would do a lot to raise expectations.

The second issue concerns the balance of targeted and general spending. There have been undoubted gains from the Government's determination to focus on literacy and numeracy in curricular as well as budgetary terms. Ring-fenced budgets have helped to deliver the improvements in primary schools. However, the undoubted benefits of ring-fenced budgets should not blind us to the problems that that can cause for head teachers. Their enthusiasm for the Chancellor's largesse every year in sending money direct to schools, creating free money for them to use as they will, seems significant as we think about the spending decisions ahead. The flexibility exists for head teachers to deploy resources as they want rather than according to Government diktat. The reduction of the standards fund from 42 separate categories to only six is an important step in that regard.

[Mr. Miliband]

In the context of the teachers' pay discussions, it is important not to pretend that delegated budgets end the need for tough choices about where money should be spent. However, this is the right context in which to think about the arguments on performance-related pay and funding above the threshold. It is important to recognise and remember that the threshold payments are fully funded by central Government—I am sure that the Minister will correct me if I am wrong. The issue at stake is what happens above the threshold.

Legitimate points are being made on both sides of the argument by good, committed head teachers and the Government that there must be a balance between ring-fenced funds and general expenditure. It is vital to have a dialogue between head teachers, who are committed and are proud of the way in which they implemented the Government's performance-related pay programme, and the Government, whose point is that, however much money there is, it will ultimately have to be deployed in different ways. There is enough common interest, given the extra money going into the system, to sort out the problem.

The third issue concerns how we compensate for social disadvantage in the funding system. I welcome the expansion of the excellence in cities programme; the quibbling about whether education action zones fall within the programme or are separate is not to the point. The important point is that we are expanding targeted provision on areas of socio-economic disadvantage. It is significant that relative social mobility in this country has not changed in 100 years. That is the central challenge for education as we think forward to the spending review, because children from lower socio-economic classes are disadvantaged.

In the context of higher education, I say to the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) that the main reason why children from lower socio-economic classes do not go into education is not student finance but performance in secondary schools. The best predictor of entry into university is GCSE performance rather than anything else. Our first priority is to improve performance in secondary schools.

The shadow Secretary of State did not mention training. I am disappointed that individual learning accounts were not sufficiently successful and did not overcome the problems that ultimately forced them to be closed down. The principle of ILAs, to empower adult learners, is absolutely right. Skills, however, need to be linked to work. The work of the north-east maritime and offshore cluster is determined to build a centre of excellence in offshore and estuarial industry in the north-east. There is a unique opportunity to create a regional and sectoral approach to the revival of individual learning accounts, and I hope that the Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth (John Healey), will look favourably on this in future.

On recent visits to France and Germany, I was struck by the huge national debate about the failings of the education system. The shadow Secretary of State told us about his visit to Germany; when he flashed open the issue of *The Teacher*, I saw the headline "Deutschland über Alles" as a description of Germany's education system.

Mr. Andrew Turner: Unter.

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: Unter.

Mr. Miliband: I thank the hon. Gentlemen for their correction. In this context, it is not "Deutschland über Alles". The evidence is that the UK is doing better for 15-year-olds, which is a significant compliment to our teaching force.

It really takes gall for the party that cut education spending to below 5 per cent. of gross domestic produc. to complain about the money available for teacher retention. It is the ultimate hypocrisy for a party that completely ignored the needs of inner-city education now to quibble about how education action zones are organised. It is record-breaking amnesia for the party that took us to 42nd in the world education league now to lecture us about standards. It is also bad politics for the party that was 40 per cent. behind the Government in its education performance in the last MORI opinion poll to be all bluster and no humility. It is time for that party to listen a little more, and lecture a little less.

In the end, there is no value in an Opposition who cannot see improved performance in front of their own eyes. The Government can set a better example—listening, learning and adapting their policies on the basis of what is happening on the ground. I hope that the Minister will respond positively to some of my ideas.

5.31 pm

Mr. Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater): Having listened to the hon. Member for South Shields (Mr. Miliband), I wonder whether there is an urban-rural divide on education and skills. When individual learning accounts crashed and disappeared, many people were disfranchised. My constituency covers much of rural Somerset. My constituents could not get to Taunton, where the providers were located. ILAs had provided money for transport, but when it was no longer provided many of my constituents lost their places and, through no fault of their own, could not continue their further education. That problem has not been rectified. People have to travel 40 miles to a place of further education, without proper rural infrastructure.

Mr. Levitt: I am delighted to hear the hon. Gentleman praise a Labour initiative and that he wants ILAs to return in improved form. What provision did the Conservative Government make for his constituents before ILAs were in place?

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: ILAs were a complete disaster—and they were got rid of because they were a disaster. If the hon. Gentleman had listened more carefully, he would have realised that his party disfranchised a major part of my constituency. I can

assure you that people working in further education, especially FE colleges, are extremely cross about that. It is your fault.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. The word "you" can be used only in respect of the Chair.

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: I am sorry, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I apologise, too, to the hon. Member for High Peak (Mr. Levitt). I meant that the failure was due to his Government's inactivity.

People from rural areas being excluded from further education is not the only problem. In one part of my patch, there is only one college. A child who is excluded from that college has nowhere else to go. Children cannot get to another school, because there is no other school in the area. Somerset county council has tried to provide for excluded children, but because resources are tight—the position in rural areas has worsened over the past few years—no provision has been made for children who cannot be taught in mainstream schools.

One might say that few children from rural areas are affected, but 124 of the 1,200 pupils at West Somerset college have special needs, which gives us some idea of the scale of the problem. There is no easy way of excluding children. We are told that they can go to their nearest further education college, but in my constituency Bridgwater college is nearly 40 miles away, and the lack of funding means that it cannot attract teachers. For years, every school in my area has applied for teachers, but simply cannot get them. Rural people may have quality of life but they lack the ability to further a career if they are ambitious. Such people understandably go to urban areas, but that does not help the rural areas that I represent.

All the colleges in my area are applying for special status. Resources are so depleted that they feel that they must raise the £50,000 required to apply for that status. One has acquired it, two more are in the process of doing so, and the other three are starting to raise the money. Local businesses in west Somerset raised £65,000 in three weeks. People's concern about the quality of their children's education was such that they felt that they had no choice but to put their hand in their own pocket as the Government will not provide the money.

What will happen to the colleges in my area? There are three: Somerset college of arts and technology, Bridgwater college and Richard Huish college. They are now in competition owing to the lack of resources. SCAT in Taunton has decided that it cannot compete with Bridgwater college and has cut courses and numbers. Bridgwater college is doing well as it has a tie-up scheme with the University of Plymouth—complicated or what?

Surely we must keep education simple so that children know where they will be from start to finish. If they do not go on to university, they should be able to follow their chosen course of further education in their local area. However, they cannot do that in our area because of uncertainty about courses.

The lack of rural transport affects the competition between colleges. It is difficult for students to attend one of the best colleges because the bus service is so limited. Unless the service is subsidised by the college or the county council—neither can do so—pupils cannot attend all their courses, which is a major concern.

I have a few other concerns to raise, although I realise that many Members want to speak. I have received many representations from teachers in my constituency about the gathering of postcodes and children's names for the school census. Until 1999, the census was based on unique pupil numbers. I do not disagree with the collection of information—it is right to find out where pupils are and to assess whether high mobility has an effect on their achievement—but why do the Government need to collect the names, addresses and postcodes of individual children? When I questioned that, I was told that the data would be widely used by DFES policy divisions, other Departments, local education authorities, external agencies and education researchers.

Teachers have rightly pointed out that if a child's name is retained on a database, his or her chance of getting a job or of securing further education may be prejudiced by problems that are not relevant to their situation. Teachers question whether they should provide such information. One of them pointed out that to do so might breach the European convention on human rights; that is a great concern to teachers in my area.

Mr. Andrew Turner: Does my hon. Friend agree that an even more insidious aspect of the annual school census is the collection of ethnicity data on every pupil at a maintained school? The Government have made no commitment to wipe such information at the end of pupils' school careers.

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: I agree with my hon. Friend, although ethnicity information is not as important in my constituency as it is in some areas.

What safeguards are there for our children? How can we ensure that children's careers are not blighted, through no fault of their own, by leaked databases? If the secret service cannot prevent that in Northern Ireland, what hope is there for the DFES?

There has been much discussion of who is providing what. I discovered the learning and skills framework for action in the minutes of the meeting of the south west regional assembly held in Exeter on 1 March. Are regional development agencies and the regional assemblies involved in education? It seems that they are. The South West Regional Development Agency has a skills and learning select committee on advanced engineering, which has met eight times. Its aim is

"to ensure the highest quality"

in sectors such as nuclear power generation, automotive, marine, aerospace and petrochemicals, but we do not train children in those sectors in our area, so why are we spending money on such matters? I also wonder why Government money that should go to teachers is being spent on the learning skills intelligence module of the regional observatory—I did not know that we had one in the south-west.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): On nuclear power, I refer the hon. Gentleman to Berkeley research centre, which is just up the road from his constituency and which does excellent work and needs trained staff.

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: Yes, the hon. Gentleman is right to mention that centre, but why do the regional

[Mr. Liddell-Grainger]

assembly and the RDA have to do such things? Why cannot such things be done through further education and organisations dedicated to teaching, as opposed to unelected quangos?

I wonder about adult skills in the workplace. The RDA has now had vital discussions with 137 participants, and with 70 participants across the region. That is education by committee. We are all concerned about education, and if the Government want education to be taken seriously, they should not educate by committee but involve the people who understand—the teachers—not the leaders of various district and county councils.

Finally, I was amazed to notice that £3.7 million is being spent on considering where money should be spent on education in our region. Why is the Department for Education and Skills or the Government office for the south-west not doing so?

There is an education gap between urban and rural areas and resources are not reaching the children in the way that they should. In my experience, teachers are incredibly worried that there are not enough of them to provide the service in the areas that need it most, because people in those areas have the least choice in this country and are least able to get where they need to go.

5.41 pm

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): In opening the debate, the hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) criticised the Government for referring in their amendment to investment, but the debate is about investment—investment in the next generation. If we fail to make that investment, we will fail the next generation. In parlance that you and I understand, Mr. Deputy Speaker—I do not expect you to arbitrate on it from your position—the hon. Gentleman's problem was that he opened the batting, but fell on his wicket at an early stage. He missed a series of things that are happening, but my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Mr. Miliband) and other hon. Members helpfully informed told the House of the positive things that are happening in their constituencies.

I have been desperately concerned about the problems of a series of schools in my constituency—some of which date back to the beginning of the 20th century, and some even before that—whose facilities were no longer adequate to provide a modern education service. The imaginative public-private partnership that has been put together represents an exceptionally good investment, and I look forward to seeing the project develop.

There is an area of real deprivation in the town centre. Hon. Members who understand the chemical industry will understand that, close to chemical plants, there is now always a belt of housing where people live in relative deprivation. Years ago, those people commuted to the plants, but now, because of technology, the industry pays much higher wages to fewer people, and the people in that little belt of housing often find themselves socially excluded in various ways, not least in education. The education action zone in that community is having a profound effect on the quality of education.

A head teacher, who had complained to me about previous problems, told me how grateful he was that, as a result of the EAZ, he had six classroom assistants. He needs six classroom assistants. Many schools in better-off areas do not need such support, but he is dealing with a number of children who come from relatively disadvantaged backgrounds, so additional investment is desperately needed. The sure start programme is having similar effects in that community, as a result of real investment in the next generation.

My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary and I have been in correspondence about provision for a further education college that is in recovery. The business process that was being applied to the management of resources was not adequate. The Government, through the Further Eduction Funding Council, had to intervene and take remedial action. That action is leading to positive responses, including plans being drawn up for new college buildings.

Some Labour Members feel nostalgic about the Grange centre in my constituency. Before becoming an FE college, it was a secondary modern school that was attended by none other than my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister. I say to my right hon. Friend in the kindest way that I look forward to his classroom being demolished and replaced by a modern institute appropriate to the needs of students. The college has recently been inspected. It is now achieving standards that were not reached under the previous regime.

I am pleased that my hon. Friend the Minister for School Standards will visit my constituency in the near future. He will see two examples of the effects of investment. First, he will see an almost brand new primary school, Brookside, which has been open for only a few months. It has brought together—*[Interruption.]* Not that Brookside. The hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) clearly spends his early evenings watching soaps. Brookside primary school brought together two schools that were in a poor physical state. As a result of a rebuild programme, some imaginative architecture and some brilliantly imaginative teachers, education is being delivered in a brand new school that is a credit to everyone involved.

I am extremely proud that it is a Labour Government who have at last put resources into the Hammond school for dance, which is on the outskirts of Chester. For the first time, moneys will go to support state pupils at the Hammond school. With the greatest respect to my colleagues who represent constituencies in the south-east, it is about time that we saw such investment in the north of the country. It is the first time such investment has been made outside the south-east.

Last Friday, I gave a public lecture at Chester college in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester (Ms Russell). The college is participating in the training of 1,500 nurses. That is an exceptionally good use of the expansion of resources that has resulted from investment in higher and further education in my area.

I agreed with a couple of points made by the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel). We must raise the profile of the teaching of science, mathematics and technology. We must enthuse school children about the exciting possibilities that those technologies will bring to them. I daily see a lack of understanding of science in the community, which impacts on people's judgments about things that surround them.

On the positive side, work is being done by the Hadley centre on oceanographic research, about which children enthuse. The same is true of the work of the European

Space Agency, NASA and Bob Ballard's research project in submarine activities in the United States. Such work is at the cutting edge of science and has a tangible dimension; we need to give our children access to such things to ensure that they understand where the cutting-edge technologies are taking us and why their involvement in practical science will be of benefit in future. Otherwise, a generation will grow up getting their science from pressure groups and so on; that generation's science will be based on a bigoted view, such as the creationism to which the hon. Member for Newbury referred, rather than proper research undertaken in the laboratory and the world around us.

I would not stop the observations of people who regard themselves as creationists being explained to children, but I would use properly taught science to put those observations in context. For example, the next step above the one bearing the plaque about Charles I's trial in Westminster Hall contains a wonderful coral fossil; science can be used to explain cogently that that fossil is more than 200 million years old, not 4,000 years and a few days. Such science, taught properly in schools, can help to excite the next generation.

The Government have done a huge amount to apply technology in schools. At Brookside school, which I mentioned earlier, the internet, including internet whiteboards, is an immensely powerful tool. We must make sure not only that our pupils are ready to grasp that tool but that our teachers are properly equipped to deal with those technologies and can pass on their benefits to their students.

In conclusion, I am sure that the Under-Secretaries of State for Education and Skills, my hon. Friends the Members for Bury, South (Mr. Lewis) and for Wentworth (John Healey), are pressing their case firmly in the comprehensive spending review. I am sure that most Members would back them solidly to maintain the pressure for continued investment. The Government have made such investment in the past four and a half years, but if that does not continue, standards will decline. That point impacts on some of those made by the hon. Member for Newbury, who was right that people's perceptions of education are based on a system in which there has been poor investment for a couple of generations. The advances that my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields sought to promote cannot take place unless we have a Government who continue to make a positive investment in the next generation.

5.53 pm

Mr. Boris Johnson (Henley): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in this debate. No Opposition Member wants to denigrate the teaching profession. I was briefly a teacher in Australia, and know how hard teaching is; I had a tough time of it. I shall shortly concentrate on an issue pertaining to my own constituency, but I cannot resist holding the Government to account for the manifest failings of their teaching policies.

The Government promise, to which the Liberal Democrat spokesman alluded, has a hollow ring for those of us who have children in state education in inner London. The Government promised "Education, education, education," but last week, my children were not in education at all; they were knocking around at home. I have no hesitation in using my children as a political football, because they always use me as a football. The Government should apologise to those of us with children in state education in inner London; despite their promise of "Education, education, education", they have devolved it to us. What greater failure of government could there be than to precipitate the first strike of the National Union of Teachers in 30 years, resulting in my family having educate our children at home last Thursday?

Anybody who listens to teachers, as I do in my constituency, and hears their horrendous tales of top-down control and having to fill in forms, knows that, contrary to the Government's assertions, the Opposition have good ideas for alleviating those problems.

Mr. Michael Foster (Worcester): Name one.

Mr. Johnson: Here is an idea for the man who wants to ban fox hunting, which I offer in all humility. It may not be as good as some of the brainy ideas of the hon. Member for South Shields (Mr. Miliband), who went on about benchmarking, best practice and socio-economic indicators—there was some good and interesting stuff about low expectation thresholds and so on—but I am genuinely interested in the Government's response to it. When I visit schools in my constituency, I am struck by the lack of something that teachers had when I was at school: respect, in the words of Ali G—*[Interruption.]* The groans of Government Members are interesting; I suspect that, sadly, they are congenitally opposed to the solution that I am about to give.

Head teachers in my constituency tell me that they cannot oblige children to spend half an hour picking up crisp packets as punishment for a misdemeanour, because their parents will come to the school and get stroppy. They have no authority any more. It may be pompous of me to talk about respect in the classroom, but I think that, having taken the trouble of being elected to Parliament, I am allowed to be pompous. It is important to restore respect. I am earnest in wishing to know whether or not the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Wentworth (John Healey), agrees that that is a fundamental problem in our schools.

Mr. Hendrick: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that many of the kids at school today are the children of people of my generation? Twenty years ago, when my generation was looking for work, there were 4 million unemployed people; our generation did not get much respect from the previous Government. Kids today are the children of those parents.

Mr. Johnson: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for reiterating the old cry that it is all society's and, presumably, Mrs. Thatcher's, fault. Personally, however, I do not think that she is to blame. There has been a calamitous falling-off in the respect in which teachers are held. Teachers used to be people who did not just impart instruction, but were treated with dignity, honour and respect by their charges. It would be a good thing if that respect were restored. We should give back autonomy to teachers, as my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) said, as well as the ability to discipline children; we should restore the old assumption that teachers, not children or parents, tend to be in the right.

David Taylor: I thank the hon. Member for Pomposity on Thames for giving way. How did the previous

[David Taylor]

Government, whom he supported, show respect for teachers, when they allowed class sizes to become unacceptably large and teachers to teach in schools, laboratories and classrooms that were 30, 40 or 50 years out of date? Only recently has that problem begun to be addressed.

Mr. Johnson: It ill becomes the hon. Gentleman to return again, as his hon. Friend the Member for Preston (Mr. Hendrick) did, to the so-called derelictions of the Conservative Government, when it is the present Government who have produced the first NUT strike in 30 years and who are depriving my children of the education that they promised. *[Interruption.]* I will not take sedentary interventions from a chap of whose identity I have no knowledge.

I promised to speak about a problem pertaining specifically to my constituency, Henley, and to south Oxfordshire, so I shall pass over my other objections to the Government's generally lax policy on education, particularly their divisiveness and chippiness in respect of Oxbridge admissions. The Government allegedly intend to introduce a 67 per cent. quota for admissions from the maintained sector. I should be interested to hear the comments of the Under-Secretary, the hon. Member for Wentworth, on that.

I am delighted to see the Minister in his seat. We have become old friends in the course of the unfolding catastrophe of the individual learning accounts. Some hon. Members may not be familiar with the disaster of the ILA affair. This is how it went: from September 2000, anyone could avail him or herself of £200 to cover the cost of computer training, a very good thing which we all, in principle, support. People dialled up a website, entered their name and supplied the name of their learning provider. They then received an ILA account number and could claim their £200 from the state.

It will not amaze the House if I say that the scheme was an invitation to fraud. In order to find a learning provider, people merely had to look in the mirror. It later turned out that a CD-ROM was available with ILA numbers to help people rip off the Government. The scheme was expected to have 1.1 million subscribers; it eventually had 2.5 million. It went 30 per cent. over budget and those who have reason to know say that the total cost was in excess of £550 million, half of which was defrauded from the Government by Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck, Del Boy Trotter and assorted other alleged purveyors—

David Taylor: And the Boris Johnson school of journalism?

Mr. Johnson: The hon. Gentleman should withdraw that assertion. I came nowhere near to defrauding the individual learning account system. My entire purpose in the debate is to speak in favour of those who honestly entered into deals with the Government and found themselves ripped off by the Government's breach of promise.

On 21 July 2001, the Government announced that the ILAs would continue "into the new era", but the gurgle of money down the drain turned into a roar and on 24 October, the ILAs were suspended, with a closure date of 7 December. By 23 November, the panic in Whitehall was so great and the sums lost were so huge that the scheme was brought to a sudden and juddering halt. It turned out that it was so riddled with fraud that it could not go on another day. I understand that the fraudsters had penetrated the central database of Capita, the firm contracted to run the scheme, and were simply looting it at will.

The Minister has been generous with his time and has been helpful in my inquiries so far. Can he tell us what steps are being taken to penalise Capita, a firm with close links to the Government, and which paid £50 million to run the ILA scheme? It was a spectacular failure of administration. Why was Capita hired, when it had a history of epic bungling? For example, it was put in charge of administering Lambeth's housing benefit. Lambeth later cancelled the contract and pursued Capita for its fee after it emerged that there was a backlog of 30,000 claims and no fewer than 113,000 unopened letters. Many other councils had similar experiences with the company.

What steps are the Government taking to penalise the bunglers that they hired, and what steps to compensate the many hundreds of honest learning providers who have been faced with financial ruin because of the Government's panic-stricken pulling of the plug? We still do not know why it was necessary to close down the ILA scheme in November, rather than to modify it, make it fraud-proof, and allow the bona fide firms to continue.

People took out loans or remortgaged their houses and invested huge amounts of their own time and money, in the belief, backed up by constant Government assurances, that they were supplying a service that the Government not only desired but would help to pay for. They have been treated most shabbily. I speak not just for the Henley community online centre, which has been forced to close, but for about 1,000 other such companies across the country, which, as the Minister well knows, employed about 4,500 people. About £50 million of investment has been taken out of higher education. We still do not know how or when it will be put back. Though I have taxed the Minister before on the question, I should be grateful if he offered some clarification at the end of the debate.

Where is the compensation for those whose legitimate expectations inspired by the Government were frustrated, and where is the replacement scheme? If the Government are really committed to higher education, we will have a son of ILA; if not, many hundreds of thousands of students and hundreds of firms will learn the same lesson about the Government as the disappointed parents of London did: that Labour promised far more than it could deliver, and when it found that it was falling down on its promises, it ratted on them without so much as turning a hair. If that is how the Government honour their undertakings this time, they cannot expect to be believed in the future.

6.6 pm

Mr. Tom Levitt (High Peak): I am grateful to the Opposition for calling the debate today. It is not long since we had a debate on education in Opposition time, and on that occasion I took 24 minutes, as I recall, to describe some of the major improvements that have taken place in High Peak and Derbyshire since the Government

came to power. I got so excited in my enthusiasm that the only reason I sat down was sheer exhaustion. The opportunity to carry on where I left off is a temptation, indeed.

I remember describing to the House the four new schools that we have had in my constituency in four years; the fact that more than half the schools have had extra classrooms, extensions or major capital investment; the fact that in Derbyshire we had the worst key stage 1 class sizes in the country, and we now have no child in an infant class of more than 30; the fact that we now have the highest standards of achievement ever in our schools in Derbyshire; the fact that we have had single regeneration budget cash to tackle the shortfall in adult literacy; and the fact that we have had better than inflation standard spending assessment increases in Derbyshire education spending every year. The House knows these things. They are established facts.

David Taylor *rose—*

Mr. Levitt: I know what my hon. Friend is about to say, but I shall allow him to intervene in any case.

David Taylor: I thank my hon. Friend for giving way. I am sure that his A-level in telepathy was worth while. Yes, I am about to point out that Leicestershire, Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire and other shire counties receive substantially smaller amounts expressed in terms of SSA per primary school pupil and per secondary school pupil. We are 6 or 7 per cent. adrift of the average county and 13 or 14 per cent. adrift of Hertfordshire. Does my hon. Friend, like me, look forward with some anticipation to the ability of the new formula to redress that injustice?

Mr. Levitt: Indeed. Unfortunately, the matter is not within the remit of the Department for Education and Skills. There is no point in reforming the defunct Tory system of SSAs, unless it is done in a way that will benefit people in the consistently underfunded counties such as Derbyshire and Leicestershire, as my hon. Friend explained.

Mr. Kerry Pollard (St. Albans) *rose—*

Mr. Levitt: In the spirit of democracy, I shall let a Member from Hertfordshire intervene.

Mr. Pollard: I thank my hon. Friend for giving way. In Hertfordshire, our costs are very much higher than in other counties. That has been recognised, and that is why we get the extra SSA. Does he accept that?

Mr. Levitt: I accept that teachers are paid on a national pay scale, that Hertfordshire teachers and Derbyshire teachers are paid on the same rates, and that the vast majority of the education budget goes on teachers. My hon. Friend and I could continue the discussion in private, perhaps.

I shall continue with the list of achievements. As a former teacher, I congratulate the Government on the fact that they have taken seriously teachers' arguments about work load. I accept the argument that there are teacher vacancies not because we have a historic shortage of teachers, but because we have created new teaching opportunities faster than we have been able to fill them. I am delighted to say that in the primary schools of High Peak, we are seeing the benefit of classroom assistants. Teachers in those primary schools tell me that they did not think that classroom assistants could produce such a benefit, how grateful they are that they have them, and what a wonderful job they can do to add to the community life of the school.

Earlier, hon. Members referred to the number of people who qualified as teachers but who are no longer teaching, and to the drop-out rates. I commend my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's reply. But there will be teachers who, like me, started to teach in the mid-1970s, who will recall that at that time there was a three-year watershed, and the number of teachers who qualified then and who were still in the job five years later was not that high. I suspect that it was not even as good as it is today.

In the 1970s, teachers who did not feel satisfied had somewhere else to go. Throughout the recessions of the 80s and 90s, teachers who, after a few years, felt that teaching was not the job for them, did not have the same opportunity to get out. Given that we are now retaining teachers at an historically high level at a time of a thriving economy, when we all know that we are unlikely to end our career in the profession where we started it, our achievement is significant.

No teachers have complained to me that they have received the £2,000 bonus unjustifiably, and the pay increases for the average classroom teacher during the past few years will ensure that, when we address the work load issue and other things that will benefit teachers, the retention level will be still higher; and we will have well motivated teachers with high morale contributing to the excellence of the service that is provided.

I return to the point that I made earlier to the hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) in an intervention about teacher morale. When I was on Derbyshire county council from 1993 to 1997, there was only ever one item on the agenda, and that was cuts. Year after year, we were forced to cut our education budget as a result of the Government's use of the iniquitous SSA system, to allow class sizes to rise, and to decimate our youth service—a non-statutory provision within the education budget; in short, we let our education service go to seed. I am delighted that that situation has been reversed and I look forward to that progress continuing.

I want to touch briefly on two areas that I was unable to cover in my previous contribution on this subject during an Opposition day debate; they are higher education and—the hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Johnson) will be pleased to know—independent learning accounts and adult learning generally.

On higher education, I want to tell the House of another success story. Shortly after I was elected to this place, I helped to negotiate the merger between the High Peak further education college and the university of Derby, one of the first mergers of its kind. It is already a success, not just because of the prestige of the degree courses provided but because the university has been enabled to develop in a new and comprehensive way to serve a rural community. The university has now pioneered distance learning. It has outposts in factories, community halls, libraries and even pubs throughout Derbyshire, where people can access courses online, particularly those that are vocationally oriented.

[Mr. Levitt]

At the same time, the university has acquired our most famous and prestigious historical building, the Devonshire Royal hospital in Buxton, with a dome bigger than almost any other dome of its kind in the world. It is a beautiful building that the university is developing into a brand new campus, saving our heritage site, and delivering in the centre of Buxton, not just for High Peak but for the whole country, high level courses in subjects at the heart of the local economy, such as sustainable tourism and hospitality-related issues. The most important aspect of the university is that it is bringing real education opportunities to ordinary people, whether from a traditional university background or otherwise.

It has been fascinating to hear Opposition Members' views on individual learning accounts. They are right; what has happened is an embarrassment, and there is no getting away from that. It should not have happened. But they were over-subscribed. They were brought in to provide a service that had not hitherto been provided. Independent learning accounts gave many ordinary people their first opportunity. It was the first time since they had left school that they had got the message that education was for them. With a £200 computer literacy and information technology course, people had the opportunity to further their professional development and vocational ambitions, in many cases finding that an extra dimension, an extra value, had been given to their lives. People on doorsteps have said, "Thank heavens for the ILA. Thank heavens I went back into education." Having done one course, they have gone on to do another.

In my constituency, there has also been the excellent sure start initiative; this nursery scheme, which I commend to hon. Members, will shortly bring adult learning within its framework. Those parents who are benefiting from sure start will find opportunities for learning themselves in parallel with their children, and I commend that excellent initiative to others.

Today, education is open to all. ILAs, the university of Derby and the learning and skills council are co-ordinating post-16 education generally. The Minister will know that Derbyshire has one or two problems with the funding of the learning and skills council and the post-16 budget, and I am sure that he or my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State are about to sort those out—I look forward to that. I certainly look forward to the replacement of ILAs with something more sustainable that takes the values of ILAs and applies them more widely.

I look forward, as my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Leicestershire (David Taylor) said, to the end of the SSA system, and to a fair, transparent and constructive system that will get rid of that nasty, divisive, politically corrupt system that we used to have under SSAs, when counties such as Derbyshire were singled out for bad treatment by the Tory Government year after year. Next April will see the end of the SSA system and I am confident that we will have a much fairer and more transparent system which will be another break with the past, another break with the Tory tradition of cuts, and another opportunity to invest, invest, invest in education for all.

6.17 pm

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): I am interested to hear of the enthusiasm of the hon. Member for High Peak (Mr. Levitt) for changes to the SSA system. As a representative of a constituency that does not always see itself as part of the south-east, I echo the concerns of the hon. Member for St. Albans (Mr. Pollard). Where will the money come from? Will it be drained from the education authorities in the south-east, and particularly in London? With the London elections coming up, it behoves the Government to answer that question. If more is going to Derbyshire and other areas, more will come from somewhere else, and I should like the Minister to answer that point.

I want to devote most of my time to ILAs. I have a letter from Mrs. Barnes of Cowes who says:

"Thirty-five years ago I left school"—

she then gives her age—

"I hadn't taken full advantage of or appreciated my education but now I feel I had been given a second chance . . . Teachers at my Secondary school thought I would not amount to much. I can proudly say under the ILA scheme and dedicated team of tutors I am fully versed in Sage Accountancy for Beginners and Intermediate level, database and publishing, the prospects are good for me; I now manage a small roofing company".

Another of my constituents says that she can now get a part-time job using what she learned in the ILA system. She says:

"If I had not done this training I would still be looking for a job."

Yet another of my constituents says:

"I had been working in a shop for 10 years and had got very bored with it and I have always wanted to do office work. I attended the courses so I could get some experience behind me. I am thrilled to have passed six exams with distinction."

In quoting those constituents, I am illustrating not only some of the successes of the ILA scheme—it is only fair to recognise them—but the aspirations of many people who have not had the benefit of the education that many hon. Members on both sides of the House share. Unfortunately, the Government have damaged those aspirations and have let down many other people who have taken advantage of the ILA system, and they have let down the providers as well.

I shall quote some more of my constituents. A gentleman who had benefited from the ILA scheme but who is worried about what will happen in the future said:

"There aren't many, if any, other courses that the average working person can get help with."

A lady who was asked whether she was disappointed to see the scheme finish said:

"Very disappointed. When I first saw the scheme advertised I thought it was too good to be true, a scheme that was actually helping employed people for a change at a price that was affordable."

Another lady who was asked whether she was disappointed said:

"Yes, very much so. There are very few, if any courses that can be taken if you are a working person. Cost is not a problem if you are highly paid or on benefit, but it is if you have an average job and only earning £5.72 per hour."

A gentleman whom I shall not name described the situation most graphically. When asked whether he was disappointed to see the scheme finish, he said:

"Yes! Low income people get kicked in the nuts again by central government."

That is because central Government have failed to introduce and maintain successfully what was a very good idea.

I congratulate Government on having the idea, and on the idea of a voucher for further education and training. The voucher idea is brilliant, and I wish that it could be widened to other disciplines, too. However, it had two fatal flaws. First, as my hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Johnson) described, the Government saw the scheme being abused, and they took precipitate action to close it, thereby losing the confidence of the users and the providers. Many of those people will not try again—having got halfway through a course, or having decided to embark on a course, they will have lost their confidence, and they did not have much confidence to start with. They will feel that the Government have let them down because of the panic with which they closed the scheme.

Of course I understand that there was fraud and abuse, although the Government seem to have had difficulty in describing exactly what is abuse and what is an enterprising new approach to marketing a scheme and getting new people to take advantage of learning who would otherwise not have done so. However, I am concerned that the Government went from their announcement on 24 October last year of the date when the scheme would be closed to closing it precipitately. I can only conclude that they did so because insufficient safeguards were built into the scheme in the first place.

My hon. Friend the Member for Henley mentioned Capita. Perhaps 180,000 unopened letters in Lambeth under Capita's regime was an improvement on the previous regime in that borough, or perhaps not. However, Capita has let down the Government and the users. However, the providers have also been let down, for the reasons on which my hon. Friend expatiated. The providers invested their money, time and energy—in some cases, they mortgaged their homes—and some of them have gone bust because the Government do not accept responsibility for that participation.

The Government were selling a "Government scheme" to a range of private sector providers, many of which are small businesses that can ill afford to offer the Government their trust and have it so badly abused. It is no good for the Government to say, "Don't worry, we had no contract with the small providers." If the Government let them down this time, as they have done, and if they see nothing wrong in letting them down—they do not—the small providers will not be available when the Government relaunch the ILA scheme, as I hope that they will do soon. The small providers will say, "Once bitten, twice shy." They will not get involved in a Government scheme of this kind unless there is a clear and unambiguous contract. I cannot hear what the hon. Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Ms Atherton) is muttering from a sedentary position. I shall give way to her if she has something useful to say.

Ms Candy Atherton (Falmouth and Camborne): Is the hon. Gentleman honestly trying to suggest that providers will not see opportunities to make money in a future scheme?

Mr. Turner: If they have gone bust—as many of them have done—they will find it difficult. If the hon. Lady is saying that they should have the same trust in the Government as they had under the previous scheme, I am sure that they will look into the history books and find that the Government pulled the plug on the providers and the users precipitately, and they will not get involved in a future scheme. Of course the big boys will get involved. It is good for big business, but it is no good at all for small businesses. It is good for the public sector, but no good for those in the private sector who risk their money, their livelihoods and their bank loans. That is one of the problems faced by the Minister in launching a new ILA scheme.

The second problem—that of the single target—is one on which I sympathise with the Minister, as he inherited it from his predecessor. The Government set one target only for the ILA scheme—1 million participants by 2002. Close questioning of Ministers, civil servants and Capita by the Select Committee on Education and Skills has revealed only one target for the scheme—membership. There was nothing about quality, need or targeting those most in need. That is not satisfactory. It is not satisfactory to use so much public money without any guarantee of quality. I genuinely sympathise with the Minister on that.

I also sympathise with the Minister—again, this was revealed in the evidence that Capita provided to the Education and Skills Committee—because the Government changed the basis of the scheme after Capita had been named as the preferred provider and had started to develop the computer scheme. The Government withdrew the connection with the learndirect list of registered providers, which was one of the quality mechanisms in place before the scheme was advertised. So, one month before the scheme was launched, the then Department for Education and Employment admitted that that connection could not be provided. Capita was let down, and the users and other providers of the scheme, as it turned out, were let down, too.

I find the Minister not guilty on the last two counts, but the Government are certainly guilty. However, I fear that I find both the Government and the Minister guilty on the first count of closing the scheme precipitately and in a panic, and of damaging the interests of users and providers.

6.28 pm

Tony Cunningham (Workington): Quite a lot of former teachers have contributed to this debate. As someone who taught in comprehensive schools for about 15 years, who has been a governor of several schools for about 20 years, and whose nine-year-old daughter is studying in a primary school at the moment, I honestly do not recognise the education system described by the hon. Members for Ashford (Mr. Green) and for Henley (Mr. Johnson). I shall not quote from briefings but talk about what is happening in my constituency.

I wish to refer to a secondary modern school that was built roughly about the time that I was growing up. It did not have a particularly good reputation, but it is now a specialist technology college. Just a few weeks ago, I was approached by a teacher at the Southfield technology college, who had tremendous pride in the college. As I said, the school did not have a particularly good reputation, but the teacher told me that the specialist technology college had just had its Ofsted report and the

[Tony Cunningham]

Ofsted inspector had said that it was the best school that she had visited in 18 years. The teacher, with a smile on his face and pride in his voice, told me that the college was now going forward as a result of Labour policy.

We had two further education colleges—one in Workington and one in Whitehaven—and the fabric of the buildings at both was deteriorating. However, the new Lakes college—it used to be called the West Cumbria college—was funded with £12 million of investment. It is superb. It is the first brand-new college for further education in the area and provides first-class education for the people of west Cumbria. Furthermore, £500,000 of investment went into a new all-weather facility at Cockermouth school, and I have seen new language labs, teaching facilities, science labs and drama facilities. I could go on and on. There has been tremendous investment in the schools in my constituency.

I taught for 11 years at Netherhall school, and returned there recently. I finished teaching there in 1994, but many of the teachers with whom I taught are still at the school. I accept that there are recruitment and retention problems, but they do not exist across the country. They are found in specific areas.

No one would dispute that there are challenges ahead. Teachers in my constituency say that they face distinct challenges, but they also point to the huge improvements in education. The Government and their policies are going in the right direction. As I said to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State earlier, the secondary head teacher of the school where I am a governor told me that he had never known a time when the quality of his pupils was so good. He said that the school could do so much more in years 7 and 8 because of the primary education that his pupils had received. Part of that involved the numeracy and the literacy hours.

Dr. John Pugh (Southport): If satisfaction is so prevalent in the teaching profession, will the hon. Gentleman explain why teachers are currently balloting on strike action?

Tony Cunningham: I have been talking about my experience in my constituency, and teachers are not balloting for strike action there. However, I remember that, when I was a teacher in Maryport in the 1980s, the NUT balloted its members on strike action. When I discuss education with my former colleagues, I recognise the problems and challenges. However, I also ask them to think back to the 1980s and when we taught together. I can think of temporary classrooms that should have been bulldozed 20 years earlier, but which were still in place. I remember holding fund-raising events not to raise money for a new sports centre, but to raise money to paint classrooms and for exercise books and text books. When I ask them to think back to the 1980s, they cringe because they remember that time so distinctly.

I also want to refer to resources. A head teacher recently told me that he had never known a time in which so much investment was going into schools and in which schools had so many resources at their disposal. Although Opposition Members would deny this, they have criticised the teaching profession. Some of the best primary and secondary schools in the country are in my constituency and the league tables demonstrate that. When we try to attract inward investment to my constituency, one of our selling points is the quality of education provided. We say to people who want to invest, "Come to this constituency because of the quality of life and because of the quality of the primary and secondary education that your children will receive."

Like my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, I pay tribute to the teaching profession. It might be argued that, as a former teacher, I am bound to do that, but teachers do an incredibly difficult job incredibly well. The same applies to the support staff, the governors and everyone associated with education.

On recruitment and retention, I agree with the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel). One way of ensuring that we do not retain or recruit is to act like the Opposition and run down education, criticise teachers and say nasty things about them. If the Opposition want to recruit teachers and provide them with respect and status, I hope that they will join me in saying that teachers do an incredible job.

Challenges lie ahead and, of course, everything is not right in the education system. However, the Government have put the building blocks in place and genuine improvements have occurred in primary and secondary schools. Let us give credit to the Government and pay tribute to the enormously hard-working teaching profession.

6.36 pm

Alistair Burt (North-East Bedfordshire): This has been a wide-ranging debate characterised by passion for the subject, which is not unusual. It is no surprise that we have ranged widely, because wherever one considers education and those who are working hard—both students and staff—we find that the Government have put obstacles in their way.

I wish to make two points at the outset. First, no Conservative Member has criticised teachers. However, under a democracy, it is still possible to criticise the Government, and that is what we have done. Our support for teachers, particularly bearing in mind the burdens on them, is fulsome and genuine. Secondly, there are examples of good and bad practice at any time in the education system, under previous Governments or this one. That should not surprise anyone. However, the Secretary of State's repeated claim that 1997 was some sort of year zero is becoming increasingly wearing. The public find it incredible that nothing good happened before 1997, and the educational establishment is not fooled. The narrow-minded amnesia that she displays is wearing thin.

The issue before the House is whether the charge made by my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) has been proved. He alleged that our motion was justified because of Government failure, incompetence, broken promises and weakness. To what extent have those charges been proved in the debate?

First came a memorable speech from the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel). We found out that, should he become Secretary of State for Education and Skills, he will be considerably more relaxed than the present Secretary of State. He was smoked out by my hon. Friend the Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin), because the hon. Gentleman said that the smoking of

cannabis would make teaching easier. I have no doubt that he will reflect on the wisdom of his remarks, which caused surprise here and will, I suspect, cause considerable concern elsewhere.

Mr. Rendel: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way, because he misquoted me completely. I never said that the smoking of cannabis by teachers would make them more relaxed or that the smoking of cannabis was a good idea in itself. I said that a change in the law so that cannabis was no longer illegal in the way that it is now would be a good idea and make the whole of society work a lot better.

Alistair Burt: The hon. Gentleman may prefer to consult *Hansard*, and then have another crack at it. I suggested that it was put to him that the smoking of cannabis would make teaching easier, with which he agreed.

We will draw a happy veil over the rest of the hon. Gentleman's speech, other than to pick out his admission that the Liberal Democrats in Scotland have not abolished tuition fees in higher education, but merely put them at the other end of the process.

Mr. Rendel: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Alistair Burt: No. The hon. Gentleman can consult *Hansard* again.

Mr. Rendel: That is a misquote.

Alistair Burt: I did not misquote you last time, and I am not misquoting you this time—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. The hon. Gentleman must use correct parliamentary language.

Alistair Burt: I beg your pardon, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I did not misquote the hon. Member for Newbury, who may refer to *Hansard* again in due course.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ashford focused on schools issues. He was supported by strong speeches from my hon. Friends the Members for Bridgwater (Mr. Liddell-Grainger) and for Henley (Mr. Johnson). The latter's speech was especially strong on bullying in schools, an issue of which, disappointingly, Labour Members made light.

Passionate speeches were made by Labour Members, including the hon. Members for South Shields (Mr. Miliband), who did his promotion prospects no harm, for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller), who made his usual sound and fair contribution, for High Peak (Mr. Levitt), who made interesting comments on mergers between higher education and further education colleges, and for Workington (Tony Cunningham), whose praise for the Government was so fulsome that even Ministers might have been embarrassed by it. The House will forgive me if I concentrate on three other issues.

Higher education is apprehensive. Ministers say little about the problems of recruiting and retaining academic staff and funding research, or about a funding gap that Universities UK suggests is now £9 billion, but they do respond to other stimuli. They are turning the unwarranted attack into an art form—indeed, it is almost a policy in itself. Universities are not encouraged in their efforts to increase access to and participation in higher education but regularly hectored and condemned for not doing enough. Ministers conveniently forget that the pool of well-qualified post-16 pupils from non-traditional university backgrounds is simply not large enough. Their cries of "elitism" uttered at every turn to deflect criticism are becoming wearing.

Students with debt problems, inspiring headlines such as "Debt grows ever bigger and even more painful", are met by the Minister for Lifelong Learning with a discussion of their drinking habits. That does not accord students, many from non-traditional backgrounds who work long hours outside their studies to fund their time at university, the support and respect that they deserve.

Mr. Hugo Swire (East Devon): Does my hon. Friend regret the emergence of a practice that affects one of my constituents: the selling on of student debt, in my constituent's case from Nationwide to Deutsche Bank? The student in question cannot ascertain from anyone what he owes and to whom he owes it. By the admission of his university office, the whole system is in "complete chaos".

Alistair Burt: My hon. Friend makes a fair point. If the Government concentrated on students real difficulties and concerns instead of making hectoring remarks about them, people would be much better informed.

Further education is a fantastic sector. Close to the need of students and local employers, FE colleges now teach a wider range of ability than ever before, and to an increasing extent, the pathway to higher education is through further education. Yet the Minister for Lifelong Learning decided not to encourage further education in recent remarks and speeches. Instead, she launched another unwarranted and silly attack that prompted an extraordinary response. Let me quote an open letter to her, dated 7 March, in which the chief executive of the Association of Colleges, David Gibson, writes:

"Dear Margaret,

I write to express the deep concerns and, in very many quarters, the absolute anger of those professionals committed to the teaching and learning of four million students in our Further Education sector at the ill-conceived and dangerously misleading information you provided to the media in pre-briefings, in your Department's press release and to the conference on Raising Standards in Post 16 Learning this morning."

He goes on to quote examples of good practice in further education that the hon. Lady had either wilfully or neglectfully failed to mention. A Minister in that sector cannot expect to be taken seriously if she is at war with everyone in it, from universities to students and those in further education. She should reflect carefully on the image and reputation she is gaining.

The bulk of my remarks will deal with the individual learning accounts scandal, to which my hon. Friends the Members for Henley and for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) addressed the substance of their remarks. It has been the most remarkable problem, caused substantially by Government incompetence. No one doubts that the idea was good—the hon. Member for High Peak mentioned people's enthusiasm for it—but that leads precisely to the point: those who needed ILAs most have been let down by the Government. That is becoming the Government's hallmark. The hon. Member for Falmouth and Camborne

[Alistair Burt]

(Ms Atherton) spoke about trust and whether anyone would trust the Government again. Those who have been let down will not trust them again.

To replace a voluntary training relief scheme that had been part of the Conservatives' overall education package for some years, the Government deliberately introduced a system of ILAs. The concept was perfectly right, but the mechanisms were fundamentally flawed, as the Government were told from the start. Let me read a few extracts from accounts of events in the Select Committee on Education and Skills. Under the heading, "Learning accounts 'not robust enough'", one article states:

"The government training grant scheme was not robust enough to stop fraudsters taking advantage, Department for Education officials have admitted."

The second account states:

"Training providers say security on the government's training accounts scheme was so poor that crooks could have accessed people's account numbers by guesswork."

The third states:

"Further education officials say they warned in advance that ILA training grants would be exploited by quick-footed 'Ferrari Nick' characters.

They say there is a need to protect training funding from scam merchants who exploit loopholes in the system to make a lot of money very quickly."

Setting Ferrari Nick against the Trabant that is the Department for Education and Skills was no contest.

A scheme full of flaws, set up by the Government even though they had been warned about them, produced a wholly distorted market. Those already involved in training had to participate in ILAs, otherwise they would have had no business. Despite the warnings about the scheme, which gradually began to collapse, the Government had no systems in place to isolate and deal with small problems without destroying the whole scheme. As my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight said, the Government changed the parameters at a late stage and Capita could not deliver, so the whole scheme was lost. People who had students waiting to go on courses could not fulfil their obligations to them and had to meet the debts themselves.

Businesses have been lost, students have lost the chance of education, and jobs have been lost. Above all, the confidence of those needed to make the ILA system work has been lost. I cannot think of a more woeful disaster brought on by a combination of incompetence and a desperate desire to achieve a manifesto target at all costs, which was all that mattered to Ministers. The Government's hallmark is becoming the production of a target out of thin air—devil may care if it is not achieved and anyone is damaged in the attempt to achieve it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ashford set out to prove that the Government's education policy is in crisis because of weakness, incompetence, failed policies and inability to deliver to those who need it most. From what we have heard, that case is proved. Labour Members now have the opportunity to make a name for themselves. It is not true that the Whips respect the good boys: they respect those who are prepared to stand out and cause trouble. To Labour Members who know that the Government have let down their constituents, I say—paraphrasing Martine McCutcheon—"This is your moment. This is your perfect moment to say your piece." Too many people have been let down for too long and the Government's answers have been too poor. I invite the whole House to vote with the Opposition.

6.49 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills (John Healey): It is clear from today's debate and others that all hon. Members take an active interest in the schools in their constituencies. Fewer take such a close interest in their further education colleges, and not enough are aware of the skills needs of employers in their areas—a sad oversight, especially in view of the motion. Many hon. Members have spoken from personal experience and local knowledge. Some of the strongest contributions came from that perspective. My hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Mr. Miliband) made a typically reflective and wide-ranging speech, displaying a strong concern for his constituency. He pointed out that the delegated schools budget has risen by 50 per cent. since the 1997 general election—the equivalent of £1,000 a pupil. Importantly, he stressed the need for a culture of high expectations, particularly in constituencies such as ours, and the importance of focusing our resources and efforts on those who are most disadvantaged.

The hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. Liddell-Grainger) referred to concerns in his area about the school census. The purpose of the census is to give a clearer picture of the impact and operation of policies in one go, so that data collection is managed more easily and is less burdensome for schools to provide. He also expressed concern about security. Names will be held securely within the Department and accessed only by technical staff who have agreed to, and have been trained to, the required security levels. Outside organisations will be given access only if a clear need exists. In most cases, the data in question will be anonymised.

The hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Johnson)—I am glad that he has returned to his place—detailed his constituency dealings, as well as some general points about individual learning accounts, to which I shall return later. His comments were echoed by the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner), who has made a significant contribution to the Select Committee's inquiries. He gave a balanced account of his concerns, and his contribution was more measured than the florid phrases of the hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green).

My hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) spoke with authority about the chemicals industry in his constituency. I should tell him that I launched a new sector skills council in Aberdeen this morning, which will enable us to reinforce the influence of employers in the chemicals, petroleum and extraction industry over future skills and learning provision.

The hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) took us to task over what he described as our failure to deal with school repairs sufficiently quickly. I should remind him that, since 1997, significant repairs have been made to 17,000 schools, and we have trebled capital investment in schools. In 1996–97, £683 million was invested; last year, more than £2 billion was invested; and by 2003–04, the figure will rise to £3.5 billion.

My hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Mr. Levitt) spoke with the authority of a former teacher. He said that half the schools in his constituency have new classrooms

or have undergone major repairs. He also talked about the four new schools there, and pointed out that the highest standards ever have been achieved. My hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Tony Cunningham)—another former teacher—said that he did not recognise the Opposition's description of the education system. His view is shared by my hon. Friends and by many outside the House.

The hon. Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt), who wound up for the Opposition, touched on higher education, further education and individual learning accounts. I welcome his assertion that the concept of ILAs was perfectly right, and I shall return to the problems associated with them in a moment.

Those contributions were in contrast to that of the hon. Member for Ashford, who got the debate off to a dismal start. He accused my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State of myth making and public relations polish, but there can hardly have been a Secretary of State for Education who was more blunt-speaking, knowledgable, experienced and ready to recognise the reality of the challenges that we in the education system face. It is simply not credible to talk of crisis. As every hon. Member knows, on visiting schools in our constituencies we see more books, more computers, more classrooms and more staff than we did in 1997.

I was also disappointed with other aspects of Opposition Front-Bench contributions. The Department that I am proud to serve is called the Department for Education and Skills, and although the title of the Opposition's motion indeed refers to education and skills, the hon. Member for Ashford made no mention of skills. It was left to the hon. Member for North-East Bedfordshire to mention further education.

The UK work force are becoming better educated, but the demand for skills is growing and will continue to grow. Between now and 2010, eight out of 10 new jobs will demand level 3 skills or above. The employment rate for people with no qualifications is 60 per cent., and for those with level 2 qualifications or above, it is 80 per cent. However, 30 per cent. of our current work force do not have level 2 skills. A yet greater scandal is that 7 million adults—half those in work today—do not have the reading, writing and mathematics skills that we now expect of our 11-year-olds. That scandal has been left untackled for too long, and I am proud to say that—at last—we have a Government who are meeting that challenge. We are putting in place the necessary resources and a national programme, and tackling those basic literacy and numeracy problems by setting arguably the toughest targets anywhere in the education field.

As the Minister responsible for individual learning accounts, I shall now deal with them. As the hon. Member for Isle of Wight made clear through the testimonies of his constituents, ILAs were innovative and important and brought learning to many who had not been taught since they left school. Some 91 per cent. of ILA learning met or exceeded the expectations of those who took it up, and 85 per cent. said that it increased the training and learning options available to them. However, it was misused and abused by a minority of learning providers, who spoiled the process for their colleagues and for the learners whom they were supposed to serve.

Problems began to emerge in earnest over the summer, and we took steps to try to tackle them. We introduced a new learning provider agreement, removed 700 learning providers from the register, introduced new information for learners, ended the use of blanket application forms, and suspended learning providers who were misusing or abusing the system. Moreover, Capita and the Department introduced a joint compliance unit to try to deal with the problems. However, the design of the system did not allow us to stamp out abuse, so in the end we had no option other than to close the scheme. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I regret that. We are very conscious of the impact on learners and learning providers.

We are trying to do three things. First, we are trying to ensure that legitimate payments are made to legitimate providers for legitimate learning. We have paid £7 million of the £21 million that was claimed in respect of learning that took place, or was booked, before 23 November, when the scheme was closed. Double that sum—£14 million—has been claimed by 193 providers, but we are withholding it because we have serious concerns about them and are investigating them.

Secondly, we are investigating complaints against 672 learning providers. Our own special investigations unit is investigating 105 complaints, and the police are investigating a further 66. Some 45 arrests have already been made; 13 people have been charged, one of whom has been convicted.

I turn now to compensation for learning providers. From the outset, the decisions that learning providers made to take advantage of the scheme were business decisions, which they took for themselves. The Government were not, as the hon. Member for Isle of Wight asserted, selling the scheme to learning providers. There was no contract between the Department and learning providers, and therefore we are not considering claims for compensation for those providers.

I have been struck by the disappointment that has greeted the closure of individual learning accounts, but I have also been struck, very strongly, by the strength of the support and encouragement given to the Government to reintroduce a successor scheme, as we will do.

I return to the question of schools. I could recite the headline figures but, like every hon. Member, I know from what is happening in my constituency what a difference the Government's policies are making in schools.

I leave this thought with Opposition Front-Bench Members. As long as they overstate the case with talk of crisis, no one will take their criticisms seriously. They have no answer to problems such as the pressures of teacher work load. They have no answer to the problem of teacher retention and recruitment, other than to cut the number of circulars. They have no policies to reinforce standards in our schools. They have no contribution to make to the debate about employers' need for skills or reform in the further education sector. As long as all that remains, the Government will not take their criticisms seriously, and no one else will either.

Above all, the Leader of the Opposition is on record as approving cutting public service spending to 35 per cent. of gross domestic product. As a result, the hon. Member for Ashford cannot say that he would match our investment. As long as that remains the case, the Opposition will remain out of touch and irrelevant, with no one taking their points seriously.

[John Healey]

I urge my hon. Friends to reject this incoherent, irrelevant and incredible motion, and the arguments that we have heard this afternoon from the Opposition.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 180, Noes 322.

Division No. 200] **[7 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Cable, Dr Vincent
Cameron, David
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Donaldson, Jeffrey M
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hammond, Philip
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat–Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Leigh, Edward
Liddell–Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Mates, Michael
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Wilshire and
Dr. Julian Lewis.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Caborn, Rt Hon Richard
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis–Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit

Dismore, Andrew
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Irranca–Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Lloyd, Tony
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Price, Adam
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Ruane, Chris
Salmond, Alex
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Timms, Stephen
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wishart, Pete
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Fraser Kemp and
Mr. Ian Pearson.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 31 (Questions on amendments):—*

The House divided: Ayes 307, Noes 178.

Division No. 201] **[7.14 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen

Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis–Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Irranca–Davies, Huw
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Killoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Ruane, Chris
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Timms, Stephen
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Fraser Kemp and
Mr. Ian Pearson.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul

Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Cable, Dr Vincent
Cameron, David
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Donaldson, Jeffrey M
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gidley, Sandra
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hammond, Philip
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Leigh, Edward
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Price, Adam
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Wishart, Pete
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Cheryl Gillan and Dr. Julian Lewis.

Question accordingly agreed to.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House recognises an education system which is benefiting from an unprecedented period of sustained investment on an unprecedented scale, in parallel with the Government's strategy to raise standards through an ambitious series of reforms of the curriculum, the teaching profession and the organisation of schools; welcomes Ofsted's latest annual report showing the highest ever proportion of good and excellent lessons in schools, and the OECD's PISA Report that the UK performance was above the OECD average across all three domains of reading, mathematical and scientific literacy; notes the other tangible signs of increased investment and reform such as higher academic standards at primary and secondary level, the dramatic reduction in the numbers of infants in large classes, more teachers in schools than at any time in the last decade, extra resources and more people than ever going into Higher Education, with 45,000 new places since 1997; notes further the huge increase in the number of adults who are now acquiring basic skills and learning for their futures; recognises the clear commitment of the Government to address teacher workload in partnership with the unions and other agencies; welcomes the positive proposals the Government has given to headteachers on school exclusions, reinforcing their right to manage their schools and enforce discipline as they see fit; recognises that working closely with parents, police and health professionals is key to tackling unacceptable levels of absence and supports the Government's work in this area; and supports the measures being taken by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority to ensure that examination results are delivered successfully.

7.25 pm

Mr. Richard Spring (West Suffolk): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In view of the most welcome and significant news this evening of Zimbabwe's suspension from the Commonwealth, which we have long advocated in view of the violence and intimidation surrounding the presidential election there, have you had word from the Foreign Secretary that he will come to the House at 10 o'clock to make an urgent statement about the situation, the future of the Commonwealth and our relationship with Zimbabwe?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): I know that there is great concern in the House about these matters. I have not had any indication that such a statement is to be made, but the House will have heard what the hon. Gentleman has just said.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Will you be so kind as to advise the House whether it is possible at this hour to put down an application under Standing Order No. 24, requiring the Foreign Secretary to come to the House?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The right hon. and learned Gentleman should probably inquire at the Table Office about matters of that sort.

Chinook Crash

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): I must inform the House that Mr. Speaker has selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

7.27 pm

David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden): I beg to move,

That this House notes the House of Lords Select Committee Report on Chinook ZD 576, which concludes that 'the Air Marshals were not justified in finding that negligence on the part of the pilots of ZD 576 caused the crash' in the Mull of Kintyre on 2nd June 1994; and calls on the Government to exonerate the deceased pilots, flight lieutenants Jonathan Tapper and Richard Cook.

This is an unusual motion for an Opposition day debate because it is sponsored on a cross-party—indeed, almost an all-party—basis. That is because it is virtually an apolitical subject: there is no ideology involved, and no party difference. Furthermore, the original decisions that we are seeking to put right were taken under a Conservative Administration. We are not, therefore, seeking to score political points. We are seeking simply to correct a miscarriage of justice that has gone on for too long. In the light of this cross-party approach—subject, of course, to getting a reasonable response from the Minister—I am not minded to press the matter to a vote tonight, but we shall wait and see.

At about 1759 hours on 2 June 1994, a Royal Air Force Chinook mark 2 helicopter, ZD 576, on a flight from Aldergrove to Inverness crashed into a cloud-covered hill on the west side of the Mull of Kintyre. The pilots, Flight Lieutenants Jonathan Tapper and Richard Cook, the other two crewmen, and the 25 passengers—all senior members of the Northern Ireland security services—were killed. The aircraft was completely destroyed in the crash and subsequent fire, and many of its component parts, including much instrumentation and the digital engine control unit, also suffered total destruction. Neither a cockpit voice recorder nor an accident data recorder was fitted. There were no eye witnesses to the crash, nor any radar trace.

Because of the absence of hard evidence of what happened on that fateful day, the investigating board made no finding of negligence on the part of the pilots. Nor did the two station commanders who reviewed those findings. Nevertheless, the two air marshals to whom the investigating board's report was submitted concluded that the pilots were negligent and that they failed to take appropriate action when approaching deteriorating weather near the mull. Furthermore, the air marshals maintained that the pilots voluntarily did not take the necessary action safely to avoid the land mass ahead of them. Both pilots were therefore found guilty of gross negligence. Not only did they lose their lives, but their reputations—and the peace of mind of their families—were destroyed. They were allowed no defence or appeal, and were denied the benefit of the doubt of the RAF board of inquiry. They were effectively convicted of causing the deaths of 27 other people.

RAF rules in force at the time provided that deceased air crew could be found negligent only when there was "absolutely no doubt whatsoever". That is a higher standard of proof than the "beyond reasonable doubt" required in criminal trials, and it is very much higher than the "balance of probabilities" laid down for civil law. In practice, the "absolutely no doubt whatsoever" standard means that every other possible explanation of the crash must be positively disproved. The House of Lords Select Committee demonstrated that the air marshals had come nowhere near that level of proof.

Early in 1996, a fatal accident inquiry was held in Paisley sheriff court. The sheriff, Sir Stephen Young, conducted an inquiry involving evidence and submissions taken over some 16 days. The sheriff concluded:

"It has not been established to my satisfaction, and on the balance of probabilities, that the cause of the accident was the decision by the crew of ZD 576 to overfly the Mull of Kintyre at cruising speed and their selection for that purpose of an inappropriate rate of climb. It may then be asked what was the cause of the accident. For my part I can only say that I do not know."

The sheriff was applying the lower standard of proof appropriate in civil law, namely the balance of probabilities. In other words, the air marshals had not even shown that their conclusion was probable, let alone certain. The Ministry of Defence refused to accept the judgment, on grounds subsequently shown to be flawed.

In November 2000 the Public Accounts Committee, under my chairmanship, reported on the MOD's acceptance of the Chinook mark 2 helicopter. The Committee considered that an engine-control software fault or other technical malfunction on the ZD 576 was a real possibility, and that there was not enough evidence to rule it out as at least a potential cause of the crash. In its view, it was

"impossible to prove gross negligence in the case of ZD 576".

Again, the MOD refused to accept the judgment—a judgment that the Committee had reached unanimously, after extensive investigation by the National Audit Office.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): In the Treasury minute that constituted a reply to the recommendations of my right hon. Friend's Committee, the Government claimed that there was no proof that the FADEC software system was at fault. I can buy that; but having made their assertion, the Government went on to say that because there was no explanation of why the helicopter had hit the Mull of Kintyre, the pilots must have been guilty of gross negligence. That is in paragraph 8 of the minute. It is surely a jump in the logic of the Government's argument, which I do not find very convincing.

David Davis: My hon. Friend—the new Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee—is entirely right. He has highlighted the point that the Government have always walked around the issue of requirement of absolute proof. The onus is on them to demonstrate that the FADEC was, in effect, perfect, which we know it was not. There are plenty of examples of its causing serious problems, cited in the report.

In July 2001, the House of Lords appointed a Select Committee to consider whether the finding of negligence was justified. Six weeks ago the Committee, consisting of five peers including four very distinguished lawyers and a very distinguished engineer, reported on the accident after hearing evidence for six months. Its members concluded unanimously that

"the reviewing officers were not justified in finding that negligence on the part of the pilots caused the aircraft to crash."

The Government have said that they need time to consider the Select Committee's report, but Ministers' immediate response was that it covered

"the same ground with the same information".

They said that there was

"no new evidence and no new facts".

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): Is the case being made by the right hon. Gentleman and the Opposition that the House, and indeed the Government, should simply accept the report of a Select Committee in the other place without further consideration?

David Davis: That was a timely intervention. I shall come on to exactly why we have concerns about the Government's response.

The ministerial response that there was

"no new evidence and no new facts"

misses the point. The required evidence never existed in the first place. The House of Lords report shows unequivocally that the so-called facts underpinning the air marshals' judgment were at best educated guesswork, and at worst demonstrably wrong.

Nevertheless, it was reassuring that the Government did not reject the report out of hand in the first instance. The same does not apply to other reports. That gave hope to the families of the pilots and to those who had campaigned for many years to see their names cleared—volunteer supporters, Channel 4 and *Computer Weekly*, for instance.

We now understand, however, that the Government plan to order a new simulation from Boeing. That points to the likelihood that they intend to find a reason for sticking to their finding of gross negligence. Such a course is wrong, in my view. The House of Lords Select Committee has demonstrated numerous flaws in the original Boeing simulation used to investigate the accident, and criticised the air marshals' treatment of the output of that simulation as fact.

The original simulation assumed a combined speed and rate of climb that have since been found to be unattainable—impossible in practice. It produced the wrong rotor speed, and it produced a ground speed during the final manoeuvre that was 11 knots higher than that measured by the ground-speed indicator. Perhaps most significant of all, it presupposed that before the crash the aircraft had been under control on a steady course and at a steady speed.

As well as depending on a mixture of dubious data and guesses about the Chinook's position, height and speed, a further simulation would not—indeed could not—deal with the possibilities of technical failure. Put simply, it would be another "garbage in, garbage out" exercise.

Mr. Hoon: I am sorry to interrupt the right hon. Gentleman again, but he has not answered my earlier question. He seems to be suggesting that the Government should simply accept the report of the House of Lords Committee without further investigation. Is that what he is saying?

David Davis: I did answer the Secretary of State's question once, but he will have to wait until the end of my speech to hear what I have to say about the simulator. I have some questions for him, which I hope that he will answer in his own speech.

I fear that the Government will maintain their pattern of behaviour in ignoring the findings of independent, expert and reputable bodies that have examined the accident in detail. They say that there is "no new evidence". That fails to take on board the fact that the House of Lords has shown that the original verdict was based on fallacious or non-existent evidence.

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): It has already become clear that the original decision of the air board was changed by the air marshals when they made their final decision, without their having any different evidence to consider. If it is possible for a decision to be changed on the basis of judgment as to where the blame lay, with no new evidence, why is it not possible for the Government to change a decision on the basis of "no new evidence"? I agree with the right hon. Gentleman that there is probably plenty of new evidence, but even if there were not there would be no reason for the Government to stick to their decision.

David Davis: The hon. Gentleman is right. He was also a member of the Public Accounts Committee at the time of the discussion, so he is familiar with the Government's problem of "no new evidence". I shall say more about that later.

Let us consider the course of events during those fateful days in 1994. On the day of the last flight of Chinook ZD 576, after obtaining weather reports Flight Lieutenant Tapper decided that the flight to Inverness would be a low-level sortie flying under visual flight rules, or VFR, and intimated that he was not intending to fly under instrument flight rules—IFR. Indeed, flying under IFR in the vicinity of the mountains to the east of Ballachulish and Fort William would not have been permitted because of icing restrictions. Flight Lieutenant Tapper therefore selected a route that included flying towards the Mull of Kintyre lighthouse, which was programmed into the Chinook's computerised navigation system as way point A, and from there to Corran on Loch Linnhe, programmed as way point B. According to the SuperTANS computer, the Chinook was a mile from the lighthouse when the crew selected the next way point.

The original air marshals' criticism of the two pilots was based on the assertion that they had voluntarily flown over the Mull of Kintyre at too low a rate of climb in instrument conditions. But why would an experienced helicopter crew, immediately after selecting a pre-programmed visual way point, suddenly agree not to turn on to it, switch to instrument flight rules, which they had ruled out at the pre-flight briefing, and fly straight on to cloud-covered high ground which it knew to be there? Special forces helicopter crews exercised regularly in that area and were extremely familiar with the landscape and the weather conditions associated with it.

When the matter was debated in Westminster Hall, the Under-Secretary of State for Defence said:

"they flew on, contrary to instrument and visual flight rules. The evidence is that they were already too close to the cloud-covered mass of the mull and were travelling too low and too fast."—[*Official Report, Westminster Hall*, 27 June 2000; Vol. 352, c. 174WH.]

[David Davis]

That is the basis of part of the accusation for gross negligence, but it does not add up. On what evidence was the ZD 576 "too low" at way point change? The only concrete data were an eyewitness account from a yachtsman, Mr. Mark Holbrook, who saw the helicopter at the height of between 200 and 400 ft about two miles from the mull. The helicopter was clear of cloud and in sunlight. That is consistent with the crew's visual flight rules flight plan, which was seen and described as being "thorough and professional" by the board of inquiry. There is no case for the aircraft being too low.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): May I refer my right hon. Friend to the logbook entry of the Sea King crew members who went to the scene of the accident? They made it absolutely clear that the weather around the lighthouse was nowhere near visual flight rules. In fact, they had to grope their way in at 100 ft with radar assistance, and they spoke of sucker holes, which is just the sort of thing to which the yachtsman referred. The cloud conditions change very rapidly in that kind of terrain. One may get a fleeting glimpse of an aeroplane; it does not mean that it is in visual flight rules.

David Davis: I recognise my hon. and gallant Friend's experience in this area. The Sea King went after the accident. It is well known that the weather changes in that area, a point well understood by the special forces crew that flew there, but I will come back to that point.

On what evidence was ZD 576 "too fast" at the way point change?

Mr. Menzies Campbell (North-East Fife): I do not know whether the right hon. Gentleman intends to leave consideration of Mr. Holbrook's evidence, but if he has carefully examined the report, as I am sure he has, he will know that at page 19, paragraph 67, the conclusion of the Select Committee of the House of Lords was to say:

"We had no hesitation in accepting him as a reliable and convincing witness."

David Davis: The right hon. and learned Gentleman is exactly right. One of the problems was that the Royal Air Force appeared to write off Mr. Holbrook's evidence early on and to view him as a fallible witness, for reasons perhaps touched on by my hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson).

The air marshals tried to tell the House of Lords Committee that the Chinook ZD 576 was going so fast that it would not have been able to turn in time to avoid the cliffs, but that was based on false assumptions. First, it assumed that the aircraft was travelling at the ground speed of 174 knots used by the Boeing simulation. There is no basis for that assumption.

Nobody knows the speed at the way point change. The tail wind was about 20 knots, and the Chinook normally cruises at 130 knots. According to the inquiry, ZD 576 crashed at 150 knots ground speed but that does not tell us the speed at the way point. Mr. Holbrook, the yachtsman, estimated the speed of the Chinook when he saw it at about "60-80 knots".

The Lords Committee also concluded, based both on Mr. Holbrook's statement and expert witnesses,

"that the crew had probably seen the land mass at or before the time the way point was changed."

So the witnesses' evidence points to the Chinook flying in visual flight conditions, at the right height, at a lowish speed. The Lords Committee criticised the board of inquiry for not paying more attention to the yachtsman's evidence.

Mr. Hoon: Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that at the way point change the aircraft was functioning perfectly properly?

David Davis: It is probable but the problem is that we are dealing here with requirements of absolute proof. However, even if the aircraft behaved perfectly properly at the way point change, it is entirely possible that, immediately after the way point change, that ceased to be the case. Flight jams are well known to occur. Evidence given by the squadron test pilot of the Chinook suggests that flight jams occur very often on change of direction. That would have occurred immediately after, or within seconds of, a way point change.

Mr. Wilkinson: My right hon. Friend will recall that the heading change was something in the order of 13 deg, a minuscule injection of bank and heading change. If there had been something wrong with the aeroplane as it went across the Irish sea, the crew would have aborted the sortie, changed the flight profile or issued a pan call—an emergency call. It would have been perfectly plain. They did nothing of the kind, so the assumption must be that they pressed on in the knowledge that all systems were working perfectly. They had good time to put a call into military air traffic Scottish region.

David Davis: I am afraid that the use by my hon. and gallant Friend of the word "assumption" rather blows the case. We cannot make assumptions on this. The level of proof required is no assumptions. Two witnesses who spoke to the House of Lords Committee—witness A, a special forces pilot who could not be identified, one of the most decorated pilots around today and certainly very high on experience of Chinooks, and Squadron Leader Burke, who was the squadron test pilot on the aircraft—both recognised intermittent faults that were brought on in erratic, unpredictable ways, and a small change of direction could well make that change. I will come back to the point later, but the simple fact is that they both thought that the most likely outcome was a control jam after the way point.

The Lords Committee found that there was no evidence to back up the data used to estimate the Chinook's height, speed, position and course at

"any time prior to impact",

so the whole approach of the air marshals was based on a lot of assumptions.

The MOD's assumption that the way point change was made when the aircraft was some 600 m from the cliff is based on information retrieved from the Chinook's computerised tactical area navigation system, also known as TANS or SuperTANS. That system was heavily damaged in the crash.

The RAF used TANS as the basis for its reconstruction of the final seconds of the flight claiming that the data used were

"facts based on clear evidence".

One of the air marshals, Sir John Day, used this information to

"build up a rudimentary accident data type recorder picture of the last 20 seconds of flight".

The Lords Committee dismissed these claims as "hypotheses and assumptions". Further, according to the manufacturer, the computer was never designed to give historical data. In addition to that, it had hit a mountain at 147 knots, or 170 mph, and then burned. Who would believe any information garnered from that computer to be 100 per cent. accurate? Even given that, that computer system was well known to be subject to errors.

There is an ironic example. On 13 July 1995, a Chinook mark 2, the same sort of Chinook, was tasked to perform an overflight of Flight Lieutenant Jonathan Tapper's memorial. Crew members were in visual contact with the ground and they knew when they were precisely over the memorial. The TANS on that aircraft indicated that the aircraft was 2 nautical miles away from the memorial—the system "believed" it was some 2 nautical miles away from the aircraft's actual position, so the system is certainly fallible. Again, I remind colleagues of the level of proof required.

The House of Lords Committee therefore threw out the "wrong place, wrong speed, wrong height" argument of the air marshals. That leaves the problem of how the Chinook came to crash into the mull. Was there a technical fault that made the aircraft difficult or impossible to control, which was implicit in the Secretary of State's questions to me earlier?

Under the rules of "absolutely no doubt whatsoever", the MOD is required to eliminate any such possibility. Sir William Wratten, the senior air marshal, has stated that the RAF board of inquiry found a "total absence" of any technical problem that could have caused the crash. In a crash of this destructiveness, it is entirely possible that all evidence of a control problem could be destroyed. Actually, there is evidence pointing to at least three possibilities: an engine control problem, a control jam and a hydraulic system problem. Furthermore, the investigating board did not rule out a distracting technical fault.

In particular, the board noted that the Chinook had been experiencing engine control system—known as FADEC—malfunctions, including "undemanded run-ups". That technical phrase basically means sudden surges of power that could destabilise the helicopter. The board noted also that an

"unforeseen technical malfunction of the type being experienced on the Chinook . . . remained a possibility that could not be discounted."

Again we must remember the requirement for the level of evidence.

It has also emerged that, at the time of the crash, the MOD was suing both Boeing and Textron Lycoming—the manufacturers of the Chinook and its engines, respectively—because of faulty test procedures and a design fault in the aircraft's FADEC software. Malcolm Rifkind has said that if he had known this and the other technical problems at the time of the investigation, he would not have supported the verdict of the air marshals. He was the Secretary of State at the time.

The RAF's board of inquiry did not properly consider either of these facts. Indeed, it neglected to take evidence from Squadron Leader Bob Burke, the vastly experienced Chinook test pilot, and Malcolm Perks, the technical expert who had spent many years working in the field of FADEC, often for the MOD. Both men gave evidence to the Lords inquiry about the FADEC system and the possible flight control problems that it could cause.

After the accident, the investigators found that a number of components in the Chinook's hydraulic flight control systems had become detached. The air accidents investigation branch stated that the possibility that these components

"had detached prior to the accident could not be dismissed."

In fact, three weeks before the accident, this same Chinook suffered an undemanded flight control movement caused by detachment of one of the same set of components. This and its dire flight safety implications were noted in an engineering report made by the helicopter's ground crew.

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): Is it not true that the flight crew on that day had sought an alternative aircraft to make the journey?

David Davis: That is right. There is a trail of concerns about the aircraft, expressed particularly by Flight Lieutenant Tapper.

On the question of control jams, two expert witnesses—whom I described earlier—expressed the view that the most likely cause of the accident was a jam of some kind affecting the control of the aircraft, perhaps arising from detached hydraulic system components and arising immediately after an attempt to change direction in the aircraft.

Finally in terms of possible causes, in June 1997 a US Army report into Chinook safety considered an incident when a Chinook had barrel-rolled at about 1,100 ft and righted itself at about 250 ft. Following the incident, the helicopter was completely stripped down. No cause for the incident could be established. Let me emphasise this: a Chinook helicopter went out of control and barrel-rolled to within a second or so of total destruction, and not one single solid piece of evidence was found about the cause. Hydraulic contamination was thought to be most likely. The AAIB also discovered metal contamination in the same part of the Chinook ZD 576's hydraulic system.

Following the accident, the rudder pedals were found at 77 per cent. of full travel. This is an extreme position—almost full left rudder. Expert witnesses told the Lords Committee that such "an enormous rudder input" was unthinkable at high speed. This, combined with other control inputs found, suggested an

"erratic flight path typical of a partial control loss."

Both Sir John Day and Sir William Wratten accepted that the possibility of a control jam or engine malfunction could not be disproved. Again, I remind the House of the required level of proof.

In conclusion, there is a lack of evidence pointing to reasons why the pilots should have decided to change course and switch to instrument rules. Indeed, all the evidence indicates that they had no reason to do so. So why did the helicopter fly on into the mull? Well-known

[David Davis]

technical problems and episodes suffered by this very helicopter must surely point to at least the possibility that technical problems caused or contributed to the crash.

However, the MOD has given no benefit of doubt in either of these key aspects, even though many problems and doubts have been raised. In short, it has not been established to the required level of proof that it was the voluntary action of the pilots which caused the aircraft to fly into the hill. This is precisely why the Government should set aside the verdict of gross negligence.

If the Secretary of State is not willing to do that today—it would appear that he is not—I would like him to answer three questions about his proposed new simulation that will help his thinking in making his final decision. First, where will he get the new input data for his new simulation, since the old simulation failed partly because of a lack of inputting? Secondly, how will the simulation take account of any possible control system malfunction? The other one did not. Finally, will he see that any simulation is carried out by an independent body, and not by Boeing, which has a clear commercial interest in the outcome of this case? Will he also ensure that an independently monitored flight test of a representative RAF Chinook is carried out to verify that the simulated flight manoeuvres can be achieved and are not impossible, as was the case in his previous so-called evidence?

I hope the Secretary of State will take seriously the House of Lords refutation of the air marshals' judgment and the standards of proof required. He must accept that this is a matter of natural justice and see fit to clear the pilots' names. This is now a matter of honour, not just for the pilots but for the MOD itself.

7.56 pm

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): I beg to move, To leave out from "House" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

"notes the House of Lords Select Committee Report on Chinook ZD 576; further notes that the Government is currently studying the report; and looks forward to the Government's promised full and detailed response to the House of Lords."

With permission, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I should like to respond to this evening's debate on the tragic RAF Chinook crash on the Mull of Kintyre in 1994. I must say that it is perhaps slightly surprising, in the light of events elsewhere, that the Opposition chose to debate this subject today. They are well aware that the Government are still carefully considering the House of Lords Select Committee report on the crash. It is therefore difficult at this stage to add to what has been said previously. The Government have up to six months to respond to the report, and we certainly aim to do so before that deadline is reached.

The right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (David Davis) set out the facts and I do not intend to repeat them. He did skate over one point, in response to a question from the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel). The board of inquiry was entirely properly constituted and reached its conclusions as a properly constituted board of inquiry would be expected to. The right hon. Gentleman should accept that there is no suggestion of division in the way in which it went about reaching its conclusions.

Everyone recognises that what happened that evening has cast a very long shadow. It has had a devastating impact on the lives of the 29 families of those who lost loved ones in the crash. I know that I speak for the whole House when I say that I am completely sympathetic to the concerns of the families of the dead pilots; I also speak for the MOD when I say that. I entirely understand their wish to clear their relatives' names, but I must emphasise that we must also remember with sympathy and understanding the relatives of the others who so tragically lost their lives in this accident. This issue has touched all of those who have had to deal with it over the past seven years, including a series of chiefs of staff and Defence Ministers representing both sides of the House.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): Has MOD policy changed in either of two respects? First, in future, would the MOD ever approve the concentration of such a large number of key intelligence personnel in a single aircraft? If not, that suggests a vested interest in blaming the pilots. Secondly, is it true that a decision has been made that, in future, in circumstances even of this sort, there would be no question of the MOD blaming deceased pilots? If the rules have been changed because of the case of these two pilots, is it not monstrously unjust that the two pilots themselves, who have led to the change in the rules, should nevertheless continue to carry the blame in perpetuity?

Mr. Hoon: Clearly it was not sensible for so many highly specialised people to be carried on a single aircraft, but I cannot accept the hon. Gentleman's implication that there is a deliberate conspiracy to cover up the details simply to protect those who were responsible for the decision in the first place. I am sure that if he thinks about that for a second, he will realise that that is not a proper imputation to make at this stage.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Hoon: Perhaps my hon. Friend will allow me to respond to the hon. Gentleman's second point.

The hon. Gentleman rightly mentioned the present rules, which certainly have changed. They have not necessarily changed as a result of this specific unfortunate incident, but they have changed. However, that creates a difficulty for the hon. Gentleman and those who support this campaign. Not only do they need to look at the evidence in the light of the information that they have today but, in my view, they have to put themselves in the position of members of the board of inquiry at the time, applying the standards and rules that they had to apply. It is all very well rewriting history and saying that it is possible to look at historic events in a different way in the light of our experience and current practice, but the only fair way of dealing with this is to put oneself in the position of the air marshals and the board of inquiry, who were subject to the relevant rules of the Royal Air Force at the time.

Mr. Dalyell: Before leaving the problems of previous Secretaries of State for Defence, would not my right hon. Friend have been understandably annoyed if he had not been told that legal proceedings involving the manufacturers were taking place? What does he say to

Malcolm Rifkind, who has expressed public annoyance that he was not told? It is not exactly the best way for the Ministry of Defence to treat its then Secretary of State.

Mr. Hoon: Malcolm Rifkind is not here and it would perhaps be unfair to respond fully to that point. However, I agreed to see him when he wished to make representations about this matter. I hope that I am fair to him when I say that the conclusion of our conversation was to the effect that were he to be in the same position again he would not have reached the same conclusion that he reached originally. That is a perfectly proper judgment for him to reach, and I think that it is a fair account of the way in which he now puts the case. Nevertheless, when he considered the matter in the light of whatever evidence was before him at the time, he reached a different conclusion. As I said, I have discussed the matter with him and nothing that he said to me at the time persuaded me that there was at that stage any need to reopen the matter.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): I was Malcolm Rifkind's special adviser at the time, and I can assure the right hon. Gentleman that it would not have been the desire of the then Secretary of State in those circumstances to revisit the judgment of two air marshals sitting on the board of inquiry unless there was evidence for doing so. He quite properly supported the opinion of the air marshals. Since there has been new evidence, he has revised his opinion. The Secretary of State is in precisely that position.

Mr. Hoon: I have always made it clear on behalf of the Government that were there to be new evidence I would consider reopening the matter. That is why I believe it necessary to look very carefully at the report published by the Select Committee in the other place so that we can reach a proper result on the basis of its analysis of the facts and the interesting technical views that it expressed at the time. Again, that is why I find it slightly surprising that the Opposition appear to believe that the position of the Government and the House ought to be to accept the views of a Select Committee in the other place without any further consideration. I made that point to the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden, and notwithstanding the suggestion that he had answered me, I am afraid that he did not.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): The Secretary of State implied that the interests of the relatives of the deceased passengers were somehow different from those of the relatives of the deceased pilots. Surely they are entirely the same. All relatives of the deceased have suffered greatly and want to make sure that the Secretary of State gets to the bottom of the matter. My right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden (David Davis) is simply saying that there are reasons for doubt. Could not the Secretary of State give us a little hope by saying that he accepts that there are unanswered questions that he must take seriously when responding to the House of Lords inquiry?

Mr. Hoon: That is precisely why it is necessary to conduct a further examination of the report, of the basis of the report and of the evidence on which the board of inquiry relied. That is what the Government are doing. The difficulty I have this evening in responding to the points made by Opposition Members—certainly from the Opposition Front Bench—is that they do not appear interested in that further analysis or consideration. They appear to want simply to accept the recommendations of a Select Committee in the other place without further consideration. Unless I have misread the motion, that seems to be what the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden has been saying this evening.

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Ochil): Will my right hon. Friend share with us some of the ways in which his Department will look afresh at the issue in the light of the Jauncey report? The report placed a great deal of emphasis on the evidence question and what the weight of evidence should be. I know that my right hon. Friend is a distinguished lawyer; is he likely to seek advice from the Attorney-General or the Advocate General? Many of us are worried about this being an in-house MOD response, and believe that the whole Government machine should be involved.

Mr. Hoon: I will deal with both those points in due course. Before that, I should like to say something about the critical comments made by the Select Committee in the other place about Air Marshals Sir John Day and Sir William Wratten. Whatever views exist as to their conclusions, I hope that the House will accept that the air marshals' decision was taken neither lightly nor easily. The judgment was taken with the utmost care, the fullest consideration of all the available evidence and the application of the highest standards of professionalism and airmanship.

The air marshals are experienced and highly professional senior officers, both experts in their field. Sir John Day, in his evidence to the Committee, described it as the most difficult decision that he has ever had to make in his career. He has also said that it is the decision that he thought most hard about, being only too well aware of the immense consequences of what he believed his professional judgment required him to say. Nobody would wish to find someone negligent, especially someone who has died, unless they were convinced beyond any doubt.

In that regard, it was extraordinarily disappointing to hear Lord Chalfont on the radio this morning suggesting that the problem was that senior members of the Royal Air Force were "reluctant to change their minds and to appear to lose face." In my view, that is unfair, unnecessary and thoroughly disrespectful to those who have risked their life on behalf of this country.

I cannot this evening—nor should anyone reasonably expect me to do so on behalf of the Ministry of Defence—give a thorough examination of the various facts raised by the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden. To do so, inevitably, as his three questions indicate, would go so far as to reveal a conclusion that I am simply not in a position to give. It would not be right and proper, on behalf of a Government who are studying this Select Committee report thoroughly, to respond in anything like the detail that he has requested. He has set out his views clearly on more than one occasion, and he is unlikely to change them. However, it is right for the Government to consider carefully what has been said.

On the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Ochil (Mr. O'Neill), I have sought further advice from counsel, to which I shall pay careful regard. We have also

[Mr. Hoon]

asked Boeing to undertake a review of its original analysis of the last seconds of the Chinook's flight, including a full simulation of FADEC—the full authority digital engine control system. This morning, the campaign, in the person of Lord Chalfont, suggested that that was a totally irrelevant and pointless exercise. I would be interested to know whether the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden believes that to be the case.

David Davis: My earlier point was that the flaw in the air marshals' argument in the first instance was the heavy reliance on that simulation. All it amounts to is an electronic guess; it is a postulation of what might have happened. Even if we accept that the Secretary of State cannot comment on the underpinning of the re-analysis—I do not accept that, but let us take it as read for the moment—surely he can tell us that independent oversight of the re-run of the simulation is possible. We should not simply leave it to Boeing, which is, after all, parti pris in this exercise: it has an interest in the reputation of its helicopter. No one would accept a simulation or evidence that depends solely on those who have something to gain from the continuance of this miscarriage of justice.

Mr. Hoon: I am prepared to make the evidence produced in the light of the remodelling process available for independent analysis. I shall certainly make it available to the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden, and others in the campaign will be able to subject it to appropriate scrutiny.

I am interested in a fact that the right hon. Gentleman rather skated over. One purpose of the process is carefully to examine the speed of the aircraft at the relevant time. He suggested—I am prepared to be corrected if I am wrong—that there was no evidence whatsoever of the aircraft's speed. However, if only on a basic mathematical assessment of the time taken in the journey's course, it is possible to estimate the likely speed simply by dividing the time taken by the distance travelled. That will provide an estimate of the average speed during the journey—that is not, I accept, conclusive evidence of the aircraft's speed at the point in question, but it is part of the purpose of the modelling analysis.

David Davis: That argument has been tried before, but the House of Lords rebutted it on the grounds that it was dependent on averages. The aircraft travelled at about 150 knots from Belfast, Aldergrove to the way point, but that is not to say that it did not slow down when it was looking for the reference point of the lighthouse. We simply do not know: that is the point. The level of evidence that we need is absolute certainty—not hypothesis, averages or a convenient guess that fits the case.

Mr. Hoon: I am not sure that I was right to give way to the right hon. Gentleman. I had just made precisely that point. Perhaps he feels the need to embellish it for me, but I pointed out that it was possible to provide some evidence of the aircraft's speed, but that it was not conclusive regarding the speed at the way point change. Nevertheless, it helps us to form a judgment about what took place. I noticed that he did not correct my suggestion that he had earlier said that there was no evidence whatever.

Mr. James Arbuthnot (North-East Hampshire): My right hon. Friend said that there was no evidence of the speed at the way point change.

On the simulation that the right hon. Gentleman is recommissioning, does he accept the point raised by Tony Collins, a journalist from *Computer Weekly*, that modern aircraft are so complicated technically that it is impossible for the purchaser, or anyone but the manufacturer, precisely to understand what the computer code has done. Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that the same would apply to simulations in circumstances as unbelievably complicated as those of this crash?

Mr. Hoon: The right hon. Gentleman makes a reasonable point. My only reservation about agreeing completely is that I have seen so much nonsense written about the subject in *Computer Weekly*. Some evidence may be acceptable, but the way in which that journal hysterically pursues the subject does not give me cause to accept anything that it says at face value. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will forgive me for not accepting an assertion by a representative of *Computer Weekly* at this stage.

It is important for the Government to have the best possible evidence. I hope that all right hon. and hon. Members accept that. The modelling tool available at the time did not include FADEC. The engineers who conducted the original simulation factored in the known FADEC performance criteria. We have asked Boeing to undertake more advanced modelling by including the FADEC flight system. I want to be confident that we have the most accurate information about what happened in order to make the most informed judgment. It is difficult to understand how that approach can be criticised.

Mr. Robert Marshall-Andrews (Medway): Before the Secretary of State leaves the findings of the air marshals, he has twice referred to findings of negligence but, as I understand it, the test applied and found was one of gross negligence. That means a voluntary course of action taken deliberately at the time. I ask my right hon. Friend to apply himself to this question. If I am right, that test is indistinguishable, in truth, from the test of recklessness applied in criminal law. If that is so and the burden of proof applies in that sense, how, in view of the expert evidence, could they possibly have arrived at that conclusion?

Mr. Hoon: My hon. and learned Friend makes a point that I have made myself about the legal test applicable to the case. It is interesting to read the House of Lords Select Committee report, in which, notwithstanding the legal distinction of some of the participants, there appears to be confusion between recklessness and negligence. Without giving the House a legal lecture, which it does not need at this stage of the evening, I believe that the expression "gross negligence" is not particularly helpful, which is why the rules that apply to boards of inquiry have been changed since this case. That still leaves us with my

earlier point: that in order to do justice to the case, it is necessary to apply the rules that faced the board of inquiry at the relevant time.

Mr. Leigh: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman, who is a reasonable man. Does he accept the comment made by the Public Accounts Committee, which develops the point made by the hon. and learned Member for Medway (Mr. Marshall-Andrews)—that

"the burden of proof of 'no doubt whatsoever' requires that gross negligence be positively identified as the cause of the crash, not simply that it be used as the default explanation when the Department cannot find an alternative"?

The Secretary of State nods. Does he agree?

Mr. Hoon: I certainly accept that it is necessary to examine carefully the legal basis on which the board of inquiry reached its conclusion. I have just criticised the concept of gross negligence as being difficult for most lawyers to understand and apply—a difficulty that the Select Committee encountered. I have asked for further legal opinion in order properly to satisfy myself that the right legal approach was adopted at the time. As I said, it is important that any analysis is consistent with the rules that the board of inquiry had to follow.

I have given way on every occasion that I can in this debate. The Government have every intention of producing a full response as soon as possible. We shall certainly do so within the six-month period allowed for replying to such reports, but that should not be understood as delay. Rather, it is an acknowledgement that this is an extraordinarily complex matter. It is right and proper that the report is fully and carefully assessed and that, where appropriate, further detailed technical work and investigations are undertaken. We naturally want to have the best possible advice, but that inevitably takes time. I apologise to right hon. and hon. Members for the fact that I cannot say more this evening. To that extent the debate is bound to disappoint those who initiated it.

Lady Hermon (North Down) *rose—*

Mr. Hoon: I had only one more sentence but I shall certainly give way to the hon. Lady.

Lady Hermon: I thank the Secretary of State for giving way.

Will the right hon. Gentleman reflect on the conclusion of the report of the Select Committee on Defence in 1998? It noted that "great sensitivity" was required in investigating fatal accidents in the armed forces. Will he please explain how taking a further six months shows "great sensitivity" to those involved, especially the widows who are still left with doubt and with stigma attached to the reputation of the two flight lieutenants?

Mr. Hoon: In order to reach a properly considered result it is necessary to do the Select Committee, the House and all those who have an interest in that tragic incident the courtesy of carefully considering their arguments. That is what the Government intend to do; it is certainly what I have been trying to do ever since I assumed my current responsibilities. I am sorry if a wait of a few more months before the Government reach their conclusions appears insensitive in any way.

I do not accept that for a moment, however. We want to examine the report with appropriate care, to consider the factual evidence on which the Committee relied, to find new evidence if any can be found and to subject to proper analysis the Committee's technical conclusions and the legal basis for its report. I acknowledge the comment of the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden that this is not a party political issue, so I hope that the whole House agrees that it is only appropriate that the Government have the opportunity to reach those carefully considered conclusions.

8.22 pm

Mr. Menzies Campbell (North-East Fife): I begin by commending the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (David Davis) and his colleagues for allowing part of a day that was within their gift to be given over to discussion of this topic. I confess that I was not optimistic enough to believe that putting my name to the motion would mean that the Secretary of State would come to the Dispatch Box and concede that the motion should be passed unanimously. However, this opportunity affords us the chance to engage in the merits of an issue that causes great concern on both sides of this House and of the other place.

As has already been pointed out, this is not—nor should it be—a party political matter. The Select Committee, under the leadership of Lord Chalfont, was drawn from all parties on both sides of the House. The Secretary of State may have had some criticism of Lord Chalfont, but it is fair to say that the noble Lord has certainly, with a high degree of commitment, tried to ensure that these matters are properly considered in the House and in the other place.

I do not for a moment challenge the integrity of Ministers past or present or of the senior officers of the Royal Air Force who were engaged in the decision. I make no allegations whatever of bad faith. As it happens, I know Sir William Wratten and Sir John Day personally. However, I believe that an error of judgment has been made in this case, and I am left with the suspicion that, had proper legal advice been made available to the board of inquiry in the later stages of its consideration, it is highly unlikely that it would have reached the conclusion that now exercises so many of us. I hope that the reform of boards of inquiry to which the Secretary of State has referred will afford the opportunity for those charged with the difficult task of determining such matters to take legal advice of the highest quality.

As I believe that an error of judgment has been made, there has, in turn, occurred an injustice. That injustice should be put right. Parliament exists for the redress of grievances and the families of the two pilots certainly have a grievance. They are entitled to seek to persuade the House to put that right on their behalf. In saying that, I do not for an instant ignore the feelings and emotions of the relations of the other two deceased crewmen and of the 25 passengers. However, I venture to offer this thought: I doubt whether any of them would derive comfort from the notion that a miscarriage of justice had been committed and allowed to persist. On several occasions, I have received direct communication from the relations of passengers—although not in every case—saying that they supported, albeit not publicly, the efforts being made to try to deal with a matter that, in the minds of so many, has created an injustice.

[Mr. Menzies Campbell]

The Government's position—frequently repeated and rehearsed by Ministers at the Dispatch Box and on television, radio and elsewhere—is that if there is new evidence they would be prepared to open the inquiry, but if there is no new evidence, there is no justification for reopening the inquiry, so the original finding stands. If that position is to be maintained, it can be maintained only in the teeth of the findings, first, of the fatal accident inquiry and, secondly, of the report of the Lords Select Committee.

That position assumes that the original finding is unchallengeable because it was infallible. We thus have to look at the standard of proof that was required—yes, with the benefit of hindsight; but also with a rigorous intellectual approach.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): Before the right hon. and learned Gentleman proceeds with that thought, may I take him back to the Government's view that the matter should be reopened only if there is new evidence? Is it appropriate to maintain that position, given the analogy with criminal convictions? The law has been changed to allow those cases to be reopened when there is no new evidence but when there are grounds for believing that a mistake has been made. Should not the Secretary of State's approach to boards of inquiry be analogous to that now adopted by the law with regard to criminal convictions?

Mr. Campbell: As well as being the leader of his party, the right hon. Gentleman is by profession a lecturer on law—

Mr. Trimble: Was.

Mr. Campbell: Once a lecturer on law, always a lecturer on law; I am happy to accede to the right hon. Gentleman's proposition.

The original inquiry was—at least generically—a tribunal. It was necessary for it to gather and consider evidence, to reach conclusions on that evidence and then to exercise a judgment. As the Secretary of State rightly said, when we consider the quality of that decision we must do so on the basis on which it was taken and in the light of the rules applying at the time.

In parenthesis, I have always wondered whether, if an action of judicial review had been taken within the conventional time limit for bringing such actions, such an action would inevitably have succeeded. I have never received sufficient answer on that point.

Like those charged with the responsibility of the board of inquiry, however, we have to consider the matter against the background of the rules then applying. At the heart of that consideration were the rules of the Royal Air Force, which required absolutely no doubt. It is instructive to read paragraph 14 of the Select Committee's report—those words have already been echoed to some extent. The paragraph in the report stated that paragraph 9 of the rules

"demanded a particularly high standard of proof, higher than is required of the prosecution in a criminal case in the United Kingdom ('beyond reasonable doubt'), and much higher than is required in civil litigation ('on the balance of probabilities'). It was no doubt set so high because deceased aircrew are no longer available to offer their own account of events."

That is to say, it was provided as a protection for deceased aircrew. The report continues:

"We consider that it requires all other plausible explanations for the crash to have been positively excluded. If any such explanations remain possibilities, the standard of proof has not been met."

That effectively means that someone could be convicted of murder in England and Scotland on a standard of proof lower than that necessary to be achieved before any finding not of gross negligence, but of negligence, could be established.

Having considered that, let us remind ourselves of the fact not only that that standard was considered by the Select Committee, but that in determining what his conclusions should be in the fatal accident inquiry, the sheriff, Sir Stephen Young—to whom I shall return in a moment—was unwilling, on a balance of probabilities, to hold that the MOD explanation had been established.

These are human affairs, and it is inevitable that emotions will play a part. I believe that it is inevitable that those campaigning for the pilots will find 100 per cent. objectivity difficult to maintain; equally, those intent on sustaining the original decision may be similarly disadvantaged. That is why we must try to divorce ourselves from those emotional considerations and look outside and elsewhere.

I have already referred to Sheriff Sir Stephen Young, who considered 16 days of evidence, when all the relevant interests in the crash were represented by counsel or solicitors and there was the opportunity for cross-examination. Yet despite all that, on a balance of probabilities—the appropriate standard in a fatal accident inquiry, which in Scotland is roughly, but not entirely, equivalent to a coroner's inquest in England—the sheriff was unable to support the MOD conclusion. To those hon. Members who have not yet done so, I recommend reading that judgment, because it is as close an analysis of the issues involved as one could hope for, and it reflects extremely favourably on Sheriff Sir Stephen Young—a reflection that is also corroborated by references in the Select Committee report.

The second external point of reference is the House of Lords inquiry—chaired by Lord Jauncey, one of Scotland's most eminent judges of recent times—and composed of four, plus himself, independently minded peers. Against that background—first, of the fatal accident inquiry and, secondly, of that report—how on earth can anyone say that the standard of absolutely no doubt whatever can have been achieved?

I have heard it said, anecdotally, that the unwillingness of those with initial responsibility to accept a different conclusion may be based on a determination to maintain the integrity of the inquiry system or, indeed, the chain of command. As for the inquiry system, as the Secretary of State has already told us, the regulations have been changed, but as for the integrity of the chain of command, of course, that is important. Anyone with any knowledge or understanding of the armed services knows that the integrity of the chain of command is essential for good order and discipline and that it must be respected; but how much more is the chain of command likely to be respected if those involved are sufficiently confident to recognise when an error of judgment may have been made and should be corrected?

In the conduct of public affairs—perhaps no more frequently than for those Ministers who occupy the Treasury Bench this evening—the exercise of judgment is commonplace. I think no less of those who acknowledge that they have made an error of judgment and are anxious to put it right. In particular, I have in mind Sir Malcolm Rifkind, with whom I have talked about this matter and whose views are now well known as a result of the interviews that he has given on radio and television, and of at least one article that he has written in a national newspaper. I believe that—if he catches your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker—the right hon. Member for North-East Hampshire (Mr. Arbuthnot), who was also a Minister at the MOD at the relevant time, may have something to say about what he now believes, compared with the part that he played in the original decision.

The last paragraph of the Select Committee report is as succinct a statement as one could possibly hope for:

"How could it be that a very experienced crew, having planned to fly VFR, having taken when probably visual with the Mull the appropriate steps to alter course, when there was nothing to prevent them flying northwards within sight of the coast, flew into the Mull? It is as Sir John and Sir William speculatively described 'incomprehensible' . . . and 'astonishing'."

The last sentence reads:

"We shall never know."

That paragraph and, indeed, the whole report make it clear that we are in a climate of uncertainty. In a climate of uncertainty, how can the original decision possibly stand?

8.35 pm

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Ochil): I am pleased to follow the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell), as I agree with much of what he said and with the way he addressed the issue this evening. This is a difficult issue, and I am not altogether certain that the tactic of holding this debate tonight was the best one. There is a case for holding a debate, but it is certainly the case that the other place responds to Select Committee reports in a rather more leisurely way than we expect Ministers to do in the House. Having said that, a report of the complexity and rigour of that produced by Jauncey requires time.

I have considerable sympathy with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State not only in the length of time that he wants to take over this issue, but in ensuring that previous evidence that is now regarded as suspect is re-examined. I do not pour scorn on the desire to carry out other simulations, but I would include the qualification that, if they are carried out, they ought to involve a degree of independence. I accept that there is a devilishly difficult problem—such is the complexity of the equipment and the monitoring, that, outside the companies and the customers, not many people are capable of interpreting the data, but it is incumbent on the MOD to seek a means of doing that.

I should like to think that, equally, some of the legal advice that my right hon. Friend is seeking will be incorporated in the reply in a form that lay people such as ourselves can not only understand, but identify as legal advice. Many hon. Members have had misgivings about that because there has been a sense that the MOD has dealt with this issue as an in-house operation. There is often the rather depressing form of reaction to any evidence that emerges. There is more than a smack of the Bourbons about the MOD; it repeatedly conveys the impression of having learned nothing and forgotten nothing. In part, that is attributable to the incrementalist way in which the evidence was gathered prior to Jauncey.

A number of the reports seized on technical data and other matters. Very often, the technical data were probably less than the sum of their parts, but we have now got a comprehensive collection of all the available evidence, which has been addressed with considerable style. I use the word "style" without in any way wishing to undermine the content on which the work is based. Indeed, many of us who have discussed this matter with Ministers—I have probably been at this game as long as most and longer than pretty well anyone else—have heard the mantra that pilots of Chinook ZD 576 flew at the wrong speed, on the wrong course, in the wrong place, at the wrong time, in poor weather and visibility, and caused the helicopter to crash.

That was the standard response from Ministers at the Dispatch Box or in private conversation. It was put a little more eloquently by Sir William Wratten, when he said:

"Lamentably, all the evidence points towards them"—

that is, the pilots—

"having ignored one of the basic tenets of airmanship, which is never to attempt to fly visually below safety altitude unless weather conditions are unambiguously suitable for operating under visual flight rules."

Mr. Wilkinson: Is that not the case? To do anything other than what the hon. Gentleman has described is to imperil the aircraft and to fly it in a grossly negligent manner.

Mr. O'Neill: The hon. Gentleman is making my point for me. For men of the distinction of the pilots who have been accused of gross negligence, nothing would be further from their training, their habits or their behaviour. We are dealing with an element of gross negligence—everyone is agreed that it is extremely difficult to prove—involving pilots of the highest calibre, men who expressed misgivings about the craft that they were flying prior to the incident, men who would not take risks, having been so open and frank with their superiors and with others. They said that they had worries about the aircraft that they were required to fly. It might be said that that story could be fabricated, but it comes over in the evidence time and time again.

Mr. Wilkinson: The hon. Gentleman is most generous. Will he take it from me that history is littered with the wreckage of the careers and lives of the most experienced and wonderful pilots, who for various reasons seem to have broken all the rules and killed themselves, and perhaps others? That is a sad fact of aviation history.

Mr. O'Neill: I have heard that argument advanced before. I accept the point. I return to the responsibility with which the men concerned were charged. They had to take the cargo or the assets, whichever word we want to use. They had to take some of the most important people who were engaged in a war. Two of them were in the one aircraft at the one time, behaving negligently. I find that hard to understand.

The air marshals have always fairly maintained that the pilots never saw Mull and that no technical failure or malfunction occurred that deprived the pilots of control

[Mr. O'Neill]

up to the point of impact. Lastly, the Boeing simulator provided a reasonably accurate demonstration of the aircraft's movements for a period prior to impact. These were the assertions made by Ministers and by the air marshals. In paragraph 148 of the Jauncey report, we find the greatest single charge against that view. The Select Committee states:

"We consider that Sir John's conclusions on this matter"—

that is, gross negligence—

"must be weakened by his reliance on matters which he treated as facts but which have been demonstrated to our satisfaction to be not facts but merely hypotheses or assumptions."

That is the most telling part of all the reports.

If we are to read the interrogation or cross-examination that results in that conclusion, we see that it is not coming from someone who wishes to dissemble, or someone who wishes to put out a picture that is not true. It seems that we have almost lost sight of the wood for the trees. There is a welter of data. It must be said—this is one of the shortcomings of the tribunal system—that those with the greatest expertise are not necessarily the best people to weigh evidence. That is what the sheriff was able to do. It was what Lord Jauncey and his colleagues, doubtless under his direction, were able to do. That is where we are moving into new territories.

In the past, I have questioned people's integrity. I worried about the fact that there was a war. I have been concerned about technical data. I do not think that we need concern ourselves with those issues now. We have the facts. The way in which the inquiry has conducted its affairs requires our response. I hope that tonight we do not have votes and a confrontation. I hope that we can give the Government more time to pause and reflect.

It could be said that for the Department to change its mind on this issue is akin to a large tanker turning round. I make no reference to the Under-Secretary of State for Defence, my hon. Friend the Member for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie). Much reassessment is required. It is correct that before such a process is undergone, every piece of evidence both for and against is submitted to the greatest scrutiny. That is why I do not disparage the attempt to re-engage with Boeing on this issue.

I would like to think that the young men concerned—the members of the crew who were with them and their passengers—and their families will know that justice has been done. At present, too many people believe that justice has yet to be done.

8.46 pm

Mr. James Arbuthnot (North-East Hampshire): It is an honour to follow the hon. Member for Ochil (Mr. O'Neill). Today, our thoughts are with the crews of the Chinook helicopters that are about to fly out from Odiham to Afghanistan. I live three miles from Odiham, and I have fought to keep the Chinook base there because the local community is so proud of what the Chinook fleet does for the country.

We know that the crews will acquit themselves well in Afghanistan. We know that they will acquit their country with great honour, because they always do. A year or so ago, they acquitted themselves utterly brilliantly in Sierra Leone, and we know that they will do no less in Afghanistan.

Our thoughts are also with the families of the crews. Being left behind is one of the hardest tasks of all. The families will be hoping, as will we all, that their loved ones will come back safely. Yesterday, the Secretary of State told us that there may be casualties in Afghanistan. The families will know that if, God forbid, something dreadful happens during the campaign, they will not have to go through the agonies that the families of Jonathan Tapper and Rick Cook have been through. As my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) has said, the Royal Air Force has rightly changed the rules. The attribution of blame for negligence is now left to the civil courts. However, it is not enough to change the rules when we see that the rules are not working. If the Royal Air Force imposes rules on itself it, like everybody else, it is obliged to follow them. The key rule in all of this is the rule,

"Only in cases in which there is absolutely no doubt whatsoever should deceased air crew be found negligent."

That is what the RAF manual says; that is the rule that the RAF imposed on itself for good reason; that is the rule that it is obliged to obey and that is the rule that it broke.

In the debate on defence policy on 14 February, my hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) made the best defence I have yet heard of the decision by the Ministry of Defence to stick to the verdict of the board of inquiry. He made a number of important points. First, he said that an aircraft that had not had clearance from the Aircraft and Armament Experimental Establishment at Boscombe Down should never again

"be allowed to perform such an important mission".

I agree. Only the day before the crash, Boscombe Down had not only failed to clear the aircraft, it had refused even to allow the continuance of test-flying of the Chinook mark 2. Perhaps the most poignant thing is that days before the crash Rick Cook had asked his father to look after his family if things went wrong; it seemed that he knew that the aircraft was not yet ready.

That brings me to my first question to the Minister. In his winding-up speech on 14 February, the Minister of State for Defence asked

"all Members to take their consideration beyond the technical aspects of the report and the terrible tragedy that occurred."

He continued:

"We also have to examine the airmanship decisions taken by the pilots on the day."—[*Official Report*, 14 February 2002; Vol. 380, c. 382, 410.]

Of course, he was right. However, those who defend the decision of the board of inquiry now tend to say, "Well, something may have gone wrong with the aeroplane, but it should not have been there at that time, at that speed and in those conditions." Can the Under-Secretary of State for Defence say whether the MOD accepts that indeed there may have been a fault in FADEC? After all, the MOD was taking Textron Lycoming to arbitration, so something must have been wrong. Will the Minister say, preferably yes or no, whether the MOD accepts that there could at least be some doubt about the air-worthiness of the helicopter's control system? If the answer is no, what on earth was the arbitration about? More to the point, why on earth did the arbitration succeed?

Mr. Dalyell: Is the right hon. Gentleman not shocked that apparently the then Secretary of State, Malcolm

Rifkind, a personal friend of mine, was not told that arbitration was going on? Should not someone in the MOD have said, "Look, Secretary of State, we think you ought to know that all this arbitration is going on and may be relevant."?

Mr. Arbuthnot: Yes, I am shocked that Malcolm Rifkind was not told. Someone in the MOD should have said, "Look, Secretary of State, something is going on." However, the present Secretary of State should recognise that that is a new fact and was not available to the board of inquiry when it reported. For Ministers to come to the House, or speak on television or radio programmes, and say that the various inquiries have produced nothing new is an utter travesty of the truth.

Ms Debra Shipley (Stourbridge): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree, given the quality of this evening's contributions, that it would reflect well on the MOD and the armed forces to acknowledge that things were not as they should have been? There is a need for change—there has indeed been a culture of change—and we must progress more constructively.

Mr. Arbuthnot: I agree; the hon. Lady makes a fair point. If the Secretary of State, Ministers and senior officers and officials in the MOD said, "Yes, we recognise that the verdict has to be reopened," there would be no criticism of the MOD at all; everybody would accept that it was doing the right thing for the right reasons. That would be an excellent step for it to take.

I shall now turn to the crux of the speech made by my hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood last month, which was broadly in support of the contention that the pilots should not have been there at all. As it turned out, of course, indeed they should not have been, but the question is, why were they? My hon. Friend said that their lordships, in their Select Committee finding, were "wise after the event". Of course they were, and so must we be. My hon. Friend said that their lordships had

"not flown helicopters at low level in difficult weather conditions."—[*Official Report*, 14 February 2002; Vol. 380, c. 383.]

Of course they had not. Neither, as I understand it, has Air Marshal Sir William Wratten. I do not criticise him for that; he is a fast jet pilot, and of course fast jets operate in wholly different conditions from helicopters.

However, their lordships are in a position to judge whether the weather conditions were difficult or not. Having done an exhaustive analysis of all the evidence, their lordships came to the conclusion that it was impossible to know what weather conditions the pilots were experiencing as they approached the mull.

Mr. Wilkinson: My right hon. Friend is most generous. We do know what the weather was. There were 10 witnesses on the Mull of Kintyre and they all confirmed that the mull was in cloud and that the cloud obscured the lighthouse. There had been a forecast of a 30 per cent. probability of IMC—instrument meteorological conditions—with visibility of about 500 m and low cloud in the vicinity of the mull. The weather report of the naval pilot speaks of cloud stratus at 200 ft and visibility of a quarter of a mile at worst. There was exceptionally bad weather all around the mull.

Mr. Arbuthnot: Well, it seems odd, then, that Mr. Holbrook could have seen sun glinting on the helicopter. My hon. Friend's point about there being a number of witnesses on the mull is true. There were a number of witnesses on the mull, but all the witnesses were either on the mull itself or at sea level, so they were not able to determine what the pilots were able to see at their height. They were in different conditions.

I have not understood, and I do not think that the Select Committee in another place understood, why Mr. Holbrook was sailing among a number of different fishing vessels, yet no evidence was taken from the skippers on those vessels—in fact, none of the skippers of those other fishing vessels were even sought, let alone found or evidence taken from them.

There is no understanding of what the pilots saw because there is no evidence of what the pilots could see. There was no cockpit voice recorder; we do not know what they were saying to each other. There was no black box. There is no other evidence of what the pilots themselves could or could not see. The Select Committee reports Mr. Holbrook as having said that he

"considered that the crew of the aircraft when he saw it could determine without ambiguity where the Mull was and could see the cliffs, beach and lower perimeter walls of the lighthouse complex."

The air marshals, though, did not know that Mr. Holbrook thought that. The reason that they did not know was that they did not ask him. Their lordships said that they asked Mr. Holbrook only three questions, only one of which

"was relevant to weather, namely whether he could see the physical features of the cliff on the Mull."

To that, he replied no.

In other words, when my hon. and gallant Friend says, as he did last month, that the crew were flying in very marginal weather, we do not know whether that is true. Anyway, I remind him that the board of inquiry was obliged to take that view only if there was "absolutely no doubt whatsoever". Mr. Holbrook, who was there, clearly goes further than to doubt it. He disagrees with the proposition.

I have two further points to make. First, the standard of proof required, of "absolutely no doubt whatsoever", is extraordinarily high. It is intentionally high because in cases where pilots are unable to defend themselves, the RAF rightly tries to look after its own personnel, who are, after all, flying an aircraft provided by the RAF.

Last month I took the liberty of saying where I felt that the air marshals had failed to apply the right test. I said that Air Marshal Sir John Day got it wrong when he said:

"In my judgment, none of the possible factors and scenarios are so strong that they would have been likely to prevent such an experienced crew from maintaining safe flight."

In using the word "likely" as he did, he was applying the wrong test. I believe that he genuinely did not understand that, and I believe that some of the Ministers who have since dealt with the matter have also genuinely not understood that.

For example, on 11 July 2000, the Minister for Transport, the right hon. Member for Warley (Mr. Spellar), then the Minister of State in the Ministry of Defence, answered a written question from me about the health of the two pilots shortly before the crash. His answer was that

"The Board of Inquiry concluded that the mental and physical state of Flight Lieutenants Tapper and Cook was most unlikely to have been a factor in the accident".—[*Official Report*, 11 July 2000; Vol. 353, c. 454W.]

[Mr. Arbuthnot]

But likelihood has got nothing to do with the issue. There has to be "absolutely no doubt whatsoever". So here we have another element of doubt—could the mental or physical state of one of the pilots, or possibly of both of them, have been a factor in the accident? We do not know, as with so much of the rest of the case.

And now I come on to my final point, which is this. On 1 June 1995 there was another crash. A Harrier GR7, flight number ZG 475, crashed into the sea and, sadly, the pilot was killed. In the RAF board of inquiry report that followed, there was no finding of negligence, and that was obviously the right conclusion. One important paragraph from that report reads as follows:

"The investigation was able to eliminate technical fault, structural failure and birdstrike as possible causes of the accident. The investigation focused, therefore, on the human factor aspects. Although there was no evidence to suggest that the pilot had been medically incapacitated, the Inquiry could not rule out the possibility that he may have been partially incapacitated for a period before the application of full back stick. It also considered feasible that the pilot may have been distracted by other in-cockpit tasks during the descent and did not notice the proximity of the sea."

If an RAF board of inquiry could make such a finding—a correct finding—in relation to a single pilot in an aeroplane which contained an accident data recorder or black box, how could a board of inquiry possibly make a different finding in relation to an aeroplane which had numerous technical problems, which did not have a black box and which could have been under the control of either one of the two pilots at the time? How can it possibly rule out all question of illness? How can it possibly rule out even questions of disagreement between the two pilots? Obviously it cannot.

This verdict flies in the face of all reason and it flies in the face of all justice. If these pilots can be cleared by a Select Committee in another place, we should do the same.

9.2 pm

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): I can be mercifully brief tonight. I wish to make only one point. That is not because I disagree with the comments of my right hon. and hon. Friends who have contributed to the debate; they have made their points in a most effective and superb style. I merely wish to take the House back to one comment that the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) made in his speech, and that was that this House should not question the integrity of the air chief marshals. It is proper that we should not question their integrity and that the House should be careful before commenting on people who are not Members of the House who cannot be here to defend themselves.

But given the way in which the debate continues to rumble on and for the evidence to be gathered as it is, I do believe that we have to put by the side of integrity, which none of us are doubting, an equally important quality, and that is judgment. It is not the judgment of anybody that we are talking about. When we are talking about Sir John Day, we are talking about somebody who is at the very centre of the defence of this country.

While, of course, I can understand the Government wanting to take time and to choose the moment when they will respond to a Select Committee report of the other place, I believe that we have reached the point now where we are not questioning the effect of allowing this decision to stand on the morale of the services, but on the judgment of the electorate in the wider field. If people at the very centre of the defence of this country maintain a judgment in spite of all the evidence that is being put forward, that raises some terrifying question marks. I therefore hope that when the Government come to respond, it is not a question whether we should defend people who have been asked to make the decision and who still have a role in public life; it is a much bigger issue than that.

I bring us back to the central idea that has dominated this debate. We are not in a court, weighing up evidence or coming to a conclusion on that evidence. The tribunal, to use the phrase that others have used, had to have "absolutely no doubt whatsoever" about the evidence before it. When I hear the Government asking for even more simulations from the manufacturers, I worry that we might be in danger of not seeing the wood for the simulated models. There is now a body of evidence that does not prove that the pilots were innocent but that does suggest doubt. That is the issue on which the Government must concentrate their mind. It is not right to look for new evidence; the evidence must be weighed. After weighing it, on every point, the Government must be certain that they can dismiss it to maintain the judgment. The slightest glint of doubt in the Secretary of State's mind must bring him to a conclusion that the judgment is unsound and unsatisfactory and must be put aside.

Of course, in debates such as this, it is easy for us to forget the pilots, their memory and their families, and the numbers of people who were killed on that day and their families, who, clearly, will never get over this horrendous event. However, we are not debating our feelings towards them, as crucial as that is in another sphere. We are debating whether the Government, despite all the evidence that has been put forward, can maintain that there is "absolutely no doubt whatsoever" that the decision made by the tribunal is correct. I do not believe that anybody who is rational can maintain that.

Therefore, I say to my hon. Friend the Minister that the longer this goes on, the greater the worry not merely that the air chief marshals' judgment—not their integrity—might be wrong but that, perhaps for the wrong motives, the Ministry of Defence will come to a wrong judgment again. It is bad enough if one comes to a wrong judgment in taking away somebody's income support. One can often make good that mistake on a later occasion. However, we are talking about a small core of people on whose judgment the security of our country rests. We are in deeply worrying territory in which the Government still cannot make up their mind and come to a judgment, on the weight of the evidence, as to whether the tribunal inquiry verdict should be set aside.

Although the Government are of course right to take time, to work within the six months, and to choose the moment at which they wish to make their decision, the debate has rumbled on at length, here and elsewhere in the country. More and more people are not just talking about the integrity of the air chief marshals; they are beginning to talk about the judgment and the wisdom of the people who have the security of this realm as their first priority.

9.10 pm

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): I am most grateful for the measured and informed way in which my right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden (David Davis) initiated the debate. He was followed in similar terms by the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) and by my right hon. Friend the Member for North-East Hampshire (Mr. Arbuthnot). I wish to add to their remarks, not to repeat them. I agree with everything that they said.

For 18 years, I have had the honour to represent more than 11,000 employees of the Ministry of Defence, including those who work at Boscombe Down where the RAF has been present with scientific and industrial civil servants who are engaged on the business of evaluating the RAF's aircraft. I have therefore been prone to support the chain of command and Defence Ministers of whatever Government and to recognise that they need our support in peacetime as well as in time of conflict. However, just as I am about to conclude that they may have got it right after all in this case, something happens to make me realise that they have got it wrong.

For six years, with my right hon. and hon. Friends, I have been engaged deeply in this case. Initially, I did not know the families of the two brave pilots who died. I am honoured to have made their acquaintance over the years. However, I know the people who work at Boscombe Down, so I was astonished at the tone that the Ministry of Defence used in dismissing their work.

I received a minute headed "Draft DO From AOCINC" to the assistant Chief of the Air Staff dated 6 June 1994—four days after the crash of ZD 576. The complaint was that

"for the second time this year, because of their concerns about the safety of the FADEC system, they had stopped trials flying on the Chinook Mk 2. I understand that, in practice, they are not flying the Chinook at all. Consequently, delivery of their aircraft to RAF Odiham on 21 July to enter minor servicing will be carried by a No. 7 Squadron crew who, because of test equipment fitted to the aircraft, will operate under a Service Deviation."

In other words, Boscombe Down was not prepared to fly the aircraft. Odiham had to send a special crew and ordered them to fly an aircraft that Boscombe Down said should not be flown.

Lady Hermon: Did the air marshals and the board of investigation have that information from Boscombe Down?

Mr. Key: I have no way of knowing. I am sure that someone in the Ministry of Defence had the information, but I do not know whether it made its way to the Scottish inquiry or to the RAF board of inquiry.

The minute again refers to Boscombe Down and states:

"their ongoing stance towards the Mk 2 contrasts sharply with the considerable efforts being made by the front line to bring the aircraft into service and maintain a capability. It also does nothing to engender aircrew confidence in the aircraft. In sum, I find A&AEE's attitude quite incredible."

That is an astonishing thing for any senior officer to say.

Under questioning by the Select Committee on Defence in its fourth report, "The Lessons of the Chinook Crash on the Mull of Kintyre" published on 13 May 1998, Colonel Hodgkiss, who was at the time the assistant director of Helicopter Projects 1 at the Ministry of Defence referred to Boscombe Down and said:

"All that it has not satisfied is an internally-imposed test procedure which Boscombe Down believe they should apply because they consider that their role is to give unequivocal advice and recommendations to the operators of the aircraft."

Quite so—that is what Boscombe Down did. It said that the aircraft should not fly. The RAF continued to fly it and ZD 576 crashed.

I have engaged in extensive correspondence with Ministers over the years. Allow me to quote a letter to me from the then Secretary of State for Defence, now Lord Robertson, dated 24 November 1997. He wrote:

"I would take this opportunity to make it abundantly clear that we are satisfied, on the evidence available,"—

on the evidence available—

"that this accident was not the result of any technical malfunction."

Lord Robertson then set up a meeting, which my right hon. Friend the Member for North–East Hampshire also attended.

The atmosphere at that meeting was not especially happy, because it was clear that the Ministry of Defence had been tasked to brief us. Its representatives did not like questions—they were not used to questions—and it was clear to me even at that stage, in November 1997, that the Ministry of Defence and the Royal Air Force were not going to consider any judgments about the standards of proof. They would stick to their demand for new evidence and they, and they alone, would decide what constituted new evidence. They would deny all subsequent evidence, from 1997 onwards, presented by technical experts—even people they had employed as their own consultants. They would even seek to justify not disclosing litigation in the United States of America.

I was astonished to find in the report that I quoted previously that when the then Minister for the Armed Forces, the right hon. Member for Hamilton, North and Bellshill (Dr. Reid), was questioned about whether the Scottish fatal accident inquiry knew of the United States case, he replied:

"Had the sheriff in any way indicated any interest in that, of course he would have been supplied with it as he was with everything else. There is an endless potential mine of information on tens of thousands of components in a Chinook. It is not possible to just load them on to a sheriff. We gave what we think was relevant to our Board of Inquiry and supplied anything the sheriff might want to ask for."

What an extraordinary way in which to carry out any inquiry.

About that time, I visited the Defence Procurement Agency down in Abbey Wood for a briefing on its new functions and systems. I met the team that was engaged full-time in defending the Ministry of Defence's position. In 1998, there was a dedicated team at Abbey Wood; it is probably still there, answering parliamentary questions.

Some very strange things were happening. In my years in Parliament, I have had all sorts of pressure put on me—as have we all—but never anything quite like what happened in December 1997. At that time, I attended a reception for defence contractors in a hotel in Park lane. I was approached by a highly distinguished Conservative peer who had served in the RAF during the second world war and had been a Minister in Conservative

[Mr. Key]

Governments. He had been asked by senior RAF officers to put me off the trail: he said that it would serve no purpose if I continued.

None the less, I had questions for answer. I asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he would place in the Library copies of the minute relating to the Textron White Paper and the White paper itself. I asked him about the fully automated digital engine control system and whether he would put in the Library copies of the 70 incident signals relating to FADEC. I later asked if he would put in the Library

"reports he has received from the United States authorities relating to the US Army Chinook CH-47 barrel roll incident in 1998"—[*Official Report*, 6 December 1999; Vol. 340, c. 347W.]

which has already been mentioned. In answer to my request for the Textron White Paper, the then Under-Secretary of State for Defence, the right hon. Member for Warley (Mr. Spellar), told me:

"The subject document contains internal opinions and advice, disclosure of which would harm the frankness and candour of internal discussion. Accordingly, I am withholding the information requested under exemption 2b of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information."—[*Official Report*, 3 December 1997; Vol. 302, c. 264W.]

The answers to my other questions cited exemptions 13, 2 and 1c. The Ministry of Defence did not wish to share the information.

Then something extraordinary happened. On 5 December, I wrote a contemporaneous note which states that on Tuesday 2 December, I went to Carol Stone's Christmas party at the Institution of Civil Engineers. There I met a former Secretary of State for Defence who told me that, a couple of weeks previously, a senior official in the Ministry of Defence had telephoned his former special adviser to say would she please ask the former Secretary of State for Defence to persuade me to drop my pursuit of the Mull of Kintyre Chinook crash. That, in my judgment, was an extraordinary thing for a Ministry of Defence official to do.

So it went on. We were denied information, letters were exchanged and I took up the matter with the Cabinet Secretary, who referred me back to the Secretary of State for Defence, who said that he was very sorry that I was not satisfied with the answers and that I would therefore have another briefing with officials, which I had; it was acrimonious and I will not relate it here.

In spite of being denied evidence, and in spite of the failure to answer questions, Mr. Martin Bell, who was then a Member of Parliament, wrote to the Prime Minister. On 18 July 2000, the Prime Minister said in his reply:

"This Government has tried to be entirely straightforward and open about the circumstances of the crash and the conduct of the Inquiry. The proceedings of the Inquiry were released. Questions have been answered fully. Any material which might have amounted to new evidence, or which might have offered fresh perspectives on the accident, has been analysed . . . I repeat to you the long-standing pledge, that I also give to Mrs. Tapper, that any new evidence would be thoroughly considered. In the absence of such grounds, however, I see no case for re-opening the inquiry."

This distinguished lawyer, our Prime Minister, added in his own hand:

"I am sorry if this is a disappointing reply but we do need fresh evidence to justify re-opening this issue."

It is not a question of new evidence but of judging existing evidence, what is meant by "absolutely no doubt whatsoever", and standards of proof. The RAF regulation required a much higher standard of proof than is required in criminal cases, including those involving murder. In criminal cases, the standard is "beyond reasonable doubt"; in civil cases, the standard is "the balance of probabilities". The latter standard was applied by the Scottish sheriff, who refused to attribute the incident to pilot error.

Ministers accept that there is "absolutely no doubt whatsoever" as to why the two pilots were unable to avoid crashing into the Mull of Kintyre. The RAF does not know, and cannot say, why things went wrong and the aircraft was in the wrong place at the wrong time. Whatever anyone may say, no one will know the answer. Ministers also accept that there is "absolutely no doubt whatsoever" that no mechanical or computer software fault occurred. To me, both propositions are incredible. I cannot believe them, and nor would any jury.

The issue is about honour, not money. As we have heard, the Ministry of Defence has changed the rules retrospectively—no one who dies will ever again be accused of gross negligence. The issue should be a matter of honour for this Government and this Prime Minister. He should do the decent thing and overturn that dishonourable verdict.

9.22 pm

Lady Hermon (North Down): It is a pleasure speak in the debate, having heard the contribution of the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field). I am greatly concerned by some of the evidence put before us this evening, and I hope that the Minister will address these issues.

I have listened intently to hon. Members' contributions, but we should reflect for a moment or two on the personal tragedy involved. On 2 June 1994—almost eight years ago—29 people were killed outright on the Mull of Kintyre in dreadful circumstances, which were made worse by the fact that the aircraft in question caught fire. It was a great tragedy, and the circumstances proved deeply upsetting to the widows. Air Chief Marshal Sir William Wratten described it as

"the largest peacetime tragedy that the Royal Air Force had suffered."

Although my husband, a former Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, retired from the RUC some five years before that crash, I know that it was also the greatest tragedy in the RUC's history. Ten members of the police service, who were also members of special branch, died. Even today, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland rightly paid tribute, in a completely different context, to the work of special branch—not only in respect of the security of Northern Ireland, but in a wider sense.

This morning, I spoke to one of the six RUC widows who live in my constituency. She said:

"My husband is dead, but he still has his reputation. The MOD can do no more to him or for him, but the MOD can do more for Flight Lieutenants Tapper and Cook . . . they can clear their names and give them back their reputations."

The fact that 29 people died caused enormous heartache and pain, as it would to anyone who lost a loved one in such dreadful circumstances. The fact that the two pilots

were held to be grossly negligent was enormously painful, hurtful and offensive not only to the flight lieutenants but to the others widowed in that crash.

Earlier, hon. Members discussed the difference between negligence and gross negligence. I may be corrected by the Minister, but I had understood that the pilots being held to be grossly negligent had at an early stage affected the compensation payable to their widows. Gross negligence made a difference. If the circumstances have changed, I should be glad to hear the Minister explain to the House the compensation issues that arise.

The RAF's manual, which was available at the time to the air marshals and does not constitute fresh evidence, clearly states in black and white:

"only in cases in which there is absolutely no doubt whatsoever should deceased air crew be found negligent".

The manual contains guidelines on what amounts to negligence or human frailties, so it is not as though no guidance was available. Paragraph 1 of annexe G to chapter 8 of the manual states that, broadly speaking, causes of accidents fall into three categories: technical faults, natural operating or medical hazards, and human failings.

Paragraph 2 explains what human failings amount to and suggests that judgments be made by answering two questions. The first is:

"Was the person's act which is under consideration an essential link without which the final event would not have happened?"

The second is:

"Ought the person to have foreseen that their action or their failure to take action would in all probability occasion the final event?"

The House of Lords Select Committee report concludes:

"the question to be answered is whether there is absolutely no doubt whatsoever that they ought to have foreseen that their action would in all probability occasion the final event."

Referring to the air marshals' conclusion that

"the pilots were grossly negligent in placing the aircraft in the position in which it was at or before the way point change was made",

it found that

"regardless of what happened thereafter, the question to be answered is whether there is absolutely no doubt",

and that the air marshals had not properly answered the questions.

The Government must be fair. As I said in my intervention on the Secretary of State earlier, in considering fatal accident inquiries and investigations, great sensitivity should be used. In light of the extremely high standard required at the time, the MOD should not linger for six more months but quickly conclude that an error of judgment was made in finding that the two flight lieutenants were grossly negligent. Their names must be cleared. The MOD has an opportunity to do that, and I urge it to do so at the earliest opportunity.

9.29 pm

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): The hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon) made a deeply moving speech.

I declare an interest as an elected companion of the Royal Aeronautical Society by virtue of five years' service on the flight safety awards panel of the Civil Aviation Authority.

In my speech on 14 February I stated that in my judgment the air marshals were

"justified in their belief, with the wisdom of hindsight, that the crew, who were flying in very marginal weather with high ground ahead and with the aircraft slightly off track to the right, probably ought to have aborted, or at least got well clear of the high ground with all speed."

The point is this. On take-off, the weather forecast for the vicinity of the Mull of Kintyre gave a 30 per cent. probability of weather that could by no possible stretch of the imagination be construed as suitable for flights under visual flight rules. The reports that we have make it clear that as the aircraft approached the mull the weather was indeed well below conditions for visual flight rules.

In justifying Air Chief Marshal Sir William Wratten and Air Vice Marshal Sir John Day, who reviewed the board of inquiry's conclusions, I added:

"The House would be wise not to follow the path taken in the other place, or to try to second guess the investigations of military accidents, however tragic the circumstances"—

few could have been more tragic than these—

"however much we sympathise with the grief".—[*Official Report*, 14 February 2002; Vol. 380, c. 383-84.]

There could have been no better qualified air officers commanding to review a board of inquiry's findings than those two air marshals. Air Vice Marshal Day has a BSc in aeronautical engineering from Imperial college, served two tours as a flying instructor—one in command of a flying training squadron—was a support helicopter pilot and then commanded a support helicopter squadron. Indeed, less than 10 years before the accident he commanded the base at RAF Odiham where the Chinooks are located.

Air Chief Marshal Sir William Wratten is an aviator's air marshal if ever there was one—certainly, he is no Whitehall warrior. He commanded the Royal Air Force in the Gulf war and led the battle of Britain fly past a few months previously. One could not find a finer flyer and a prouder example of the best traditions of the service.

That is not to say that the professional distinction, the Air Force crosses, the legions of merit and the aeronautical degrees immunise the two air marshals from the possibility of error, any more than long experience on Chinooks, including much time in a special forces role, precludes the possibility that two much-respected deceased flight lieutenants could commit an error of basic airmanship that constituted gross negligence.

However, since my 14 February speech I have studied the sortie profile again and have looked in greater depth at the original conclusions of the board of inquiry, the air accidents investigation branch's findings and Sheriff Young's fatal accident inquiry, together with their recommendations and those of the House of Lords Select Committee. I did so in the knowledge that the air marshals were not callous or unfeeling or insensitive to the reputations of the pilots whom death had robbed of the right of reply. On the contrary, a lifetime of service flying, with the inevitable loss of many friends in all-too-frequent air accidents, will have taught the air marshals that military flying operations and their safe execution require standards of discipline and perfection that can never be compromised.

Flying regulations are quite simply life preservers. Failure to comply with them is often likely to be fatal and cannot be condoned in peacetime operations.

[Mr. John Wilkinson]

In circumstances where they are not followed, as in the case of Chinook ZD 576's attempts to maintain low-level flight according to visual flight rules, in instrument meteorological conditions, at about cruising speed, in the vicinity of high ground on the Mull of Kintyre, this cannot be exonerated by the experience of the crews. Indeed, far from being a mitigating factor, the very experience of the crew justifies the attribution of gross negligence. Sentiment cannot enter into air accident investigations; probity is what they are about.

There is no doubt that the aircraft was flying in instrument meteorological conditions. The witnesses on or about the mull confirm that. There were 10 of them, including a lighthouse keeper whose job is to take weather reports. The aircraft's speed is not in doubt, in that it can be verified by the spread and disintegration of the wreckage at the crash site, as well as by readings recovered from the instrumentation. There was no confirmation of any technical malfunction that would, of itself, have caused the accident, and this was verified by the board of inquiry and by the air accidents investigation branch's report. The point is that the crew should not have been flying in a way that could have led to the loss of the aircraft, had there been any malfunction.

Mr. Arbuthnot: My hon. Friend says that there was no confirmation of any technical malfunction. That is not the test. Is there a possibility that there was a technical malfunction? That is the test.

Mr. Wilkinson: The test is the one that we are looking at today—whether gross negligence was the right finding.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Wilkinson: No, I cannot.

By changing the way point from the Mull of Kintyre lighthouse to Corran, the crew deprived themselves of the certainty of the reference to the lighthouse that was their turning point. The lighthouse was in cloud and, having removed position information with reference to the mull, this could have been the crew's fatal error. Indeed, I suspect that they were looking for the mull lighthouse. We know that they were south-east of track, and that there was error on the TANS, which had been faultily programmed before flight. The engines were running normally at the time of the crash, and there was no evidence of a flying control failure that would, of itself, have precipitated the accident.

Their lordships and their supporters have indulged in many speculations, relating to FADEC problems, control system jams, undemanded excessive left rudder input on the part of Flight Lieutenant Cook, who was flying the aircraft in the right-hand seat, and to much else besides. However, the accident parameters are entirely consistent with cruising flight into high ground, with a last-second attempt to flare the aircraft and to yaw away from the hill to port.

As in so many accidents, there are a number of events which, while not contributory, cannot pass unremarked. It is true that Flight Lieutenant Tapper could self-authorise without a briefing officer, and if the squadron leader on duty had been available, he might perhaps have prevented the sortie by persuading the flight lieutenant not to choose the Mull of Kintyre routing in those weather conditions, or by persuading him to consider other possibilities.

The weather is paramount here. I have mentioned the forecast of a 30 per cent. probability of instrument meteorological conditions around the mull. The actual forecast made by a qualified observer closest to the time of the accident was that of the Sea King pilot, whose log stated that there was, at worst, seven eighths stratus at 200 ft and, at best, seven eighths strato cumulus at 900 ft. The log also states that the visibility was, at worst, a quarter of a mile. The height of the top cloud was 1,500 ft, which is more or less the height of the top of mull. The weather was, therefore, in no way suitable for flight in visual flight rules.

The crew ought to have aborted the sortie or climbed above safety altitude as soon as a deterioration occurred or as soon as there was a likelihood of deterioration. Coming in off the sea, with the fishbowl effect that occurs when flying low over water, makes these judgments particularly difficult, and makes it negligent to press on without firm visual pinpoints, which there is no evidence that the crew possessed.

In conclusion, I can only say that the air marshals fulfilled their duty as I believe they were required to. The criteria relating to negligence are

"Whether the person had the necessary degree of skill and/or knowledge, or should have had that skill and/or knowledge, to make the right decision and act upon it"

and

"Whether the person failed to exercise the degree of skill and/or knowledge required".

Given all the evidence of the weather conditions prevailing and the flight profile decided on, I believe that the air marshals were correct, and I hope that the Ministry of Defence upholds their judgment.

9.40 pm

Angus Robertson (Moray): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak. Along with the Secretary of State and every other speaker, I share the sadness of the families of the two pilots and the two crew members, and those of the 25 passengers who were on board the Chinook.

In the run-up to the debate I was struck, as one of the newer Members, by the view—taken by many during the election campaign—that Parliament and politics are a cynical business in which there is no agreement between parties or between Members with differing opinions, on the left or on the right, on constitutional questions. I am therefore proud to take part in this debate, and to support the motion along with Members on both sides of the House. I am also humbled by the fact that others here have contributed so much in the past—for instance, the hon. Member for Ochil (Mr. O'Neill), a long-standing campaigner on this issue, the right hon. Member for North-East Hampshire (Mr. Arbuthnot), who made one of the most significant speeches I have heard during my short time in the House in a defence debate on 14 February, and the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key). We should also bear in mind the comments of the former Member for Edinburgh, Pentlands.

Like everyone else who supports the aims of the motion, I do not think that this is a party political issue. The debate can send a powerful message to the MOD and

to Ministers that elected representatives throughout the House are deeply unhappy about the findings of negligence. We are not interested in who is to blame. We would be delighted to know who will break the logjam, clear the names of Flight Lieutenants Jonathan Tapper and Richard Cook, and maintain the good standing of the MOD.

Mine is primarily a constituency interest. I represent two of the largest RAF bases in the United Kingdom. I speak to many people serving on those bases, and I know that a number of them share the disquiet expressed by nearly every speaker today. They are not interested in second-guessing the motives or questioning the professionalism of those who arrived at the negligence finding; what they want, what I want and what so many who have spoken today want is natural justice. They believe that the balance of proof has not been achieved, and that this is an issue of judgment.

This has been oft repeated, and I repeat it again: I cannot get my head around how a conclusion of negligence could have been reached in the first place, given that the test is "absolutely no doubt whatsoever". I am a great supporter of the Scots legal system—of its rigour and its high standards—and I am sure that even a first-year Scots law student just starting a course would find it difficult to understand how, if negligence could not be proved with the standard "balance of probabilities" constraints of the fatal accident inquiry, it could be proved with the higher RAF standard of "absolutely no doubt whatsoever".

I am concerned about the prospect of a new simulator. I agree with other Members that if all that is available is an average speed, a hypothesis based on another hypothesis and inconclusive input data, a simulation will not produce a finding that will support the truth.

I welcome the comment by the Secretary of State that he would take new legal advice. That is perhaps a glimmer of hope that we can take from the debate.

It is not our job to prove that the flight crew were not negligent. It is up to those who support that unproven finding to prove that they were. The Government should listen to the bipartisan views expressed in this debate. They should set aside the verdict. I hope that they do so at the earliest opportunity.

9.45 pm

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): I shall be very brief. I wanted to speak in the debate for several reasons. First, I represent a large number of RAF personnel based at Marham and Coltishall. Secondly, I represent the family of Jonathan Tapper, who live in Burnham Thorpe in my constituency. Thirdly, I was Parliamentary Private Secretary to Sir Malcolm Rifkind when my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) was special adviser. I have no doubt, having spoken to Sir Malcolm, that had he known at the time that the MOD had been in dispute with the manufacturers, he would not have accepted the advice of the two air marshals. I am absolutely clear on that fact.

We have had some excellent speeches, but I just wanted to say that the families of the two pilots have been through hell and back. Their sons were found guilty of gross negligence, a finding that was not upheld by the first two inquiries and by the third inquiry of the House of Lords Select Committee. One does not have to be a lawyer to conclude that, had either of those pilots survived, they probably would have faced charges of manslaughter. We are seeing an appalling slur on their professional reputations, a slur on their families and an undermining of two young men who had an impeccable service record. Having looked at the House of Lords report very clearly, I feel that the Government have an opportunity to set aside the findings. If they do that, they will restore honour to the Department.

9.47 pm

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): The House has heard some very moving, wonderful, well-balanced speeches from both sides of the argument. Hon. Members on both sides of the House will wish to join me in offering our renewed condolences to the families of all the 29 people who were killed in the tragic crash of Chinook ZD 576 on the Mull of Kintyre on 2 June 1994, but we pay particular tribute to the families of Flight Lieutenants Jonathan Tapper and Richard Cook, who have fought a long and determined campaign to change the conclusion of the original RAF board of inquiry that they were guilty of gross negligence.

We have heard a number of outstanding speeches from hon. Members with a great deal of knowledge and interest in the tragic incident. My right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden (David Davis) has taken a long-standing interest in the case since he chaired the subsequent PAC inquiry into it. My right hon. Friend the Member for North-East Hampshire (Mr. Arbuthnot) and Sir Malcolm Rifkind, who were the Ministers responsible for the original decision, have been very courageous in now admitting that their original judgment was incorrect. As the hon. Member for Ochil (Mr. O'Neill) reminded the House, no one now believes that the pilots flew at the wrong speed, at the wrong height and in the wrong place, as was accepted wisdom at one time.

My right hon. Friend the Member for North-East Hampshire also has a strong constituency interest, with RAF Odiham in his area, from where it was announced yesterday that three Chinooks were to be deployed to Afghanistan with the 45 Commando battle group. All parts of the House will wish to join him in wishing those personnel well and in thinking of the families they leave behind. Incidentally, the Minister might like to tell us whether the three Chinooks will be fitted with black box flight recorders. I hope that they will.

Uniquely, hon. Members on both sides of the House spoke in support of the Conservative motion. I mention in particular the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell), my hon. Friend and neighbour the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key), who has been involved in this matter for so long, the hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson), and my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Norfolk (Mr. Bellingham). The broad cross-party agreement on the issue may be something to which Ministers will wish to pay particular attention, and in recognition of it, we will not seek to divide the House this evening.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson), who speaks with such authority on all aviation matters, spoke with great courage and was the only hon. Member to seek to persuade the House that the original conclusions of the air marshals were correct. I sympathise with his view that respect for the chain of

[Mr. James Gray]

command must be paramount in the maintenance of proper military discipline, and it is extremely unusual, to say the least, for this place to seek to question a conclusion that has been reached.

In doing so—as the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife and the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) reminded us—we are not seeking to challenge the honour or integrity of Ministers or senior RAF officers; we are seeking to question their judgment. The experience of the two air marshals concerned is beyond question. None the less, we would appeal to them to reconsider the conclusion that they came to four or five years ago.

Under normal circumstances, Her Majesty's loyal Opposition go to lengths to support ministerial operational and deployment decisions. Our support for the Government on everything that they have done in Afghanistan is testimony to that. However, we have come to the clear conclusion that it really is time to revisit the MOD's original decision on the Chinook crash.

Since the original RAF board of inquiry in 1995, there has been the fatal accident inquiry in 1996, which left wide open the question of what caused the accident. In 1998, the Select Committee on Defence stopped short of making any judgment on the cause of the crash. In 2000, the Public Accounts Committee—chaired by my right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden—went further and disputed the original findings. Most recently, the Select Committee in the other place overturned the original inquiry's findings altogether.

The sheer weight of evidence that those various inquiries have produced, and the legal and military distinction of many of those who are calling for a rethink, must give all of us cause for concern about the original conclusions.

In particular, it would be difficult for any of us to do other than to listen carefully to the Select Committee's conclusion that

"we have considered the justification for the Air Marshals' finding of negligence . . . against the applicable standard of proof, which required 'absolutely no doubt whatsoever'. In the light of all the evidence before us . . . we unanimously conclude that the reviewing officers were not justified in finding that negligence on the part of the pilots caused the aircraft to crash."

Now is not the time to revisit the evidence in detail. That has been done convincingly by a number of hon. Members tonight and satisfactorily by all four inquiries. Listening to them, it seems to me that the only conclusion that any dispassionate observer could possibly come to is that the sequence of events that led to the crash remain, and will always remain, to some degree unclear. We do not know what happened on the Mull of Kintyre on that fateful day, and we will never know.

Since that is the case, it is simply incorrect to conclude that there is "absolutely no doubt whatsoever" that gross pilot negligence was to blame. No court in the land—no court in the world—would come to the conclusion that there was "absolutely no doubt whatsoever" that gross pilot negligence was to blame. That point alone should be more than sufficient to lead Ministers to overturn the conclusion of the RAF inquiry.

The Secretary of State agreed in his introductory remarks that internal MOD procedures have now changed so that the sequence of events could not happen again, particularly with regard to the verdict of gross negligence, which would now have to be arrived at in a civil court. Does the Secretary of State agree that, given that these circumstances could not arise today under current law, he could surely revisit the findings of the inquiry at the time?

The Government's amendment to the cross-party motion this evening asks the House to await their official response to the Select Committee report. Will the Under-Secretary tell the House when that will be? The Secretary of State talked generally about it being within six months. It has to be within six months, or the Government will be grossly neglecting this House. We want to know precisely when it will be. In particular, we do not want the Secretary of State to choose a particular moment to release the report; for example, as we come up to summer recess. We want him to release the Government's reply at a sensible time, and as soon as possible. In doing so, we must be certain that he will rely on more than Boeing's re-simulation, which of course would be unsatisfactory.

In simple terms, it seems to us that the principle of innocent until and unless proved guilty should, beyond any shadow of doubt, apply in this case. There is a long and honourable tradition of an assumption against deceased pilot error in the RAF.

Despite the Opposition's very real reluctance to do anything that might, or might be thought to, undermine the authority of the chain of command—and I reiterate our respect for the two air marshals concerned—it seems that on this occasion a very tragic miscarriage of justice has occurred. We appeal to Ministers and the RAF to take this opportunity to clear the names of these young pilots. Only then will their families be able to lay their memories to rest.

9.55 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said in his opening remarks that this tragic crash has generated strong feelings among all those who have been and continue to be involved in its consequences. The debate tonight has served clearly to emphasise this point, and I would like to take this opportunity, as others have, to express my sympathy to the families of the 25 passengers and four crew who were so tragically lost in that accident.

The House of Lords Select Committee report on this complex accident requires, and is receiving, full and detailed analysis. The points made by their lordships are being reviewed and, where appropriate, further detailed technical work will be undertaken.

One specific area that was widely reported this morning, particularly in the Scottish press, is that of the Boeing simulation. The Committee criticised the original Boeing simulation and, as part of the detailed assessment of the report that is being undertaken, it is right to seek Boeing's input. Indeed, I would expect hon. Members to criticise us if we did not do so. Boeing is the only company that makes the Chinook, and there is frankly no other way in which to carry out the simulation. We have asked that it review its original analysis of the final seconds of the Chinook's flight leading up to the crash.

The level of contractor involvement in investigating the Mull accident was consistent with normal practice in military and civil aircraft investigations. Such help from manufacturers is a necessary part of such investigations.

The board of inquiry was set up to determine the cause of the crash. It was conducted in a professional manner and the final decision was made on the available evidence. The findings were based fundamentally on airmanship and duty of care principles. The essence of the judgment of gross negligence was that all the available evidence indicated that the pilots flew a serviceable aircraft at speed and at a low level into cloud-covered high ground.

Mr. Arbuthnot: Will the Minister give way?

Dr. Moonie: I will not have time to, I am sorry.

In reaching its conclusion, the board had a wealth of expertise and experience available to it from all the relevant professional disciplines, including helicopter and aircraft operations and technical matters.

Lady Hermon: Will the Minister give way?

Dr. Moonie: No, I shall not.

Other authorities, such as the Defence Research Agency and the manufacturers of the aircraft, its equipment and avionics supported and made evidence available to the inquiry. A number of technical issues have been postulated over the years as possibly explaining the accident. Indeed, the Defence Committee investigated the lessons of the crash and published a most helpful report in 1998. It concluded that there was no compelling evidence to support claims of fundamental flaws in the design of the Chinook or of its components. More recently, technical issues were also examined closely by the Select Committee of the House of Lords, whose report we are fully considering.

I should like to turn briefly to the points made during the debate and, in respect of her attempt to intervene, that of the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon). Compensation is a very complex issue—I shall write to the hon. Lady and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

The right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) is a distinguished lawyer and QC. The many points that he made about the details of the legal position are for the legal profession and not for a lay person such as myself until I am in receipt of the appropriate advice on the subject. I therefore cannot make any comments of my own on that subject until the advice that my right hon. Friend has indicated is being sought by the Ministry of Defence is to hand.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ochil (Mr. O'Neill) rightly pointed out the great complexity of the equipment involved. He criticised the Ministry of Defence for dealing with the matter internally. That is so, but such is the case in virtually every complex issue that I have had to deal with over the past two years in this job, and I have so far had no cause to doubt the professionalism and attention to detail that goes into the advice that we are given, be it by our civil servants or by officers—

It being Ten o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 119(9) (European Standing Committees),

Aircraft Noise

That this House takes note of European Union Document No. 15014/01, draft Directive on the introduction of noise-related operating restrictions at Community Airports and No 5119/02, draft Directive on the establishment of a Community framework for noise classification of civil subsonic aircraft for the purposes of calculating noise charges; and supports the Government position to ensure that the proposed Directives allow the development of a coherent and balanced approach to managing noise nuisances at UK airports consistent with existing ICAO rules and standards.—*[Mr. Stringer.]*

Question agreed to.

Enlargement

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 119(9) (European Standing Committees),

That this House takes note of European Union Documents No. 14117/01, the Commission Strategy paper and Report on the progress towards accession by each of the candidate countries with Addenda 1 to 13, the 2001 Regular Reports on progress by individual candidate countries, No. 5745/02, the Commission Communication on a Common Financial Framework 2004–2006 for the Accession Negotiations and No. 5638/02, the Commission Communication on Enlargement and Agriculture: successfully integrating the new Member States into the CAP; welcomes the Government's continuing commitment to EU enlargement, and supports the Government's aim to complete negotiations with those candidates that are ready by the end of this year, so that they can participate in the European Parliament elections in 2004 as Member States.—*[Mr. Stringer.]*

Question agreed to.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

Local Government Finance

That the Local Government Finance (England) Special Grant Report (No. 95) (HC 670), on 2001–02 Special Grant for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children, which was laid before this House on 6th March, be approved.—*[Mr. Stringer.]*

Question agreed to.

Companies

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

That the Companies (Competent Authority) (Fees) Regulations 2002 (S.I., 2002, No. 502), dated 7th March 2002, a copy of which was laid before this House on 7th March, be approved.—*[Mr. Stringer.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

That the draft Companies (Particulars of Usual Residential Address) (Confidentiality Orders) Regulations 2002, which were laid before this House on 7th March, be approved.—*[Mr. Stringer.]*

Question agreed to.

PARTNERSHIP

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

That the Limited Liability Partnership (Competent Authority) (Fees) Regulations 2002 (S.I., 2002, No. 503), dated 7th March 2002, a copy of which was laid before this House on 7th March, be approved.—*[Mr. Stringer.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

That the draft Limited Liability Partnerships (No. 2) Regulations 2002, which were laid before this House on 7th March, be approved.—*[Mr. Stringer.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

That the draft Limited Liability Partnerships (Particulars of Usual Residential Address) (Confidentiality Orders) Regulations 2002, which were laid before this House on 7th March, be approved.—*[Mr. Stringer.]*

Question agreed to.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, on Tuesday 26th March—

(1) the provisions of the Orders of 20th November 2000 relating to Thursday sittings and meetings of Standing Committees shall apply as if that day were a Thursday; and

(2) there shall be no sitting in Westminster Hall.—*[Mr. Stringer.]*

PETITION

Asylum Seekers

10.1 pm

Mr. Peter Luff (Mid-Worcestershire): It is my privilege to present a petition of 3,577 residents of the parishes of Bishampton and Throckmorton, Pinvin, Wyre Piddle and Hill and Moor, and of other residents of Worcestershire. Some 90.5 per cent. of the residents of Bishampton and 95.1 per cent. of the residents of Throckmorton have signed the petition, which was collected in just over 10 days.

The petition states that those people are concerned that the proposal by the Home Office to locate an asylum seekers accommodation centre at Throckmorton is not in the interests of the asylum seekers themselves.

The petition states that that is contrary to national, regional and local planning policy, the site having already been expressly ruled out for any form of residential development in the structure plan approved by a Government inspector.

The petition states that the centre will overwhelm small local communities and that, following adjacent land use as the largest landfill site in the county and the emergency imposition of the regional foot and mouth burial site for 128,000 animals last April, this is an unacceptable burden on this small corner of rural Worcestershire.

The petitioners further deeply resent the refusal to allow them the opportunity to have their case judged through the normal democratic planning process as the Home Office has used emergency procedures under special Government regulations.

The petitioners therefore request

that the House of Commons urges the Home Secretary to look for more suitable sites for asylum accommodation centres from the perspective of both the asylum seekers and local residents.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Workplace Fatalities

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Stringer.]*

10.2 pm

Tony Baldry (Banbury): In 1998, a constituent of mine, Simon Jones, a student at Sussex university, was tragically and traumatically killed after just two hours on his first day working for the Dutch firm Euromin Ltd., at Shoreham docks. I believe that Simon's death and the subsequent acquittal of the company's general manager, James Martell, has made clear fundamental failures of the law when it comes to safety in the workplace. Regardless of the outcome of the court case, I have no doubt that there is a real need for the Government to examine closely the operations of the Crown Prosecution Service, the Health and Safety Executive and the police in cases of deaths at work.

In Simon's case, we need simply to consider the gulf between the observations made by some of those authorities and the actions that they took. I understand that a now-departed ships agent and sales executive at Euromin wrote to the HSE to say that it would

"only be a matter of time before someone was killed",

and that there was "inadequate manning and safety" at the docks. What did the HSE do? Nothing.

Let us consider the activities of the CPS. I understand that it wrote to Simon Jones's family to say that there was

"no doubt Euromin employed an unsafe working environment".

There is no doubt about the words of the CPS: Euromin employed an unsafe working environment.

Despite there being no doubt about the severe lack of safety at Euromin, what did the CPS do after Simon's death? Nothing. It was not until the third time of asking—not until two High Court judges had told the CPS that it was "irrational" not to prosecute—that the CPS decided that it was

"in the public interest to prosecute".

I have no doubt that it is now in the public interest considerably to strengthen the law in relation to deaths at work.

The death of Simon Jones at work demonstrates existing shortcomings both in the law and in the practices of the agencies that should be most concerned to ensure that everything that can be done to reduce the risk of workplace deaths is done. Sadly, other cases also demonstrate complacency and the slow and seemingly less than committed prosecution policies that currently exist.

Although I intend to outline several problems, there is one overarching and urgent necessity: every work-related death should be treated as a manslaughter investigation from the outset, until manslaughter can be eliminated. Without that provision, it is clear that the hurdles will remain too high for those who want to prosecute.

However, any attempt to improve safety at work is undermined when one realises that the HSE is not doing its job of investigating deaths at work. Only 6 per cent. of serious accidents at work are looked into by the HSE, while a mere 10 per cent. of severe injury cases, and amazingly, only 20 per cent. of cases in which death occurs, lead to prosecution. That means that the HSE does not investigate four in five deaths at work. That is of greater concern given the even more staggering fact that the HSE appears to suggest that 70 per cent. of the 25,000 deaths at work since 1995 were the result of management failure. In that case, why have only six cases of corporate manslaughter been brought, and why have only two of them resulted in conviction?

I am additionally concerned that the HSE may have substantially under-recorded the number of deaths that take place at work. When I wrote to the director general of the HSE on that point, he pretty much conceded that the HSE often has an insufficient idea as to whether an individual is an employee or a member of the public when it initially registers a death in the workplace. That is unacceptable. Indeed, if the HSE is unsure about whether it is recording as members of the public people who are in fact employees, that serves to underline the pathetic rate of corporate manslaughter cases being pursued. I hope that the Government and the HSE will seriously consider implementing proposals to increase the reporting of all deaths in the workplace.

This specific case, however, raises two wider concerns which relate to the actions of the police and the CPS as well as of the HSE. Those three authorities form the "protocol of liaison" on deaths at work. I shall offer some suggestions that the Government might consider in relation to this protocol and to the CPS and the police, but first I shall focus again on the HSE.

Currently, there are two categories of offence as regards a work-related death: manslaughter and regulatory offences. Manslaughter requires evidence of gross negligence as against simple negligence for a regulatory offence. That immediately creates a problem as regards corporate accountability. I ask the House to consider the Home Office's recent response to me on that point.

A letter from the Home Office of 24 October 2001 stated that although the Government intended to legislate, they must

"ensure that we balance the entitlement of the public to see justice being done and the need to protect corporations that have taken all reasonable precautions from an unjust prosecution".

However, the letter went on to state that the Government felt that they must also ensure that

"the emphasis is on the responsibility of the corporation itself, as a legal body, taking responsibility for its actions . . . however, individual officers could still be prosecuted if there was sufficient evidence".

By distinguishing between manslaughter and regulatory offences in relation to deaths at work, one Government objective is being cancelled out by the other. Surely, on a simple interpretation, logic might suggest that a work-related death through negligence is no different from a gross act of negligence and hence the presumption of corporate manslaughter. Why do the Government feel the need to distinguish between manslaughter and regulatory offences? What is the difference between gross negligence and negligence?

Although I agree that the HSE's focus should remain largely preventive, it occurs to me that part of the reason for its disappointingly low level of investigation and prosecution is that it is attempting to strike a somewhat false balance. Clearly, that would be easily remedied if all deaths at work were initially treated as manslaughter until proven otherwise. That problem is plainly underscored

[Tony Baldry]

when one considers the protocol's initial assessment in relation to police investigation. Consider the wording of the introduction to the protocol:

"the police will conduct an investigation where there is an indication of manslaughter".

Yet paragraph 1.1 says that a police investigation could be undertaken

"where the circumstances might justify a charge of manslaughter".

Even more contradictorily, paragraph 2.1 asserts that that may happen where there is

"evidence or a suspicion of . . . gross negligence".

Such inconsistent language in the protocol about what evidence is needed before an investigation is even started will not advance the accountability of businesses, their managers and directors.

It is now necessary for the Government to introduce legislation so that corporate killing is immediately treated as manslaughter until the evidence demonstrates the contrary; otherwise, if the Government's new protocol retains the distinction between the initial assessment and manslaughter inquiries, there surely needs to be consistency about the degree of evidence before a proper manslaughter inquiry can be commenced.

In my opinion, evidence that might justify a charge of manslaughter presents far too high a test. It does not even offer the chance for consistency in police investigations. That lack of consistency and its consequence as regards the police attitude towards deaths at work become clearer if one considers the resources made available for the initial investigation.

In various responses to my letters, the Home Office has made it clear—I quote from a letter dated 15 January 2001—that

"one of the most important parts of the Protocol is for Chief Constables to appoint Regional Liaison Officers, who should maintain contact with nominated representatives in the CPS and the HSE in the relevant region".

But it was not necessarily clear that that was the case with Simon Jones's death. For example, it took more than six weeks for the police investigation to begin. Why? I would suggest once more that the inherent weaknesses in the current two-stage process mean that it is not made clear whether the initial assessment itself is an investigation; thus it seems likely that some police forces will not direct into it sufficient resources. Not only is that ambiguity unacceptable, it does not create the accountability to which the Government aspire.

In fairness, I suspect that the Government believe that the protocol involves more accountability than it does. For instance, the Home Office letter to which I alluded on the line of accountability of police investigation stressed effective working with the HSE, yet how can such work be effective when the HSE itself appears to support my concerns with the current initial assessment under the protocol, given that it observes that

"in most cases it is unlikely that a manslaughter investigation will commence based solely on an initial assessment of the facts surrounding a fatality"?

If that is so, and initial assessments only pick up the most transparent cases of manslaughter, the two-stage process must surely have failed, especially if the HSE has failed to refer evidence to the police.

Furthermore, it seems that the protocol's current process of undertaking an initial assessment may in itself result in unnecessary delay in those cases where a decision is subsequently taken to launch a manslaughter inquiry. Indeed, it would appear that there was a perhaps an inverted occurrence of that scenario with Simon Jones's case. In a letter to the victim's family, the HSE states:

"I said that the HSE were about to brief Counsel to ensure we had all the necessary evidence . . . however, before this final item of evidence was obtained, the start of the Judicial Review process into Crown Prosecution Service's decision not to take manslaughter prosecutions was announced. This prevented us obtaining this last item of evidence and left us once more in the position of awaiting a decision on manslaughter prosecutions".

Surely that cannot be effective working, as the Government claim.

It is clear to me that, if the Government were to introduce legislation so that directors or managers were responsible for deaths at work, the new protocol would create a far clearer line of accountability. Directors are, after all, responsible for employees in all other corporate aspects. Thus two further issues need to be clarified under the current protocol.

First, there are the continuing concerns over how the criteria are applied by HSE inspectors. The Government chronically under-resource those authorities, yet it is clear that, although the HSE needs to operate within resource limitations, if it were to develop more detailed guidance, such a system would ensure that decisions on whether to investigate would be more rigorously based and more transparent, which would ultimately lead to more consistency. There is also the additional concern about whether the HSE passes evidence to the police as it should.

Secondly, there are the actions of the police when it comes to evidence gathering. I am told time and again in Home Office responses that police officers—I quote from a letter of 5 December 2001—

"go through a nationally organised training programme . . . of a very high standard."

I do not doubt that. However, I doubt the effectiveness of the protocol when it is clear that many police forces are unaware that the protocol even exists.

I understand that the police are not provided with any training on issues relating to manslaughter in the workplace and on how to conduct a thorough investigation in these circumstances. How can that help those responsible to be accountable? It is perhaps no wonder that in Simon Jones's case the actions of the CPS fell well below what is acceptable. I can only assume that the Government's talk of balance on corporate death and the CPS's action, or lack of action, puts the prevailing defence of the "effective workings" of the protocol on a somewhat false foundation.

In Simon Jones's case, there was the wrong application of the law and the wrong law was being applied. As a consequence, I am not filled with much confidence when the Government tell me that everything is all right because the CPS will be involved at every stage to ensure that legislation is "fully workable and effective".

It comes as an insult to the family of Simon Jones when, after its recent Crown court case, Euromin is fined only £50,000 for what clinically has to be described as a corporate death. Once again, it perturbs me that the law

is being applied the wrong way round. Surely corporations should be fined if they fail to secure safety, but manslaughter, and hence prison sentences, should be invoked for those directors whose failure on safety results in fatality.

If that is to happen, the Government need to publish their promised Bill on corporate manslaughter. Yet Parliament is still awaiting a commitment for the timing of such a Bill. If and when there is a Bill, I would ask the Government to consider the following five questions. Will the Bill make clear the line of accountability between the police, the HSE and the CPS? Will the Government ensure that if one or more of these authorities fails to take sufficient action, they will then take action against those authorities? Will the police be given proper training on issues relating to manslaughter in the workplace and on how to conduct a thorough investigation?

Will further protocols cease with the two-stage process of investigation and initially consider all cases of deaths at work as corporate manslaughter? Ultimately, will corporate directors be held responsible for corporate employees—such responsibility being the most effective deterrent against insufficient safety at work which causes deaths at work?

I suggest that these five questions would make legislation workable, effective and, above all, balanced. I strongly suggest that the five questions, if answered properly, would in part ensure that, as the Minister concerned at the time told Simon Jones's family in a letter of 20 September 2000:

"When flagrant health and safety crimes are committed, the case for punitive punishment is unquestionable."

There are far too many deaths at work and we need to ensure that actions are taken that make deaths at work a crime that does not pay.

10.18 pm

Rob Marris (Wolverhampton, South-West): I thank the hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) for allowing me time to speak briefly. It is shocking that the number of deaths at work increased last year. This is a timely debate.

I have a personal interest in this subject because Simon Jones' cousin, Cath, lives in my constituency. Along with other members of his family and many supporters, she and her husband, Ray, have campaigned energetically for justice, both in memory of Simon Jones and for the sake of others.

I shall focus briefly on some aspects of practice rather than the law itself, which was covered by the hon. Gentlemen. Many changes are needed, and I shall consider four of them.

In 1998, the Association of Chief Police Officers, the Health and Safety Commission and the Crown Prosecution Service developed the protocol to which reference has been made. There is an agreed procedure for liaison between these organisations where there is a work-related death. The protocol is a significant step forward, but we must ensure that the police, the Health and Safety Executive and the CPS are fully trained in this specialist area, preferably through joint training, thus enabling prompt and thorough investigation.

I echo the hon. Gentleman's call for every work-related death initially to be treated as a manslaughter investigation, until manslaughter can be discounted.

Incidents should also initially be investigated from an organisational point of view—in other words, what went wrong in the system? Investigations of individuals should be in the context of any organisational failures that are discovered. Prevention based on a change in systems is usually more effective than simply focusing on individual blame. Arrangements for access to fatal accident sites must be clarified to ensure that it is clear who is in overall control and that the police do not deny HSE investigators prompt access to the site on the grounds that it is a possible crime scene. I therefore seek assurances from the Minister on joint training, initial investigation of manslaughter, organisational investigation and site access.

10.20 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Dr. Alan Whitehead): I congratulate the hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) on securing this debate; he made a number of important points about deaths at work. My hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Rob Marris), in a brief contribution, asked a number of important questions which need to discussed in the context of possible future legislation.

I welcome the opportunity to respond on behalf of the Government. I am aware of the awful circumstances surrounding the death of Simon Jones; it was a terrible and unnecessary tragedy and my deepest sympathy goes to his family and friends. His death has remained at the forefront of the minds of my colleagues in government as we work on improving health and safety. Too many people are still dying at work. The hon. Member for Banbury suggested that there had been 25,000 deaths at work since 1995. I believe that that was an inadvertent slip; 2,500 people have died at work since 1995. Last year, 295 workers were killed, which is unacceptable. It is a central tenet of health and safety practice that workers should expect to return home in roughly the same condition that they went to work; losing one's life as a result of one's employment is utterly unacceptable.

I fully recognise the concerns about Simon's death and shall respond to some specific points raised during the debate, particularly the questions at the end of the hon. Gentleman's speech and those asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West. We shall certainly look carefully at the issues that the hon. Member for Banbury raised when we formulate proposals for legislation. I shall say more about legislative proposals shortly. I assure the hon. Gentleman that we shall look carefully at the effect of any changes in the law on those enforcing it. For example, the national training programmes for the police service are reviewed and updated in line with changes to legislation, which are reflected as appropriate in the training that the police service receives. We shall also consider how the changes in the law will affect guidance issued to the police and the existing protocol.

The hon. Gentleman was critical of the protocol that has existed between the police, the Health and Safety Executive and the Crown Prosecution Service since 1998. It may assist the House if I explain that the protocol is an agreement between the signatories to ensure effective liaison between the organisations when there is a work-related death. It promotes and encourages joint decision making and a co-ordinated approach from investigation to, where appropriate, prosecution before the

[Dr. Alan Whitehead]

courts. I stress that the protocol is intended to supplement the operational guidance on the investigation and prosecution of cases by the police, the HSE and the CPS and does not dictate how an incident may be effectively investigated.

Experience of the operation of the protocol suggests that while it has proved an effective tool on a number of occasions, there is room for improvement. Accordingly, since September last year, a committee has been looking at how the protocol may be developed to address some of the concerns voiced by the hon. Gentleman, such as the approach to the initial investigation. I understand that a public consultation exercise to engage organisations that have had direct experience of the protocol took place between January and the end of February this year. Responses from the exercise will help to inform the review of the protocol. Following the exercise and other considerations, the revised protocol is expected to be introduced this autumn.

The hon. Gentleman asked whether corporate directors would be held responsible. We take the offence of manslaughter extremely seriously. We are always mindful of the need for businesses to operate successfully, but we also believe that companies must operate in a responsible and safety conscious manner. We outlined proposals for the reform of the law on corporate killing in the consultation paper entitled "Reforming the Law on Involuntary Manslaughter: the Government's Proposals".

Currently, the law requires that if a corporate body is to be found liable for a manslaughter offence, it is necessary to identify a controlling mind, typically a director, who can be proved to have committed the offence. That has made successful prosecution extremely difficult in practice, except in the case of very small undertakings, and has meant that there have been only three successful prosecutions for corporate killing.

The new offence of corporate killing that we propose seeks to capture conduct that falls far below what can be expected of a reasonable undertaking in the circumstances. The offence does not require the risk to life to be obvious. Instead, all that is required is that the way in which the company's activities are managed or organised fails to ensure the health and safety of its employees. Therefore, the undertaking as a whole is seen to have committed a management failure, even if the cause of the specific death is the act or omission of an individual.

We fully expect the new legislation to provide a clearer avenue for securing successful prosecutions against undertakings whose standards have fallen far below what could reasonably be expected, and where failure to uphold the standard has in part been responsible for a death. We envisage that the introduction of the new offence will encourage companies that have so far failed to do so to take their health and safety responsibilities much more seriously.

The hon. Gentleman implied that the HSE does not investigate all deaths at work. I emphasise that that is far from the case, as I shall make clear. The HSE is confident that it is informed about all deaths in the workplace, other than deaths that may be work-related but do not occur in the workplace and are perhaps road-related.

The HSE's revised enforcement policy statement, which was published on 28 January, states that all work-related deaths reportable to enforcing authorities should receive a site investigation. That has always been the case. Deaths would also be investigated if they were accidents to members of the public on a site where work was taking place. The HSE's published accident figures include deaths to workers and to members of the public which result from work activities.

Other reported incidents or complaints are selected for investigation according to publicly available criteria. Perhaps I could deal now with the suggestion that the HSE did nothing about Euromin. In fact, Euromin had been visited by, or had other contact with, the HSE in 1994, 1995, 1996 and early 1998. Advice on a number of issues had been given, but no formal enforcement action had been taken.

The enforcement policy states that if an investigation reveals that prosecution is justified—that is, that there is sufficient evidence to provide a realistic prospect of conviction, and it is in the public interest—prosecution will go ahead. The aim of the revised enforcement policy is to achieve greater consistency and transparency in decision making on investigation and enforcement. I agree with the hon. Member for Banbury that that is very important.

The revised enforcement policy aims to ensure that the HSE and local authorities bring to bear the full range of health and safety enforcement powers, including prosecution, to ensure compliance with health and safety law. It has also been designed to achieve an effective balance in what enforcers do, and I support that approach.

Enforcement, including prosecution and deterrence, is crucial, but not at the expense of promoting voluntary compliance and models of excellence which also have a legitimate call on resources.

The preventive inspection programme is at the core of the HSE's business and it is always seeking to improve the way in which it carries out this work. Premises are selected for proactive inspection using criteria such as the risk from the processes likely to be taking place, past incident history, standards in the industry and our confidence in management. Only higher risk businesses are inspected.

We know that resources are an important factor in enabling the HSE to do its job, and that is why we have increased its overall resources. We provided an additional £63 million following the 1998 comprehensive spending review and a further £45 million in December 2000.

The increases over those three years have allowed for an overall increase in the HSE's staff, and that has enabled the HSE to make more visits and to handle more investigations and complaints. Since the Government took office, the number of HSE prosecutions and formal enforcement notices has increased. Last year, the HSE issued nearly 50 per cent. more improvement and prohibition notices than in 1996-97 and prosecuted nearly 20 per cent. more individual duty holders.

However, demands on the HSC and the HSE to improve health and safety will always be high and will always outstrip the resources available. That is why the revitalising health and safety initiative, launched in June 2000, is so important. Effective health and safety is about getting duty holders to fulfil their obligations as a matter of course, not just in response to an inspector's visit,

and that means working in partnership with stakeholders to achieve long lasting improvements in voluntary compliance. That is not just a paper exercise and I am confident that it will deliver.

First, targets will be set for the health and safety system for the first time to reduce the incidence of fatal and major injury accidents by 10 per cent., and ill health by 20 per cent. by 2010, with at least half the improvement to be achieved by 2004. The setting of those targets has been a catalyst. It is encouraging to see the private sector committing to delivering targets, which contributes to the national effort. So far, 25 of the traditional industry sectors have done so, with a further eight to follow suit.

Secondly, the HSC is prioritising and focusing its resources and efforts on areas where major improvements are necessary if the targets are to be met, and it encourages partnership. I am pleased that in many of the revitalising initiatives, industry, employees and the trade unions are involved together.

I reiterate my sympathy for Simon Jones' family, and I hope that what I have said this evening gives assurances about the Government's commitment to improve health and safety to minimise the risk of further tragedies.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-nine minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 20 March 2002

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

LONDON DEVELOPMENT AGENCY BILL *(BY ORDER)*

Order for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second time on Tuesday 26 March.

Oral Answers to Questions

NORTHERN IRELAND

The Secretary of State was asked—

Electoral Fraud

1. **Mr. David Stewart** (Inverness, East, Nairn and Lochaber): When the new measures to combat electoral fraud in Northern Ireland will come into force. [42003]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Desmond Browne): It is intended that all the measures proposed in the Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Bill will be in force in time for the scheduled Assembly elections on 1 May 2003. This represents a major step forward in tackling electoral abuse.

Mr. Stewart: Does my hon. Friend share my view that the elimination of electoral fraud should be a key priority for the Government? Will he also condemn the abuses perpetrated through the multi-registration and proxy vote procedures? Is he confident that the planned changes, which include the national insurance check for absent voters, will not deter legitimate electors?

Mr. Browne: I thank my hon. Friend for that question. The Bill sends a clear signal to people intent on committing electoral fraud, which is a crime that the Government are determined to combat. I thank him too for his question about national insurance numbers, as it gives me an opportunity to announce for the first time in this House that, from this year's annual canvass, applicants to the Northern Ireland electoral register and for an absent vote will be required to provide a signature, a date of birth and a national insurance number. However, to assist applicants, registration will be facilitated by a canvasser on an individual basis, and it will be preceded by a significant publicity campaign.

The House should bear in mind also the fact that, until mid-March 2003, anyone who is not on the register on 1 December will still be able to get on to it on a rolling basis. I am satisfied that, in all circumstances, the proper balance has been struck.

Lady Hermon (North Down): Given that the electoral office will clearly have enhanced powers to combat electoral fraud, will the Minister give an undertaking that it and other offices, such as the office of the police ombudsman, will come within the remit of the new chief inspector of criminal justice?

Mr. Browne: I thank the hon. Lady for that question. I cannot give her the assurance that she seeks today, but I can tell her that I am consulting 18 agencies—among them the chief electoral officer and the police ombudsman—with regard to their inclusion in the remit of the criminal justice inspectorate.

Peter Bottomley (Worthing, West): Will the Minister confirm that the registration of a person's death will lead to that person's name being crossed off the electoral register at once?

Mr. Browne: I am sorry that I cannot give the hon. Gentleman that assurance immediately, but I shall write to him on the matter.

Decommissioning

2. **Mr. Jim Murphy** (Eastwood): If he will make a statement about terrorist weapon decommissioning. [42004]

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Jane Kennedy): We welcomed the announcement on 23 October 2001 that the Provisional IRA had put a quantity of arms completely beyond use. We now want to see further decommissioning by the IRA, and decommissioning by all other terrorist groups.

Mr. Murphy: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. She is aware, as am I, of the long-held belief that people who retain illegal arms do so to protect their place in the illegal drugs trade in Northern Ireland. That belief is strengthened by the activities of IRA members in Colombia in support of FARC, the terrorist and drug trafficking organisation. She will know that the issue has been raised in Congress very recently by US State Department officials. As part of the process of urging the decommissioning of illegal arms, will my hon. Friend ensure that pressure is also brought to bear on republican and loyalist terrorist to end their ownership of arms and their part in the illegal trade in drugs?

Jane Kennedy: I hope that my hon. Friend will be reassured to learn that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State discussed that very matter with the American Government when he visited the US last week. There has been a credible start to decommissioning, but last October's event needs to become a process without further delay. We also want decommissioning to be undertaken by loyalists and by dissident groups that

remain outside the peace process. Loyalist and republican paramilitaries both must realise that the Belfast agreement is the only way forward.

Mr. Michael Mates (East Hampshire): Have there been any further acts of decommissioning since that first event?

Jane Kennedy: We have received no information from the decommissioning commission that any further event has taken place, but the old arguments for holding on to illegal arms are obsolete. We have lived up to our commitments, as set out in the Belfast agreement and at Weston Park. It is time for all paramilitary organisations to honour their commitments to decommission.

Mr. Eddie McGrady (South Down): Does the Minister agree that the total decommissioning of paramilitary and terrorist weaponry and the disestablishment of paramilitary and terrorist structures are prerequisites to creating an environment in which our new institutions can thrive and prosper? Does she share my concern at the murder in my constituency a few days ago of Matthew Burns, for which local media reports claim that the Provisional IRA was responsible? Given that organisation's alleged truce, what action does she propose to take, and what inquiries will she make?

Jane Kennedy: I endorse everything that the hon. Gentleman says. There is a need for society to move away from violence and the culture of violence. The ceasefires that we have in Northern Ireland are not perfect, but neither is democracy in Northern Ireland. I condemn unreservedly the cold-blooded murder of Matthew Burns in Castlewellan on 21 February, but the investigation of the incident is continuing and it would not be appropriate for me to comment until it is complete. Obviously, my colleagues and I wish to join those who have expressed sympathy, because we have yet another bereaved family in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Nigel Dodds (Belfast, North): Can the Minister recall the promises made at the time of the referendum in Northern Ireland, linking the ending of all terrorist violence and the decommissioning of all terrorist weaponry with concessions, such as IRA-Sinn Fein in government and the early release of terrorist prisoners? Does the Minister accept that, in Northern Ireland, people regard with horror the notion that the Government are considering an amnesty for terrorists on the run in the absence of any further decommissioning? Will she give an assurance to the House that no such amnesty will be forthcoming?

Jane Kennedy: I note the hon. Gentleman's position and he has expressed his concerns before. He may wish to listen to the answer that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will give to the next question. The decommissioning that took place in October last year was a significant event and a real shift in the republican mindset. But that event needs to become a process, which needs to be extended to other paramilitary organisations that continue to cling to their illegal weapons.

Helen Jackson (Sheffield, Hillsborough): Does my hon. Friend agree that where there are groups in Northern Ireland—both loyalist and republican—that have failed to decommission their weapons, that helps to breed fear and mistrust at the grass roots of the organisations, particularly in urban areas, which find it more difficult to allow the democratic process that we have set in motion through the Good Friday agreement to take root and flourish?

Jane Kennedy: I absolutely agree with everything that my hon. Friend has said. It is not within the Government's power to promise a successful end to decommissioning, or to any other aspect of the Belfast agreement. However, we have come a long way. Much has been achieved, and our work will continue.

Mr. Jeffrey M. Donaldson (Lagan Valley): The Minister will be aware of the growing disappointment in Northern Ireland, as we approach the fourth anniversary of the agreement, that we have not had further progress on decommissioning. What steps are the Government going to take to apply pressure on loyalist and republican paramilitary organisations to complete the decommissioning process? Is she aware that if the Government do not act, we will?

Jane Kennedy: I hear what the hon. Gentleman has said. He will know that we continue to work tirelessly towards achieving all the objectives set out in the agreement. That is our intention and our work is focused on that.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Grantham and Stamford): I wholeheartedly agree with the Minister that the Belfast agreement is the best basis for moving forward, and we all want complete decommissioning by both sides. However, after four years of unilateral and unlinked concessions in one direction, will the Government finally learn, after releasing all the prisoners without demanding any decommissioning at all and after crafting a special status for Sinn Fein-IRA MPs in this House and giving them the red carpet treatment in Downing Street, that making such concessions is not the right way forward, that appeasement does not lead to peace, and that there is a difference between the two?

Jane Kennedy: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says. All aspects of the Belfast agreement must be implemented in full. None is conditional upon another. Everybody who has signed and is committed to that agreement needs to carry out their responsibilities under the agreement. Those paramilitary organisations that continue to cling to their illegal weapons need to learn that the only way forward is the true implementation of the agreement and the abandonment of weapons for good.

Mr. Davies: Does the hon. Lady realise that the fundamental lack of linkage is at the root of the problem of the Government's tactics and the reason why we have not made more progress? Does she accept that if her Government go forward with an unconditional amnesty for terrorists on the run, not only will there be revulsion, as the hon. Member for Belfast, North (Mr. Dodds) said, throughout both law-abiding communities in Northern Ireland, but the Government will reinforce the sense in Sinn Fein-IRA that they can get all the concessions they want while sitting on their hands and on their arms?

Jane Kennedy: We have seen massive advances in Northern Ireland, albeit often painful and even

acrimonious at the time. In any context, that progress has been extraordinary. Enormous programmes of reform have been achieved—the Assembly, policing, criminal justice reforms and human rights—but the situation is not perfect. Hard decisions have still to come. We recognise the pain that victims and relatives feel, but as in many areas, we need to draw a line under the past and turn towards construction. Let no one belittle the significance of last autumn's decommissioning act. It was historic. It was a clear symbol of a major shift in attitudes towards constitutionalism, and the process must continue on all sides. Loyalists, too, need to play their part in bringing about a better future.

Terrorists

3. **Mr. Andrew Turner** (Isle of Wight): If he will make a statement on his policy towards terrorists who have *(a)* escaped and *(b)* not been apprehended. [42005]

4. **Rev. Martin Smyth** (Belfast, South): What plans has he to introduce legislation regarding suspected terrorists who are on the run. [42006]

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Dr. John Reid): We recognised at Weston Park that the issue of those on the run needed to be dealt with. We will deal with it. However, as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has made clear, how we deal with it is open to discussion.

Mr. Turner: That was a very equivocal response to a very important question. At a time when the Government are spending £100 million on the Saville inquiry into Bloody Sunday, will not the relatives of the 11 innocent victims of that other bloody Sunday, Enniskillen, remembrance day 1987, be appalled to hear that the Government are even contemplating an amnesty for terrorists such as Charlie Caufield? Cannot the Government get their act together and send a straight message to the terrorists that there will be no amnesty for those on the run or those who have escaped?

Dr. Reid: Of course, the thoughts of all hon. Members are with the victims of all the troubles. We have made more progress in the past four years resolving the difficulties than we ever did in the previous 40 years. That is partly because we have recognised the amount of pain and the fact that pain is indivisible. The hon. Gentleman raises the issue of those on the run. It is a difficult question, and for many a distasteful one. I have no illusions about that.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): It is not difficult.

Dr. Reid: The right hon. Gentleman says it is not, but I understand just how difficult it is. I also understand that it is distasteful for many people. Many of the things that we have had to countenance in the peace process, such as the release of prisoners, have been both difficult and distasteful. I would not want in any way to diminish that consideration. However, we have managed to achieve such success in the peace process because we have been courageous enough to face up to issues that are difficult and distasteful. I urge the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) to look at the wider context and consider the benefits that the peace process has brought, and to look elsewhere, not least the middle east, to see what happens when political processes fall.

Rev. Martin Smyth: One may have sympathy with the Secretary of State's position, but will he acknowledge that last year some 700 people in Northern Ireland did not enjoy their human rights, as they were expelled from their homes, and 39 of them were expelled from Northern Ireland as well? While the political spokesmen keep talking about community justice, is it not near time we said clearly that there will be no further advance until we see advances in realism from those who are leaders of terror?

Dr. Reid: It is not often that I can say that I unambiguously and unequivocally agree with everything that the hon. Gentleman says, but I can on this occasion. There is absolutely no justification for kangaroo courts, punishment beatings, exiles and people taking the law into their own hands, particularly when there is now a police service in Northern Ireland that I think is due the support and participation of all members in all communities. I say, again without equivocation, that it is time for reconciliation in Northern Ireland. It is time for people to put a bitter, bitter past behind them, and resolving the issue of exiles is another important part of that process. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that the Government will keep up pressure on those responsible to end the despicable expulsion of people in Northern Ireland from their homes and their homeland.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): Is my right hon. Friend aware that there is more concern in Protestant and Catholic working-class communities about the possibility of on-the-runs being given an amnesty than on any other issue in Northern Ireland politics, including decommissioning? How would he answer those who say that it is one thing to bring about the early release of prisoners but quite another to excuse people, so that there is no black mark against them and no action is taken. That is what bothers many working-class people in Northern Ireland.

Dr. Reid: Yes, I recognise fully the deep concerns that are felt on both sides of the community. I read with interest the recent report from BASE 2 on those who have been exiled. It does not afflict only one community. I think that about 60 per cent. of the huge number who were threatened or had to move from their homes last year were from the loyalist community and about 40 per cent. were from the republican community. There is no justification for that. I say this to those who want to see progress in Northern Ireland: we have been told for decades by people in Northern Ireland and the spokesmen of the various communities that they wish to get away from what they were accused of having—arbitrary justice, kangaroo courts, punishment meted out without due justification. All those issues are exemplified in the case of the exiles. We will do everything possible to make sure that those expulsions cease and that we find a way of reconciliation so that those who are expelled from their homes can return to them.

Mr. Tony Clarke (Northampton, South): Does my right hon. Friend accept that any resolution of the

on-the-run issue must include some process of detainment and release under licence to ensure parity with the early release scheme?

Dr. Reid: As I have told the House previously, we have committed ourselves to resolving this issue but have not decided how it will be resolved. Recent discussions have included issues raised by my hon. Friend and Members on both sides of the House regarding the security forces, exiles, matters of truth and victims. Those factors bear heavily upon us in our consideration of this matter, and that is how it should be. However, I repeat that there have been numerous occasions during this process when we have had to confront the most difficult and sometimes distasteful issues that we would prefer never to have to address. We recognise, however, that those issues are part of the bigger picture of achieving a settlement in Northern Ireland and a future for the generations of Northern Ireland that is better than—and more advanced than—anything that previous generations have managed to live under, and we will confront them.

Mr. Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry): The Secretary of State has said that to some degree he accepts the resentment and anger in Northern Ireland about the action that Her Majesty's Government are contemplating. Can he outline to the House what pressure Sinn Fein-IRA brought to bear on the Government to make them contemplate on-the-run terrorists being given an amnesty in the face of such opposition, not only in this House, but right across the communities in Northern Ireland?

Dr. Reid: The issue has been raised, not as a result of any particular pressure, but following on from and flowing from the logic of the Belfast agreement. It was an anomaly that we accepted had to be addressed; we are in the process of addressing it. I have told the hon. Gentleman that how we will do so has not been decided. I can say that with complete honesty and sincerity and I hope that he accepts that. The fact that we are spending so much time considering the issue is a sign of its importance and of our understanding of the concerns about it on both sides of the House. When we have reached a conclusion, we will of course come back to the House.

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): First, why was there no cross-party negotiation in Northern Ireland before that initiative was announced? Secondly, while we generally support the Government's Northern Ireland policy, will the right hon. Gentleman accept that if he tries to force the policy through without due consideration for the feelings of victims, friends and families and the application of justice, as they see it, the Liberal Democrats, and I am sure other parties too—perhaps even members of the Labour party—will oppose it in this Chamber and the other?

Dr. Reid: I should explain that this question arose out of discussions that took place at the inception of the Belfast agreement. It is an anomaly that has to be addressed as a logical outflow of some of the agreements reached then, including the difficult and for many people painful agreement on the release of paramilitary prisoners. I am the first to accept the depth of feeling on the issue. I hope that the fact that we have allowed people to know that it is under consideration has been useful. It certainly has been useful from the point of view that people have been less than reticent about making their views known on the subject. Obviously, that cannot but affect how we consider these matters.

I repeat that problems that have gone on for decades—indeed, in some cases centuries—on the island of Ireland cannot be resolved without dealing with some very difficult issues. I urge the hon. Gentleman and everyone else in the House, when they weigh in the balance the question of on-the-runs, to remember the context, which is a far better Northern Ireland as a result of such painful decisions than we have ever had in the history of that Province.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): In solving the difficulty that the Secretary of State and the Government have created for themselves, will the right hon. Gentleman guarantee—with a yes or a no—that he will not use the royal prerogative to bypass Parliament?

Dr. Reid: I have told the hon. Gentleman that all these matters are under discussion—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] If the tragic and painful history of Northern Ireland could be summed up in yes and no answers, we would have solved it decades ago. It cannot be; nor can we reconcile the parties to a conflict that has lasted decades without being prepared to consider issues that are difficult and cause a great deal of pain. I have no problem listening to hon. Gentlemen and Ladies explain to us the difficulties, distaste and pain with which the issue of on-the-runs is addressed within the community in Northern Ireland, but I would tell them this, particularly in regard to the manner in which the issue is often raised by those on the Opposition Front Benches: we have made more progress in four years in Northern Ireland than we ever did in the many decades before that. We have done so because we have had the courage to confront issues that are controversial and painful. We are doing this in a solemn and detailed fashion on the question of on-the-runs—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I want to call Question 5.

Organised Crime

5. **Caroline Flint** (Don Valley): What assistance is being provided by the United States to assist in combating organised crime and gangsterism in Northern Ireland. [42007]

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Dr. John Reid): The US has consistently supported us in our policing efforts, most recently by FBI training. Separately, in a step to assist our fight against organised crime, last Tuesday I appointed a US expert, Professor Ronald Goldstock, to provide an international perspective on the problem. He was the director of the New York organised crime taskforce for 13 years.

Caroline Flint: It is a sad reality that organised crime has fed the troubles, violence and intimidation in Northern Ireland for many years, blighting families and especially children. I welcome the appointment of Professor Goldstock, who is a respected man of high calibre.

However, will my right hon. Friend explain in a little more detail how the professor will help the Government to make progress in the fight against organised crime?

Dr. Reid: Ron Goldstock brings a wealth of experience to assist us in our efforts in the fight against organised crime. We are already trying to resource the police in very difficult circumstances, and the organised crime taskforce has made a considerable start under my hon. Friend the Minister of State with responsibilities for security. Ron Goldstock will be charged with analysing the impact of organised crime on society and, particularly, with recommending ways of building cross-community support for the fight against organised crime, especially, although not exclusively, among those who would masquerade as the defenders of either community. I am sure that he will make a major contribution to our efforts.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [42033] **Sir Michael Spicer** (West Worcestershire): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 20 March.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today, including a meeting with Prime Minister John Howard of Australia to discuss the very welcome suspension of Zimbabwe from the Commonwealth.

Sir Michael Spicer: Why are there more strikes when we have a Labour Government?

The Prime Minister: That is an ill-judged question. The number of days lost through strikes are fewer under this Government than they were under the previous Conservative Government. I am afraid that that was a foolish question to ask.

Ms Debra Shipley (Stourbridge): Will my right hon. Friend join me and the thousands of constituents who have written to their Members of Parliament to back the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children campaign to stop parents or carers killing their children? It is a shock to the House to learn that every week one or two children are killed by their parent or carer—the person who is meant to love and care for them, and keep them safe. Will he undertake to carry out all the necessary measures and legislative changes that are backed by all the children's charities?

The Prime Minister: We certainly support those moves. We support entirely the NSPCC's worthwhile Full Stop campaign, which will have the support of the vast majority of hon. Members and parents throughout the country.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): Since the Prime Minister came to power, more than 50,000 care home beds have closed. Does the Prime Minister think that that has anything to do with his policies?

The Prime Minister: No. Incidentally, in relation to that 50,000, the net figure is 19,000 places and the reason for that number is clear—many of those care homes are in private hands and have been sold off. However, as a result of the measures that the Government have introduced and the money that we have put in, some £1.4 billion will be spent on initiatives to help the elderly in care homes and in their own homes in the next few years. I remind the right hon. Gentleman that the Conservative party opposed that additional £1.4 billion when we announced it in the last Parliament.

Mr. Duncan Smith: As usual, the Prime Minister seems to shuffle off blame. Care homes are closing simply because the Government have weighed them down with expensive rules and regulations. For example, why should nursing managers with 20 years' experience have to abandon their patients to take qualifications just to keep their jobs? Why should married couples who have been living together for decades have to split up because the rules say that their home needs more single rooms? On 18 May 2000, my hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) warned the Government that their policies would result in

"a huge loss of overall capacity in the system."—[*Official Report*, 18 May 2000; Vol. 350, c. 494.]

Is that not exactly what has happened?

The Prime Minister: First, the regulations to which the right hon. Gentleman refers are the care standards regulations. I hope that the Conservative party supports high standards for our care homes, and I would have thought that it would do so. Actually, the principal reason why many of these homes have closed is that the owners believe, for understandable reasons, that the level of fees given by the Government are not high enough. We understand that, particularly when they are often sitting on extremely valuable property which they could sell for a great deal of money. However, the only way that we will get the necessary fees paid to those care homes is to put more money into the system. I repeat that the Government have committed £1.4 billion over the next few years both to help care services in local authorities and to give people better chances of being looked after in their own homes. We are putting that money into the system to rectify the problem, and the right hon. Gentleman opposed it. Perhaps when he gets to his feet he will explain how he will manage to improve the situation of people in care homes when he is opposed to the investment in them.

Mr. Duncan Smith: What the Prime Minister absolutely fails to point out is that, far from putting money in, the expensive cost of regulations takes money out of the system. The director of the Independent Healthcare Association said:

"The entire NHS plan will go into the sand unless care homes are stabilised."

The Prime Minister has been destabilising them for five years. As a result, we now have an NHS that is in almost permanent crisis. People cannot get their operations because there are no beds available. There are no beds

available because those occupying them cannot get beds in care homes, and those in care homes live in fear of being evicted because their care home may be closed. That is not health care; it is Kafka-care. The reality is that the people who will suffer are the most vulnerable in society.

The Prime Minister: First, on the point about operations in the national health service, let us not forget that the vast majority of people—more than 70 per cent.—get their operations within three months. This year, the Government have increased the number of beds in the national health service for the first time in years. The right hon. Gentleman talks about waiting lists, but let no one forget that, in the years before we came to office, waiting lists in the health service went up by 400,000. They have fallen by 100,000 under this Government.

In respect of care homes, as a result of the additional money, we are able to look after more people in their own homes—that is what they want—and we are able to increase the level of fees given to those care homes. If the right hon. Gentleman opposes the provisions of the Care Standards Act 2000—which allow, for example, some of the people working in those homes to get paid holidays for the first time in their lives—let him get up and say so now.

Hon. Members: Answer.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Jim Sheridan (West Renfrewshire): Does my right hon. Friend agree that today's British workers are among the most productive in Europe? Does he not further agree that it is not over-ambitious for those same workers to expect and enjoy the same rights as those enjoyed by their counterparts throughout Europe?

The Prime Minister: That is exactly right. That is why, when the Government came to office, we signed the social chapter and we introduced the minimum wage. We have introduced the first proper rights of trade union representation and we have introduced the right to paid holidays for the first time for literally hundreds of thousands of people who never used to get the chance of a holiday. In those circumstances, I say to my hon. Friend that it is important that we manage to combine both enterprise and fairness in our economy. Each of the measures that we introduced, including the social chapter, were bitterly opposed by the Conservative party.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West): In expressing continuing support for the further British troop deployment to Afghanistan announced this week, may I ask the Prime Minister to clarify one aspect of that? The British are already involved in peacekeeping and there will be British forces in the mountains in a combat role. Why are we combining both roles when the Americans do not wish to do either?

The Prime Minister: There have been British forces engaged in fighting in Afghanistan for a very long time. Those troops, together with those in the international security assistance force, amount to about 6,000 British troops in total who are involved in the Afghan operation. To put that into context, that is about one tenth of the number deployed in the Gulf war.

It is important to remember that several hundred of the 1,700 troops that we announced earlier this week would be deployed are already in Afghanistan. Many more are near the theatre of operation and, of course, thousands of Americans troops have been there for a very long time, and will remain there. Some of the way in which this has been reported is not in accordance with the facts.

Mr. Kennedy: I am sure, however, that the Prime Minister and the House will acknowledge that the Chief of the Defence Staff publicly cautioned against dual roles and against peacekeeping and combat forces being in the same place at the same time. Why has the Prime Minister come to the opposite conclusion?

The Prime Minister: I have not. I can assure the right hon. Gentleman that the Chief of the Defence Staff fully supports the deployment of our forces. They are not being deployed in the same areas—the security force is in Kabul and is performing a fundamental role in restoring security to Afghanistan.

As I have pointed out throughout, there was always going to be a period in which we would have to mop up the last remnants of Taliban and al-Qaeda resistance. There are groups of people in the mountains whom the American forces have already been fighting, and Canadian forces have been fighting alongside the Americans. Indeed, at the moment about eight different countries are fighting in Afghanistan alongside the United States of America. British forces have also been there for a significant period. It is important that we get the job done. I do not believe that there is any mismatch between the security force operating in Kabul and the forces that will, as I said, deal with the last remnants of al-Qaeda and the Taliban. That is a necessary part of prosecuting the war in Afghanistan to a successful conclusion.

Mr. James Plaskitt (Warwick and Leamington): My right hon. Friend will be aware of the comments of one of his recent predecessors, who declared the European Union "unreformable". Does he agree that, although it might seem that way if one stands on the sidelines and carps at it, it appears quite different if one is involved in the process?

The Prime Minister: Our membership of the European Union has been wholly to the benefit of this country. It is to the benefit of British jobs and the British economy, and it is right for British influence in the world that we remain part of the European Union. I am only sorry that so many people in the Conservative party today want to take this country back to the margins of influence in Europe, because that is not a patriotic thing to do. It is not in our national self-interest; it is actually a betrayal of that self-interest.

Q2. [42034] **Mr. Mark Simmonds** (Boston and Skegness): In Skegness, in my constituency, hundreds of jobs and thousands of tourists will be adversely affected by the ill-judged recommendations in the Government-sponsored Budd report on gaming. After four months of

delay and dithering, will the Prime Minister take this opportunity to disown, and dissociate himself from those proposals?

The Prime Minister: We commissioned the independent report for very good reasons. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport is studying it and she will make an announcement in due course. Before making up his mind and alarming his constituents unduly, perhaps the hon. Gentleman should await the outcome of the consultation.

Vernon Coaker (Gedling): My right hon. Friend will know that many people are concerned about levels of crime, particularly street crime. People tell me that they cannot understand why the courts do not deal adequately with persistent offenders. Can he reassure them and the House that the Government are determined to take action to ensure that persistent offenders are dealt with effectively and swiftly by the courts?

The Prime Minister: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. Of course, overall, crime—which doubled under the previous Conservative Government—has fallen under this Government. However, a serious problem exists with street crime, and one of the things that we are looking at is how to increase the number of secure accommodation places, precisely to ensure that those who are likely to commit further offences are not allowed back on the streets on bail.

Q3. [42035] **Mr. Tim Boswell** (Daventry): I wonder whether the Prime Minister might take the time to study the recent report of the Northamptonshire-South community health council, which reveals that the total number of nursing home beds in the south of that county declined by almost 25 per cent. in the 30 months from January 1999. Will he note that the report of which that forms part is on delayed discharges from hospital, and is he the only person in the country who can see no connection between those two facts?

The Prime Minister: No, of course there is a connection. We allocated some £300 million of additional money before Christmas precisely in order to reduce delayed discharges. As a result, they have come down significantly. Indeed, according to my meeting yesterday with people in the health service, I think that more than 1,000 beds have been freed up through that additional money.

I should tell the hon. Gentleman, who takes a slightly more reasonable view of such matters than some of his hon. Friends, that one reason why we have to make that extra investment into the national health service is precisely in order to deal with the problem that he draws attention to. However, the way to get in that extra investment is to support the policies of this Government, rather than to oppose that investment, as his Front-Bench colleagues do.

Q4. [42036] **Mrs. Joan Humble** (Blackpool, North and Fleetwood): Will my right hon. Friend join me in expressing sympathy to my constituent, Daniella Perry, an eight-year-old girl who was savagely attacked by a dog in a community centre in Fleetwood? In that particular case, the dog has been protected, but the young girl has not, because the attack took place on private property—even though that private property is a community centre run by the local council and open to the public.

The Prime Minister: First, I express my sympathy to my hon. Friend's constituent and her family. Secondly, I know that the Minister of the relevant Department is in touch with my hon. Friend about that case and will be happy to meet her to discuss it. Obviously, beyond that particular case, it is a serious matter that may have implications for the general state of the law.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): In 1997, the Prime Minister said:

"we will never consent to any arrangement that goes against the freely expressed wishes of the people of Gibraltar."—[*Official Report*, 16 July 1997; Vol. 298, c. 388.]

Given that 80 per cent. of the population turned out on Monday to oppose his plans for joint sovereignty, does he now stand by every word of that statement?

The Prime Minister: I do stand by it and of course we have not put proposals to people in Gibraltar yet. When we do put those proposals—*[Interruption.]* Well, that is the process that we have agreed. We have agreed that there should be a process under which we discuss with the Spanish Government certain proposals. When those proposals are agreed, they will be put to people in Gibraltar. Of course, people in Gibraltar will have the final say, as I have always indicated.

Mr. Duncan Smith: The Prime Minister says "yet", but his Government briefing yesterday was that a deal with Spain on joint sovereignty had already been agreed, that it will be presented within months and that whatever—I repeat, whatever—the result of a referendum, the deal will remain on the table and the Government will withdraw political and economic support from Gibraltar unless it agrees to that deal. To be absolutely clear about the issue, will the Prime Minister now answer two questions? First, if the people of Gibraltar refuse to accept the deal in a referendum, will those plans be torn up and taken away? Secondly, will Gibraltar suffer any economic or political reprisals and will it continue to be supported by the British Government regardless, through the EU?

The Prime Minister: Of course there will be no reprisals or penalties applied to the people of Gibraltar if they reject the plans. If they reject the plans, the plans are rejected by them. There is no question of the plans being able to proceed without their consent. That has been made clear throughout. I must say to the right hon. Gentleman and other Opposition Members that this is a process that began under the last Conservative Government—[HON. MEMBERS: "No."] Oh yes. This total opportunism by the Conservative party has to be exposed. The process began under the previous Conservative Government and it began for a very good reason: the present arrangements between Spain and Gibraltar suit nobody. They do not suit the people of Spain or Gibraltar or Britain. Therefore, under the Brussels process, which began under the previous Government, proposals will be put to the people of

Gibraltar, but—as I have said throughout—there can and will be no change to the constitutional position of Gibraltar without the consent of the people of Gibraltar.

Mr. Duncan Smith: The Prime Minister did not answer the question. [HON. MEMBERS: "Yes, he did."] No, he did not. I asked specifically whether those plans would be withdrawn, torn up, taken away or whatever he wants. In other words, those plans would not lie around to bully the people of Gibraltar. Is it not the same for everybody? We have a pattern with this Government, whether it is a 90-year-old worried about their health care or Gibraltarians who want to stay British. First, the Government try to smear them. If that fails, the Government try to threaten them. If that fails, finally the Government abandon them. When will the Prime Minister accept that the people of Gibraltar do not want this deal? Is it not a reality that whatever he says, and all the spin, we can no longer trust his word?

The Prime Minister: As I have said to the right hon. Gentleman in the last two answers I have given, if the people of Gibraltar do not accept the plans then they cannot be proceeded with.

Q5. [42037] **Colin Burgon** (Elmet): Moving from a rock to sport, last Friday I had the honour of officially opening the sports facilities at the Wetherby sports association in my constituency. Those magnificent facilities are being delivered, first, thanks to a £500,000 lottery grant via Sport England, and secondly, thanks to the dedication of voluntary workers such as the chairman, Seamus Picker, and his team of volunteers. Bearing in mind the role that sport plays in this country in developing a healthy and socially cohesive nation, will my right hon. Friend outline to the House what plans the Government have for supporting sport at the grass-roots level in the many years ahead that we shall be in power?

The Prime Minister: First, I pay tribute to those in my hon. Friend's constituency who have been working so hard on sport, which is dear to the hearts of many people throughout the country. There are more than 100,000 local amateur sports clubs up and down the country. We are working with them at the moment to see how they can apply for charitable status, because that is a big issue for them, but in addition there is an announcement that some £200 million of lottery money will be spread throughout the country, which will encourage these sports clubs.

It is important that we give this encouragement to sport not only for its own sake but because, as many people now recognise, it is one of the best anti-crime policies that we could have. It is also as good a health and education policy as virtually any other. It deserves to be supported and we will support it.

Mr. Gregory Barker (Bexhill and Battle): Can the Prime Minister tell me why, after nearly six years of a Labour Government—[HON. MEMBERS: "Five."]—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Barker: Five, then. Why, after five years of a Labour Government, in my constituency, are women with breast cancer—*[Interruption.]* They may find it a laughing matter, but to me it is deadly serious. Why are women with breast cancer waiting an unprecedented 20 weeks to begin life-saving radiotherapy treatment?

The Prime Minister: I will certainly look into the facts in the hon. Gentleman's constituency as, I have to say from experience, often when these points are put to me by Conservative Members on their constituency facts, they do not turn out to be exactly as they were represented to me. However, I say to the hon. Gentleman about breast cancer, as a result of the measures that have been introduced by the Government, we are referring people to a consultant within two weeks, and now 95 per cent. of people get referred within two weeks. That compares with just over 60 per cent. when we came to office. There is a particular problem with radiography at the moment, not just in the hon. Gentleman's constituency, but throughout the country—partly because, of course, there are many more referrals as a result of the two-week limit. But as a result of additional investment and the amount of equipment that we are putting in, cancer waits on the whole are down, not up.

I think that if I quote the Health Select Committee report on cancer research published this morning correctly, although the Committee said that there was still a great more to do, it specifically found that there had been significant progress on cancer in the past couple of years.

Q6. [42038] **Mr. Mark Lazarowicz** (Edinburgh, North and Leith): I am sure that my right hon. Friend would agree that the very welcome decision of the Commonwealth to suspend Zimbabwe fully justified an approach that sought to bring on board the rest of the Commonwealth rather than a unilateral approach by this country. Given the reports today of the charge for treason being pursued against Morgan Tsvangirai, can my right hon. Friend tell the House what further steps he would like the Commonwealth to take to try to give the people of Zimbabwe the Government of their choice?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments. The Commonwealth will of course consider what further steps to take. The decision to prosecute Mr. Tsvangirai is an indication of why the decision to suspend Zimbabwe is so justified.

I pay tribute to the courage and leadership not just of Prime Minister Howard, but of President Mbeki and President Obasanjo. This has been a difficult issue for them in the current situation, particularly for South Africa because there is worry about instability in Zimbabwe, but I think that it was the right decision and that it sends a very clear message that not just the Commonwealth, but Africa is in favour of democracy and that Africa will not compromise with the issues of democracy. I believe that it has given a significant boost to the prospects of getting a partnership deal at the G8 in June that will allow, in exchange for Africa sorting out some of its problems of governance, a long-overdue increase in aid from the developed world.

Mr. Michael Mates (East Hampshire): As I am sure that the Prime Minister is not aware of a dispute that is going on between two Departments, will he look into the fact that, despite the strongest recommendations from the Ministry of Defence, the Department for Culture, Media

and Sport is refusing to give the Queen's jubilee medal to holders of the Victoria Cross and the George Cross? Will he look into that to ensure that the bravest of the brave are not deprived of that honour, which they so richly deserve?

The Prime Minister: I will look into it, although I give the hon. Gentleman no promises.

Q7. [42039] **Mr. Huw Edwards** (Monmouth): Does my right hon. Friend agree that to increase capacity in the NHS we need to increase the number of consultants who work for it full time? My constituents are impressed with the skill and professionalism of consultants, but concerned about the lucrative private practices that many of them have. Will he speed up the reform of the consultants contract so that doctors who are trained by the NHS work exclusively for the NHS and get the rewards that they deserve?

The Prime Minister: As my hon. Friend will know, an intensive programme of negotiations on the new consultants contract is under way, and both the British Medical Association and the Government are negotiating in good faith on its terms. I can say to him at this stage that many consultants work immensely hard for the NHS all over the country, and they are highly dedicated and committed people. I am sure that we will find a resolution to those negotiations that allows consultants to work for the NHS while ensuring that they have the freedoms that they need.

Q8. [42040] **Mr. Edward Davey** (Kingston and Surbiton): Given the Prime Minister's commitment to tackling youth crime and speeding up youth justice, can he tell my constituents why the Government propose to close Kingston magistrates court, which has the busiest youth court in south-west London? As he may not have heard about that proposal before today, can he give me his personal assurance that he will look into it and intervene to prevent the closure of an efficient and well regarded courthouse?

The Prime Minister: In the light of the hon. Gentleman's question, I shall certainly look into it, but I have to say to him that closures take place for all sorts of different administrative, as well as cost, reasons. In respect of youth offending overall, as a result of the measures that the Government have introduced and the extra money that we have put into the system, we have halved the time that it takes to get persistent youth offenders to court.

As regards Kingston magistrates court, I shall have to look into it as I do not know the facts.

Mr. Tony McWalter (Hemel Hempstead): I welcome the philosophically substantial speech that my right hon. Friend gave last week at the London school of economics, especially its contrast between the social individualism that he advocates and the selfish individualism that has so often characterised proceedings in this House. However, does he agree that some of his current policies are somewhat inconsistent with those principles, notably his policy on the House of Lords, and will he send them back to the drawing board?

The Prime Minister: I hesitate to revisit the scene of an earlier triumph.

To answer my hon. Friend's question, we believe that it is important to combine fairness and enterprise throughout, and that is what we as a Government are doing. In respect of the House of Lords, a consultation process is under way and we are listening to the responses to it. There are many different voices. *[Interruption.]* The right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith) is pointing to Labour Members to suggest that there may be differences on our Benches. I must say to him that I read very carefully the speeches that were made in the House of Lords and the House of Commons, and few Conservative Members supported his proposals. We all have a little homework to do on this. We must find a way forward that allows the House of Lords to remain an effective revising Chamber, but I personally should not like to see it competing with the House of Commons.

Q9. [42041] **Mr. Peter Luff** (Mid-Worcestershire): On the crisis in the care homes sector, does the Prime Minister think that it is a bit rich to describe as investment the throwing of taxpayers' money at a problem that his Government have themselves created? Last Friday, I visited a care home in my constituency that is having to spend £30,000 to improve a perfectly adequate heating system just to meet the arbitrary standards that the Prime Minister praised a few minutes ago. Will he please revisit that policy before the care homes sector descends into complete crisis?

The Prime Minister: I simply do not agree with the hon. Gentleman about the care home standards regulations and rules, which were the product of detailed consultation. Indeed, I remember that hon. Members from all parties supported many aspects of them at the time. It is important that those homes have proper care standards. I cannot comment on the specific heating system in the home to which he referred. However, he says that the extra money that we are investing in social services is simply wasted. With the greatest respect, that is nonsense.

Care homes' biggest problem is that they do not believe that the fee levels are high enough, when they are often sitting on highly valuable real estate. In those circumstances, we have increased the amount of money that is put into social services, and people's ability to remain in their own homes and be looked after there. We believe that that is properly called investment. The hon. Gentleman has to decry it because he and the Conservative party opposed it.

Speaker's Statement

3.31 pm

Mr. Speaker: I have looked into the point of order that the hon. Member for Waveney (Mr. Blizzard) raised last Monday about the names published in support of early-day motion 949.

It appears that some of the Members listed as supporting the motion had been told by the sponsor that their support would be assumed unless they indicated otherwise. Some of those Members have informed me that they were not aware that their names were being added to the motion.

This is an important matter. Members should be aware that adding a name to any motion, like tabling a parliamentary question, is a formal proceeding in Parliament. Members may give the Table Office instructions on behalf of another Member, but it is incumbent on any Member who does that to ensure that he has the explicit consent of the Member concerned.

I acknowledge that it is not the first time that this has happened. My view is that simply saying that names will be added to a motion unless a Member indicates otherwise is not sufficient and risks embarrassing Members whose names are used in that way. I look to the House to ensure that it does not happen again.

Castlereagh Break-in

3.32 pm

Mr. Quentin Davies (Grantham and Stamford) *(by private notice):* To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the break-in at Castlereagh police station.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Dr. John Reid): On Sunday evening, several people broke into a special branch office at Castlereagh in Northern Ireland, assaulted the duty officer and stole several documents.

There has inevitably been much public speculation about who was responsible for the incident and the exact nature of the documents that were taken. The House will understand that, in the context of a live criminal investigation, it is not helpful to put into the public domain information that would otherwise be known only by the perpetrators or the investigators. Suffice it to say that all lines of inquiry remain open. As to the nature of the documentation, the Chief Constable has established a high-level team to assess any impact that its theft could cause.

At this sensitive moment when the damage is still being assessed and a variety of remedial measures are being taken, I hope that the House will understand why I cannot be more forthcoming. However, I can reassure the House that the Government, like the Chief Constable, are absolutely committed to taking all necessary steps to mitigate any damage from this serious incident.

The Chief Constable has appointed Detective Chief Superintendent Phil Wright to take charge of the criminal investigation. He has also referred the matter to the ombudsman. In addition, I have established a review to proceed in parallel with the criminal investigation that will report to me. It will be conducted by Sir John Chilcot, a former permanent secretary at the Northern Ireland Office, who has extensive experience of policing and security issues. He will be assisted by Mr. Colin Smith, a former inspector of constabulary and chief constable of Thames Valley, who will act as an assessor.

I am placing Sir John's terms of reference in the Library of the House for the information of Members. The purpose of the review is to establish how the incident could have happened, to assess the extent of any damage caused to national security, to audit the measures taken in response to the incident and to identify any wider lessons on national security.

Any breach of national security is a matter of grave concern. The work undertaken by the special branch of the Police Service of Northern Ireland bears directly on the safety of lives both in Northern Ireland and throughout the United Kingdom more generally. I am determined therefore that we will establish the facts surrounding this serious incident as quickly as possible, and ensure that all necessary remedial action is being taken.

Mr. Davies: The House will be grateful for that statement. No one will be in any doubt as to the seriousness of the incident for the morale and credibility of the Police Service of Northern Ireland and particularly for the viability of special branch operations. Police agents will obviously be very reluctant to maintain contact with their handlers while they fear that they might have

been compromised. New sources are likely to be fearful of coming forward, and agents who think that they may have been exposed will face the agonising dilemma of whether to flee the Province, thereby perhaps increasing suspicion about them, or stay there, risking their lives.

It is always possible, by mismanaging a crisis of this kind, to make it even worse. Does the Secretary of State agree that such an incident needs to be managed in a decisive but controlled and co-ordinated way? Otherwise, uncertainty, demoralisation and public disquiet will all be aggravated. Is it not the case that in this instance the Government's handling has not been controlled or coherent?

The right hon. Gentleman said that there will be three inquiries. Of course the police must conduct a normal criminal investigation, but it is far from clear why it is necessary to have two further inquiries, one conducted by the police ombudsman and another under the direction of Sir John Chilcot. Is it not the case that the police ombudsman has the powers to conduct inquiries only where police officers are concerned, so if her inquiry runs up against individuals who are not police officers, she will be outside her remit? Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that it is highly undesirable in such a case that there should be two separate inquiries? Clearly, we want one inquiry with a single responsibility to get to all the facts, and in which no one can say that certain matters are the responsibility of someone else. This action is not co-ordinated or controlled, and it needs a good deal more justification than the Secretary of State gave it.

There has been a spate of rumours and speculation, as the Secretary of State says. Can he give the House an unqualified assurance that those rumours do not derive from press briefings given by himself, the Chief Constable or anyone responsible to him? Can he also give the House an assurance that if there have been leaks, he will undertake to investigate them?

Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that in retrospect it is unfortunate that he did not take the initiative and come to the House himself immediately after the incident, as he could have done on Monday, or ask one of his deputies to do so in his place? That would have enabled him to pre-empt the rumour mill and give an authoritative account of the position. Instead, he preferred to brief the press yesterday and had to be dragged to the Dispatch Box today by the official Opposition. Is not that an unfortunate way to treat the House? Finally, will the right hon. Gentleman give an assurance that when the Chilcot review, which we shall certainly support in any way we can, reports, he will take the initiative and come to the House to make a statement on that?

Dr. Reid: First, I hope that I have not given the impression that I do not regard this issue as serious. Indeed, I have gone out of my way to say that I regard any breach of national security as serious in its immediate and wider implications, and I would not want to diminish in any way the seriousness with which I regard this incident.

On the hon. Gentleman's second point, any breach of national security immediately raises problems of operational effectiveness and the prospect of putting anyone who is involved in danger. That is why we are assessing what may have been taken and why I want Sir John Chilcot to have regard, among other matters, to damage assessment of specific and more general operational capability and of the threat posed to individuals.

The hon. Gentleman demanded, as a general proposition, that I act in a decisive and controlled way before attacking everything that I have done as decisive and controlled. I did act decisively yesterday, and there are various reasons why I thought it absolutely necessary to do what I did. Had the situation been such that the only or best option was to come to the House first, then I would have done so, but under the circumstances I was wise to discuss the matter with not only my security Minister but the Chief Constable and others in Northern Ireland before acting as quickly and decisively as possible.

In fairness, the hon. Gentleman might have informed the House that my security Minister and I had a conversation with him, as well as others. That is not to say that it is not preferable to come to the House. As a general proposition, I agree with that and will try to do it whenever it is in my power to do so. I hope that he understands, however, that with fast-moving events, when decisiveness and control are so important, it is necessary to take decisive and controlled action, as he said.

The hon. Gentleman also said that there would be three inquiries. I do not know what he bases that on. He agrees that there should be a police inquiry, which is absolutely necessary. I take it that he agrees that I should have taken decisive action to initiate a wider review. It is not yet apparent that there will definitely be a third inquiry by the ombudsman, but the Chief Constable acted correctly and appropriately by referring the matter to him when he decided that the threshold for the ombudsman's powers of inquiry had been met. To put it succinctly, the hon. Gentleman knows that the threshold for the ombudsman's powers to inquire are met when there may have been, or has been, a disciplinary or criminal offence by a member of the police. That threshold was met and the Chief Constable acted properly. It is now up to the ombudsman to consider the matter.

On the hon. Gentleman's other points, no one to my knowledge with my authority or in my organisation has given details to the press of the incident as far as I am aware. Indeed, I will be amazed if that is the case because so much of what has appeared in the press has been inaccurate either in the detail or on the process. Although I should like nothing better than to rebut some of the inaccuracies, he will understand that on something as important and sensitive as this incident, that would put me down an avenue in which it would be difficult not to discuss the matter in detail. I hope that he and the House will be tolerant if I cannot give as much detail as I might like.

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): Is it not extraordinary, after all that has happened in Ireland, that there still appear to be parts of the secret state who think that they can act with impunity? My right hon. Friend will be aware that there is a long history of such inquiries in Ireland encountering a wall of silence and fizzling out after the lapse of time. Can I have his assurance that that will not be allowed to happen in this case?

Dr. Reid: On the first point, I would be very wary of basing all sorts of propositions on a premise that a particular group, or a particular part of a particular group,

[Dr. Reid]

was involved. The answer is that we just do not know, at this stage, the motive, the organisation or the individuals who may have been involved.

The second point is that, as my hon. Friend says, there has been a long history of inquiries of this nature; there has not been a long history of my being Secretary of State, and I can assure him that if it is within my power—whoever the individuals are and whatever their motive—and if there is any way of discovering that and dealing with it, it will be done. The inquiry has been established not as an attempt to divert attention or in any way to cover up the grievousness and importance of what happened, but precisely to try to elicit the information necessary to get to the truth. That is hugely important in terms of operations and for those people, including many brave people, who have acted according to their consciences in the past and who may or may not be in danger as a result of any breach of security. It is also hugely important for the peace process that we get to the bottom of what went on.

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): I thank the Secretary of State for prior notice of his statement. I also thank the security Minister for our informal conversation earlier this week, which satisfied me that the Government are, in fact, taking the issue very seriously.

First, although having three investigations—the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) made some points about this—may not make it less likely that any investigation gets to the answer and the truth, would it not be helpful if the right hon. Gentleman formalised the interaction between those investigations to ensure that potentially useful cross-references are dealt with in a codified and organised fashion?

Secondly, given the obvious possibility of internal assistance with this breach—although we must not draw any conclusion until we have the facts—what steps does the Secretary of State intend to take to ensure that those involved cannot cover up some of the evidence that could highlight what happened? Thirdly, what steps has he taken as a matter of urgency to protect the welfare of individuals who may be seriously compromised by the theft of the information?

Dr. Reid: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his support. On formal co-ordination of any inquiries, I have already said that, in addition to the criminal investigation, it was appropriate for me to act decisively and to call an inquiry. The hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies), with a little lightness, if I may say so, added a further inquiry—a leak inquiry—during his contribution, but the two inquiries are absolutely essential. However, of course, we want the maximum access to information for the review, as it will be named, carried out by Sir John Chilcot, but the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik) will understand that the operational independence of the police in their investigation is a matter of some importance as well, so it is difficult to formalise because that investigation cannot, of course, come under political control. Nevertheless, I take his point about generally ensuring that one inquiry does not run across or prohibit the other. That is very important.

The hon. Gentleman asks about measures taken to try to minimise the possibility of any cover-up or destruction and so on. I can assure him that, so far as I am aware—obviously, I do not control the operation of the investigation—a tremendous amount of work was done to seal off the area to try to ensure forensic evidence and so on was preserved. Every effort is being made to try to investigate all possible lines of inquiry.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the welfare of the individuals concerned, which is very important in any breach of security. I am aware that, where it is believed that there might be a threat, steps are being taken to inform those who might be the subject of any danger as a result of this or any other breach of security. That would be a natural thing to happen.

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North and Sefton, East): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the two issues that seem to be at stake are first, who did it, and secondly, how it was done? The arrangements that he has described seem eminently well suited to answering those two questions. Does he agree that it is at the least ill judged, and may turn out—I hope not—as events unfold, to be irresponsible, for the Opposition to seek to exploit this serious matter?

Dr. Reid: On my hon. Friend's second point, yes it would be irresponsible for anyone to try to exploit this matter, particularly since, as he said, at this stage the two questions of who did it and how it was done remain unanswered. I would add a third question: why was it done? That is not clear either at this stage so in terms of motive, culprit and method, we are still at an early stage. I confess to my hon. Friend and to the House that I do not have a clear view on any of them at this stage. No one appears to have claimed credit—if I may use the word—for the incident.

The questions that my hon. Friend mentioned on method and the culprits are important. The question of why is also important. However, whatever the answers to those questions, I would not seek to diminish the fact that any breach of national security is always of importance, and this one is no exception.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): We view what happened in Castlereagh with the gravest concern. It is extremely serious and we are very worried about possible ramifications not just for national security but for the integrity of policing operations in Northern Ireland.

I am also concerned about the potential multiplicity of inquiries. I can see a distinction between the police investigation and the review being undertaken by Sir John Chilcot and Mr. Colin Smith, but I am worried about the potential overlap between the police investigation and any action by the ombudsman. That concern is deepened by the weaknesses in the investigative capacity of the ombudsman's office, as revealed by the recent ombudsman reports. Can we have a clear assurance that the police investigation will be primary and that there will be no interference with that investigation until it has run its course and, we hope, identified the people who were responsible?

I endorse what the Secretary of State said about being cautious about responsibilities on the issue. There is a tendency to be far too quick to run to conspiracy theories.

I very much regret that the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin), for whom in many other respects I have a regard, seemed to feed that tendency of jumping to conclusions, and indeed on this matter jumped to the wrong conclusions.

There is no doubt that those who were responsible in some way or other obtained detailed information about the police office at Castlereagh to obtain entry. That seems to be clear. We do not know yet how that information was acquired, and we must be careful not to pre-judge the matter. However, I cannot avoid saying that it appears to be linked to the very significant demoralisation among present and particularly former members of the police. The Secretary of State should reflect on that because that demoralisation, which is inseparable from the policies that he has pursued, has to a significant extent led to the problem before us. Indeed, that has been exacerbated by some current decisions, particularly with regard to uniforms.

On the question that the Secretary of State raised at the end about why the break-in occurred, can he put the public mind to rest in one respect and eliminate one possible reason why it was done, by making it clear that the Government will support entirely the present arrangements for special branch, and will ensure that the capacity of the police with regard to special branch operations is increased, that their effectiveness is increased and that there is no question of using these events as a pretext for further run-down in that respect?

Dr. Reid: The right hon. Gentleman said that he had the gravest concern about the incident, and he is right to be so concerned. I would expect him to be, like ourselves, thus concerned.

The question whether there was inside knowledge is to some extent speculative, but that would appear to be the case prima facie. However, that does not lead us in any particular direction because, as the right hon. Gentleman points out, there might be a range of people who had inside knowledge. I do not want to speculate on whether they might be disgruntled or demoralised former police officers. There is a range of other people who might have inside knowledge as well. I know that all these matters will be investigated by the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

The right hon. Gentleman mentioned the wider effects. There are always wider effects for the operation of national security, for the integrity of the process, the operations and, as he said, the policing effort in Northern Ireland and for the safety of individuals.

With reference to special branch, we have outlined our plans in the implementation plan, but they are subject to discussion. The Chief Constable will make a recommendation and, as the right hon. Gentleman knows, we now have a Policing Board which deals with these issues. The board will no doubt want to consider all the ramifications of any change to special branch in the future, and I would not want to pre-empt its deliberations or decisions on the matter. I do not mean that the Policing Board will be considering that as a specific item arising out of the incident, but it considers all aspects of policing and will no doubt wish to speak to me. I see no reason why, in the first instance, the matter should lead us to any conclusions in any direction about special branch or any other element. I would not want to imply any premise about who was involved. None of us knows.

As regards the ombudsman, I think that the Chief Constable was right in law to refer the matter to the ombudsman. A referral is appropriate on the basis of his judgment that prima facie it cannot be ruled out that a police officer may have committed an offence or behaved in a way that would justify disciplinary proceedings. As the Chief Constable said, however, there is no evidence at this stage to suggest that an offence has been committed by a police officer, but he nevertheless considered it in the public interest to refer the matter to the ombudsman.

The ombudsman cannot properly investigate the matter in the sense that was suggested, running across the criminal investigation, as she cannot investigate Army or intelligence agencies. Clearly, it will be important for the police and the ombudsman to develop a close working relationship in any investigations. I stress that the matter has been referred to the ombudsman—that is as far as it has gone—and no investigation has started.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. We have a lot of business today. I want to call all hon. Members who are standing. The House can assist me if hon. Members ask short questions and, of course, the Minister can help also.

Mr. Eddie McGrady (South Down): I welcomed the statement from the Secretary of State and the three inquiries, which will have three different objectives. Will he make it clear that Castlereagh police station is not an ordinary police station, but a sophisticated intelligence bureau and interrogation centre? Entry into it would require substantial detailed knowledge. Will he ensure that matters of national security will not in any way frustrate the investigations by Sir John Chilcot or the ombudsman? The popular belief is that many previous investigations in Northern Ireland have been frustrated by special branch. Will the Secretary of State assure the House that a full report—in the context of national security, but not frustrated by it—will be compiled?

Dr. Reid: I can confirm that Castlereagh police station is not one that people would expect to be entered as easily as appears to have been the case, although I must inform the hon. Member that it is no longer the holding and interrogation centre that it used to be. I assure him that Sir John Chilcot and Colin Smith will report to me. They will have full access to all the information necessary for them to complete the damage assessment and the security audit, and to judge some of the wider implications of the incident.

I believe that both of those gentlemen are eminently qualified for the task I have given them. Sir John Chilcot, of course, knows Northern Ireland well, and he has experience of policing and of intelligence work. Colin Smith is a former chief constable of the Thames Valley force, and is a member of Her Majesty's inspectorate of police. Both men are therefore appropriately qualified, and have been at the cutting edge. When it comes to investigation, people will accept that Colin Smith has been robust in any investigation that he has pursued.

[Dr. Reid]

No one can guarantee anything in Northern Ireland, and I cannot guarantee that we will get to the truth. However, I can guarantee that I and the two gentlemen whom I have named intend to do our utmost to find out what happened.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Bracknell): Many of us who have been involved in Northern Ireland for many years are, to say the least, mystified and appalled that Castlereagh could be broken into in the way that has been described. We therefore applaud the Secretary of State's decision to set up an independent inquiry under two such eminent men, both of whom have very good reputations in the Province.

However, could not the Secretary of State go a little further than the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) proposed and suggest to the ombudsman that it would not be helpful of her to get in the way of the other two inquiries, for fear of muddying the water?

Dr. Reid: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his support. However, I do not think it is always helpful for me to suggest things to chief constables, ombudsmen or to anyone whose office carries a degree of independence. Although no decision has been taken to investigate the matter, as there is no evidence yet that anyone in the police service has committed an offence or a crime that would warrant disciplinary action, it was perfectly appropriate for the ombudsman to be informed, and for the matter to be referred to her. In addition, regardless of the outcome, a good working relationship between the ombudsman and the police service is essential.

Two key things must happen—the criminal investigation must find out who is responsible, and the wider implications must be determined. That is why I have established the review.

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): My right hon. Friend will be aware that some people fear that this incident could dent confidence in the peace process. He has taken decisive action in establishing the independent inquiry under Sir John Chilcot, but does he agree that it is very important that the inquiry report directly to him? Given the pain and discomfort suffered by some of the people who have had to lead similar inquiries in the past, will he assure me that the direct line that will exist between the inquiry and himself will give the process clarity? Does he have any idea when the inquiry's report might be published, given the national security limitations involved? Will he bear it in mind that the general population of the island must be reassured so that the great work accomplished by everyone involved in the peace process can be maintained?

Dr. Reid: I welcome my hon. Friend's comments very much. He is a distinguished former Northern Ireland Minister, so his comments carry great weight. I can answer his question in the affirmative. Sir John—and Colin Smith, through Sir John—will have a direct line to me and access to me. I have met Sir John, who has already made arrangements to do just that. That is important, not only in terms of trying to get to the truth of the matter but in terms of there being wider public confidence that we are trying to get to the truth of the matter. I can assure my hon. Friend and my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) that that is what we are about to do. *[Interruption.]* I cannot hear what the hon. Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Soames) is saying. Perhaps he is having trouble with my accent because it is from a different part of the world and a different social background. However, I will attempt to speak somewhat slower in future.

Mr. Andrew Hunter (Basingstoke): Although I welcome and support the overwhelming part of what the Secretary of State said, may I ask him to consider one point? By admitting that some people may be under threat as a result of the theft, he is inadvertently fuelling the media speculation that we all deplore. May I urge him to ensure that the assessment of the sensitivity and importance of the stolen papers is processed with the greatest possible speed and that decisive action is taken as a consequence to ensure that this media speculation comes to an end?

Dr. Reid: I can please both the hon. Gentleman and you, Mr. Speaker, by saying that the answer to his questions is yes.

Mr. Nigel Dodds (Belfast, North): Clearly, this event has caused palpable shock and concern right across Northern Ireland: it is a deeply worrying event. Is the Secretary of State in a position to tell the House that a security review not just of Castlereagh but of other key security installations has taken place and that immediate steps will be taken to tighten security at such installations in Northern Ireland? Will he give an assurance that, consistent with the need to get to the bottom of the matter and to seek out the truth, the inquiry that he has set up will act and announce its conclusions publicly as soon as possible, so that all the speculation and rumour can be put to rest as quickly as possible?

Dr. Reid: I agree with the hon. Gentleman's first point. Although I got back only yesterday morning, I believe that steps were taken immediately to ensure that security was improved, or at least tested, elsewhere. I will speak to the Chief Constable about this issue once we have finished this private notice question. Obviously, this matter will be included as part of any damage assessment and security audit, which is part of the task that I have given to Sir John Chilcot. I assure the hon. Gentleman that Sir John is seized of the need to do this as promptly as possible, but it is not easy to get answers in Northern Ireland, even given a considerable length of time. Of course, we want to get answers.

Finally, I would like to be able to be in a position to give as much information arising out of any inquiry as possible. However, I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will recognise that just as I am somewhat constrained today because of the wider aspects and implications of going into detail on matters of national security, that could apply to some of the information or conclusions that are drawn by Sir John in his review. I know that he will understand that.

Child Support Agency

4.8 pm

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr. Alistair Darling): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I would like to make a short statement on the implementation of the child support reforms. As the House will know, the Government are reforming the system of child support and the Child Support Agency itself to ensure that more children see the benefit of regular maintenance.

We consulted widely in 1998 and I announced our proposals in July 1999. I undertook to keep the House informed on progress towards the implementation of these important reforms. I have made it clear on many occasions that we would not implement the reforms until I was confident that the new system would work effectively.

On 1 July 1999, I reminded the House that the present system had collapsed under its own weight in 1993 because the reforms were introduced too quickly and with too little thought. That approach has been endorsed by Members on both sides of the House and by the then departmental Select Committee. Its report of November 1999 recommended

"that the new child support scheme should not be implemented until the new computer system is fully operational".

I said then—and it remains the position—that we would not repeat the mistakes made in 1993 when the Child Support Agency was introduced. The timetable then was rushed: the organisation was not ready and some key aspects of the information technology system were not finally delivered until two months after the start date. So the IT, critical to the system, was simply not there. We know the consequences—the system descended into chaos within weeks.

Let me tell the House what progress has been made since 1999 to reform the existing system. First, we have put in place the necessary legislation. The primary legislation received Royal Assent in July 2000 and the regulations are in place, with some minor provisions currently before the House.

Secondly, the Child Support Agency has been substantially reorganised to give a far better customer focus. As hon. Members will know, this has already made a difference. Levels of compliance have increased and complaints have fallen considerably.

The third issue, which is fundamental to the delivery of these reforms, is getting the IT right. We face a major task in building a new IT system that can handle upwards of 13 million payments each year. It also needs to link up with other IT systems in the Department, which are based on 1980s technology.

The new child support computer system being built by EDS is near completion. Testing has been under way for some weeks, in advance of the planned start date at the end of April. Those tests are continuing, but they are not yet complete.

I want to see the new system in place as soon as possible. We know that any new IT system will inevitably have teething problems on introduction, but we will proceed only when I am satisfied that it is working to the standards that we expect.

In my view, until the testing process is complete, I will not have the assurance that I need to authorise the start of the new system. I have therefore decided for that reason to defer the planned start date. The new system will be implemented only when the supporting IT is operating effectively.

I have a clear responsibility to Members of this House and the staff who have to operate the new system. Above all, I have a clear duty to parents and children to make sure that the system works effectively.

The delay is frustrating and regrettable. There was a choice: I could have taken a chance, but that would have meant taking a chance on support for children, and for parents. In my judgment, it is better to take the time needed to get it right, rather than repeat the mistakes of 1993.

The new system will continue to be thoroughly tested. I will keep the House updated on progress. I undertake to give the House sufficient notice of the date the new system will start and to confirm how we intend to bring on new and existing cases.

The House will want to know the cost implications of the delay. Inevitably, there are some, but the contract with EDS specified that the Department will not pay for the computer system until it meets the standard required, and that remains the position.

We know about the problems of the past. They arose in part because the rules were too complicated, but also because the decision was taken in the early days to press ahead when there was real doubt about whether all the necessary systems were in place. I will not let that happen again.

This was a difficult decision. I know that many Members—and parents—are anxious to see the changes introduced as soon as possible, but I judged that the risk of proceeding before testing was complete was unacceptable. I therefore took the view that it was right to tell the House the current position as soon as possible, and I will continue to report to the House on progress towards implementation of these much needed reforms.

Mr. David Willetts (Havant): It is usual to welcome a statement from a Minister, especially from this Secretary of State who has made only one oral statement to the House in the past 15 months. At least today's statement has a certain rarity value.

Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that his statement announces no new policy? Instead, it announces further IT problems at the CSA which are, sadly, not new. They are, indeed, regrettable. They are serious for the families who will be left in limbo. We need more information on the new timetable for the implementation of the changes, on which his statement was completely silent. We hope that a debate can take place when we can scrutinise those matters in Government time.

The changes were originally to be introduced in October 2001. Then the Secretary of State announced in a written answer that the scheme would be introduced by April 2002, saying

"by which time successful introduction can be achieved without unacceptable risks."—[*Official Report*, 31 January 2000; Vol. 343, c. 466W.]

I presume that he regrets saying that now.

Having announced a delay in that written answer, the right hon. Gentleman now rushes to the House to make an oral statement on further delays. It would be far more significant and newsworthy if he had come to the House

[Mr. David Willetts]

to announce an IT project that had been successfully delivered on time and on budget. That would be a statement that we would all enjoy hearing.

Why have we suddenly had a statement on IT in the CSA after 15 months of almost complete silence? Why not make a statement on the Government's redefinition of their poverty target for children so that they can appear to meet it? Why not make a statement on the crisis in funded pensions, on which the Secretary of State refused to comment?

The explanation for this statement is that the right hon. Gentleman knows that later this afternoon the House will have a desperately important debate on the commitment of our troops in Afghanistan. The Prime Minister, the Secretary of State and his Cabinet colleagues ought to be present for that debate, but the longer the gap between Prime Minister's questions and the debate, the easier it will be for them to stay away. That is what this statement is all about.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must speak to the statement, not tell us what it is all about.

Mr. Willetts: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I simply wish to record that the House gave a clear expression of its will yesterday under Standing Order No. 24. I do not wish to stand between the will of the House and the important debate that awaits us soon.

Mr. Darling: I am really very sorry that the hon. Gentleman has taken that stance. He knows a lot about this subject and the House often listens with respect to what he has to say. His response today was a little petulant.

First, I would have liked to make the statement yesterday, but I was told that I could not do so because it was an Opposition Supply day. I was left with no alternative but to make it today. Secondly, the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends have said on many occasions that Ministers ought to come to the House and be answerable to the House. Here I am.

The Child Support Agency is a matter of real interest to just about every hon. Member. I took the view that rather than use a written answer or a press briefing, or putting the story in the newspapers, it would be better to come to the House and say that, because of the difficulties I described, it would be necessary to defer the implementation of changes that many hon. Members as well as, of course—and, in many ways, more importantly—many of our constituents want to be implemented as quickly as possible.

Yes, there have been IT problems in the past. There were problems when the CSA was introduced in 1993. The IT did not arrive until two months after the then scheme was introduced. The hon. Gentleman is no doubt also thinking about NIRS—a contract that was signed in 1995, had to be renegotiated in 1996, and was a year late by the time the system was switched on, by which time the old system had been decommissioned, causing all sorts of problems with national insurance records. Perhaps he is also thinking about the benefits payment card. The contract for that was signed in 1996. It had to be renegotiated in February 1997 and, by the time we took over, it was running three years late and the costs had almost doubled. Yes, it was a mess. Yes, it had to be looked at.

I have another example, and this time the Conservative Government deserve some credit. The jobseeker's allowance was supposed to be introduced in April 1996. The Government of the day were advised by consultants that introduction would not be possible then because of all sorts of difficulties. To their credit, they decided to let it slip for about six months and then it was implemented satisfactorily.

We know that there are problems with large IT systems. As I have described, our problem at the moment is that the vital testing necessary to be sure that the new computer system to back the CSA changes works has not yet been completed. I have taken the view that until that testing is complete I am not prepared to authorise its commissioning. I take full responsibility and I think that I am right to come to the House to explain the position. Members can hold me to account for the decision that I have taken. I am sorry that, out of sheer opportunism, the hon. Gentleman has taken a completely different position.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): May I offer the strongest support for the Secretary of States's attitude? Is he aware that the staff of the Child Support Agency have some of the most difficult and certainly the most harassing jobs in the civil service? Anything that adds to this harassment—and, often, ill temper and bitterness—would be a disaster. He has taken absolutely the right attitude of caution. It would be much better to wait until these teething problems are sorted out. Given the expertise that is now concentrated in the system, is there any chance of it being available to other countries that might regard it as an export proposition? Britain is a leading figure in this field.

Mr. Darling: I am very grateful for my hon. Friend's comments. Given the present position, I would be hesitant about going into the export market just yet. Perhaps one day the system will be resold in different parts of the world. Of course, it is owned by EDS, which supplies it.

In response to my hon. Friend, it is worth bearing in mind the fact that the Child Support Agency has to deal with 400,000 new applications every year, which works out at about 1,000 new applications every day. Therefore, had there been any problems with the IT system—I believe that there is sufficient risk that there might have been—it would not be long before thousands of cases built up in a backlog. That is why I am taking a cautious approach, and I make no apology for that whatever. However, I am glad that my hon. Friend the Father of the House appreciates that Ministers should come to the House to explain these positions so that we can be held to account for our decisions.

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon): I entirely agree with the Secretary of State; he is absolutely right not to introduce the system if it is not ready. However, that sidesteps the issue of who is responsible for its not being ready. Does he recall that two years ago I warned his Department in oral questions in the House that if it did not get a grip on this process and monitor it tightly this is just the sort of thing that would happen? He has already failed to mention in his statement the six-month slippage from October to

the coming April, and he still cannot say when the system will be introduced. He said that it is near completion. If so, why cannot he say whether it is months or years away?

The key point is that this is not the first computer botch in the Secretary of State's Department. He mentioned NIRS2, and I understand that the pension credit system is not all it might be. The CSA computer system is now behind schedule. Does someone in his Department monitor these projects or does he take responsibility? If not, weeks before a project is due to be up and running, someone comes along to say, "We've only been testing a few weeks. Sorry, guv'nor, it doesn't work." Is it not time that he took responsibility for projects in his Department and made sure that they were ready on time? Instead, he comes to us just a few weeks before the project is due to be ready, wrings his hands and says, "We'll let you know but we can't tell you when."

Mr. Darling: In answer to the hon. Gentleman's final point, I have said on many occasions that I take full responsibility for everything that happens in my Department. That is my job as Secretary of State. It is my responsibility to make sure that we deliver an effective working system.

It might help the hon. Gentleman and other hon. Members to know that I and my officials became concerned at the turn of the year that the testing was not proceeding as fast as we thought it should. We approached EDS, which is supplying the equipment, and it increased the resources devoted to testing the system. I was anxious to introduce the system, if at all possible, in the second part of April as originally planned. I thought that it was worth testing the system and making sure that it was completely installed to deliver. However, I came to the view towards the end of last week that, on the information I had, it would be irresponsible to authorise the commissioning of the system. Therefore, the Department is aware of the slippage that has taken place on testing, and we have taken that up with EDS.

As the hon. Gentleman should know—perhaps he does not—we intend to run the pension credit system on the Department's existing computer systems for the first two years, because we think it better to do that than to build a system.

On the hon. Gentleman's first point, he asserted that he had warned us about this problem two years ago, but his policy then was to transfer the CSA back to the courts at a cost of about £1 billion. However, I will give him credit. I read in *The Guardian* today—this may come as a surprise to some of his Liberal colleagues—that his policy has changed and that he now wants to transfer everything to the Inland Revenue. I would have thought that anyone in the Inland Revenue would think long and hard about saying, "Yes, let's have the CSA imposed on top of the tax system." I say this in the nicest possible way to the professor, but he should think beyond the next press release before he begins making policy on this issue.

Mr. Terry Rooney (Bradford, North): Many of us went through the turbulent years from 1993 onwards when we faced five years of chaos, two-year delays in assessments and thousands of children not receiving the payments to which they were entitled. The Conservatives had to set up a special MPs' hotline with 50 staff to deal just with the complaints coming from the House. May I congratulate my right hon. Friend on an intelligent and sensitive decision that means that the 2.5 million children and the 2 million parents who are in the CSA system will have a decent system and not a cock-up like we had in the past?

Mr. Darling: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. It is worth bearing it in mind that, when the new system is introduced, it will benefit many people. The formula for calculating the maintenance due will be far simpler. Rather than the hundreds of pieces of information now required to make a calculation, only three or four will be needed. That means that we can get the maintenance paid within a matter of days. At the moment, nearly a third of new applications take more than six months to process. The new system will make a big difference and it is also fairer to people who have second families, a point that many hon. Members have pressed for some time. I am disappointed that we are not able to introduce the system at the end of April as I had intended, but the risks are such that it is better to take time to ensure that we complete the testing satisfactorily before we introduce the new system.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): It is commendable that the Secretary of State saw fit to make this statement to the House. I concur with the view that, faced with the options before him, he had no alternative. If he had done anything else, he would clearly have been in breach of an undertaking that the Under-Secretary in the other place gave to a Select Committee that the new system would not be introduced until the IT was robust. To that extent, I agree with the Secretary of State's decision.

I wish to press the Secretary of State on the testing that is necessary. Is he facing hardware, software or systems problems? It seems to me that it will take weeks to get the problems ironed out and, if he is to be fair to everyone, he will have to give at least three months' notice of a new date for implementation. My working assumption is that it will be at least six months from April before the new system is introduced: Surely the sooner we can end the period of uncertainty, the better for all concerned.

Mr. Darling: I agree with the hon. Gentleman's final point about the importance of completing the testing and fixing a date for implementation. It is important to remember that new cases will be dealt with first. That was always our intention. We will deal with existing cases after that. It is important to get the system right and then fix a date rather than do things the other way around.

I appreciate what the hon. Gentleman said in the first part of his remarks. On his second point, I point out that several features need to be tested. There are problems inherent in any attempt to rebuild a Department's IT systems, and I have told the House on many occasions that that is what we are having to do because of years of lack of investment. The new system will have to operate alongside the Department's existing systems and the technology built in 2001-02 is different from the technology that was designed in the 1970s. The current CSA computer was built in the 1970s. It is an off-the-shelf model that was bought from someone in Florida; it has never been entirely satisfactory.

Miss Anne Begg (Aberdeen, South): I have been struggling with British Airways' new booking system in

[Miss Anne Begg]

which a nice voice says, "Thank you for your patience, but we have a new system that will speed up your booking." However, four weeks later, booking takes longer than it did before. I therefore appreciate why my right hon. Friend could not proceed with the introduction of the CSA system until it was up and running. There is nothing worse than a system that is not fail-safe and that has not been fully tested.

However, some of my constituents who expected to be on the new system by 1 April may be dismayed to discover that their contributions will be calculated under the old system. Can the Secretary of State assure us that—once we begin processing existing claimants—those who will perhaps miss out between 1 April and whenever the new system is fully up and running will be the first to go on to it, provided that it works as intended?

Mr. Darling: Like a number of Members, I am familiar with the notice that greets passengers at the British Airways check-in desk, explaining the wonders of its new computer system. That system is not quite fixed, and I have some sympathy with British Airways in that regard at least.

On my hon. Friend's substantive point, as I said in my statement, once I am satisfied that the system is working, I intend to inform the House as to how we will take on new cases. The key to success, however, is to try to keep the system as simple as possible. Indeed, it was the complexity of the existing system that crippled it. I intend that we will bring on new cases once the system starts up, and when they are settled in we will bring on the existing ones. It would not be wise to undertake a backdating exercise, because that would inevitably lead to the stockpiling of cases and a lot of confusion. It would be better to proceed according to the original plans that many people signed up to, and I know that my hon. Friend participated in the Select Committee that considered the issue on several occasions.

The more complex we make the system, the worse it becomes. The hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) said yesterday that he wanted a simple system but with more complications. I strongly urge my hon. Friend to give that proposal a very wide berth, and I am sure that she will.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I welcome the statement because it is important that we be kept informed. The Secretary of State said that there might be some increase in costs, but that the bill for the system will not be paid until it is delivered. Is the change to the new system attributable to a particular attitude of mind in the Department, to a particular view on how information should be delivered, or was there a problem with suppliers who did not measure up to demands?

I welcome the fact that the Secretary of State will confirm in a further statement how new and existing cases will be brought on. I have already been approached by people who are on the list and waiting for back-payments. They have been told that they will not be dealt with until the new system is up and running. Surely that is wrong, given that the relevant details are known. I would imagine that they could be fed into the computer system fairly quickly. Why should payments to people who have already wasted a lot of time, and spent a lot of money looking after their children, be held back?

Mr. Darling: On the last point, the new system is not yet operational. It has not been fully tested, so it would not be safe to feed information into it. The hon. Gentleman is right: the Department has written to people—as it was duty bound to do—telling them about the plan to introduce the new system at the end of April. We will write to them again, as it is clear that we cannot in fact bring them on to the new system at the end of April. As I have said, the situation is deeply regrettable and I am very sorry for those people who will suffer some degree of inconvenience. However, it would have been far worse to plough on in a manner that presented unjustifiable risks.

On the information technology system itself, as I said in my statement, the contract is so structured that we will not pay for it until we accept it as operational. That may seem obvious, but not all contracts have been structured in that way. I made it clear that, given the history of IT projects—to which the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) referred—we should not pay for the computer system until it works. The difficulty is that testing has yet to be completed. It is clearly in our interests—and in the interests of EDS, which will not get paid until the system works as I described—that testing be completed as quickly as possible. As soon as I am satisfied that we can proceed, I undertake to return to the House—despite opposition from the Conservative Front Bench—and explain the position. I have to say that this is the first time in 15 years as a Member of this House that I have encountered an Opposition who do not want to hold Ministers to account.

Mr. Chris Pond (Gravesham): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the impact of the delay is to some extent mitigated by the additional resources provided and the administrative changes implemented by the Government for the existing system? Can he assure us that CSA staff will be encouraged to continue to improve that service, even under the existing system? Does he agree that because that system was introduced in haste by the previous Government, it has left hundreds of thousands of families to repent in anguish and that the main victims of that have been the children? Will he strengthen his resolve not to introduce the new system, which I think is much better, in haste, as he has been encouraged to do by the cynicism and sneering from the Opposition?

Mr. Darling: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the fact that the CSA has been significantly reformed in the past three years. That was necessary for the new system, but was desirable anyway. The chief executive, Doug Smith, has made huge changes in management and in structures. It is a tribute to the staff—as my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) mentioned earlier—that so much hard work has been put into making substantial changes, including more face-to-face interviews and more time being taken to explain how calculations are made. As a result, compliance rates have increased. Most of our staff wanted to get ahead with the new system, but my hon. Friend is right to say that the worst thing to do would have been to press ahead with the system, especially when the information I had

suggested that Members of Parliament would have had cause for complaint had I done so. As I said to the hon. Member for Northavon, I accept full responsibility for the matter and the decision was right.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): Does the Secretary of State realise that his claim of accepting responsibility for the matter might ring more true if he had spent more time talking about what is happening in 2002 and his efforts to introduce the new system, rather than spending most of his statement talking about the events of 1993? Given that he has deferred the introduction of the new system, I put it to him that—as a member of a Government for whom management by targets is the order of the day—he should set a new target, even if it is not a definite commitment, to bring the new system into operation on a given date, so that he can be held to account as the responsible Minister for his performance against that target. The Secretary of State has twice been asked to set a further target date for implementation of the new system and has signally failed to do so. Why will he not give a target date?

Mr. Darling: The hon. Gentleman will remember from his previous job as an adviser to the previous Government that Governments get into awful difficulties if they fix targets, sometimes plucked out of the air, and may have cause to regret doing so afterwards. It is important to ensure that the testing process is completed. Once that is done, I intend to fix a date for starting on new cases. As I have said, I will come to the House to spell out how we propose to take on those new cases. I am very sorry if my mentioning 1993 brings back bad memories for the hon. Gentleman, although I fully understand why that might be the case.

Mrs. Joan Humble (Blackpool, North and Fleetwood): May I applaud my right hon. Friend for his determination to ensure that the new system for the CSA will succeed? We all agree with that aim. May I also reinforce the concerns of existing clients about the announcement that the introduction will be deferred? Many of my constituents who are absent parents are suffering real financial hardship. They come to see me regularly and look forward to the implementation of the new system, but are already concerned that they have no clear idea of when they will be brought on to it. When my right hon. Friend returns to the House with a timetable for implementation, as soon as he is reassured about the efficacy of the new computers, will he consider especially the needs of existing clients, many of whom are in serious difficulties?

Mr. Darling: I have a great deal of sympathy with what my hon. Friend has said. I am aware that it is felt that the present system does not take sufficient account of the circumstances of many people, especially those who now have second families. Obviously it is too soon for me to say at this stage what the precise impact will be on existing cases in terms of the time taken.

I simply repeat the following point, which I think my hon. Friend accepts. In 1993, there was cross-party support for the CSA and my recollection is that the then Opposition agreed with the then Government on introducing the thing quickly, but that proved utterly disastrous. As I have told the House on several occasions, the situation is regrettable, but it is better that we spend time getting the arrangements right, because in the long term that is the better way of helping both new and existing cases.

We should remember that the agency now deals with about 1.4 million children—we project that in four years' time it will be 1.7 million. It is very sad that that is the case, but it gives the House an idea of the number of individuals involved. We should remember that we are talking about individuals about whose well-being we need to be concerned.

Rob Marris (Wolverhampton, South-West): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on having the courage to make the announcement and to withdraw the system before it came in at half-cock and did not work. I also congratulate him on making his statement to the House first, rather than to the press, as has sometimes been done. I agree with my right hon. Friend that it would be wrong to implement a new system for the CSA until the IT is sorted out. After all, the Government are addressing years of underinvestment in his Department.

However, can my right hon. Friend assure the House that there are no other untoward delays in IT implementation elsewhere in his Department, whether in benefits or in pensions, or particularly in the Employment Service, where I believe that EDS is the lead contractor, as it is with the CSA?

Mr. Darling: In the Employment Service, as I believe my hon. Friend knows because he is a member of the departmental Select Committee, the jobpoints, which are now all successfully in place, are one example of quite a big IT project. That project was started under the Conservative Government—I say that to show that I, at least, am bipartisan—and has now been delivered successfully. There are other examples.

The Department for Work and Pensions has some of the biggest computer systems in the western world. The systems deal with 7 billion transactions every year. It is inevitable, therefore, that anything that the Department does will take time. It takes an awful lot of investment. But one thing on which I strongly agree with my hon. Friend is the need for that investment—every penny of which, to conclude on a very partisan note, has been opposed by the Conservative party.

Organ Donation (Presumed Consent and Safeguards)

4.43 pm

Mr. Tom Watson (West Bromwich, East): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to provide for the removal of organs for transplantation purposes, after death has been confirmed in a person aged 16 or over, except where a potential donor previously registered an objection or where a close relative objects; and for connected purposes.

By the end of this week, five people will have died unnecessarily on the waiting list for an organ transplant, and more than 200 lives will be needlessly lost this year because of a shortage of organ donors. The gap between the number of organs available and the number of people needing a transplant is widening. Since the House last debated presumed consent at the instigation of my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Dr. Palmer) in April 2000, the waiting list for organ transplants has risen by several hundred. Seven thousand people are now on the transplant waiting list and the queue is growing by the day. The sad truth is that one in 10 of those people waiting for a heart or lung transplant and 7 per cent. of those people waiting for a liver transplant will die, and many others will have lost their life before they even get on the waiting list.

I should like to quote from a letter from a Mr. Michael Newbold, who says that his wife

"was in hospital with what was later diagnosed as a serious, rare and incurable heart condition . . . after more than 100 hospital admissions she was told her only hope of continued life was to have a heart transplant. She has now been on the list for 15 months, and no suitable organ has yet become available.

We know that fitness and good health is no guarantee that we will not eventually need a replacement for at least one of our organs. It could happen to any of us.

Of course, we are aware and saddened that transplant can only normally come as the result of the death of a fellow human being, but surely it is a good thing if another person benefits from that tragedy?"

That is just one of thousands of cases, which demonstrates the urgent need for something to be done about the desperate need for more organ donors. The Bill would introduce an opt-out, rather than an opt-in, system, so that everyone would be a potential donor unless they registered their objections otherwise. A central computerised register of objectors would be established and would have to be consulted by doctors before transplant could go ahead. The system would have several additional safeguards. The deceased's close relatives would still be consulted in every single case and would have the ultimate veto over donation. The change would not apply to children under the age of 16, where explicit consent would still be sought in all cases.

In 1971, when even opting in was seen as controversial by some, contracting and opting out was raised in the House by the Father of the House, my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell). Thirty years on from his ten-minute Bill, the major medical advances in transplantation have made the Human Tissue Act 1961 even more outdated. The attempt that the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) made last year to amend the Act through his Transplantation of Human Organs Bill is to be applauded.

We all have constituents whose lives have been touched by transplants. They are the miracle of modern medicine because, in death, they can bring the gift of life to others. Once considered to be perilous operations, they are now routine. Indeed, King's College hospital will have performed more than 2,000 liver transplants by the end of this month.

Public opinion has moved on, but although studies have repeatedly shown that up to three-quarters of the population would be willing to donate their organs after death, only 15 per cent. have signed up to the NHS organ donor register. In fact, with one of the lowest organ donor rates, we lag behind Europe. More than a dozen countries on the continent use some form of opt-out system and have far higher donation rates than in this country.

The system used in Belgium—rather than, for instance, that used in France—provides a good model for the United Kingdom. Belgium established a register of non-donors in 1987. Citizens can express their objection to organ or tissue donation at the town hall. By the end of 1995, nearly 2 per cent. of the native Belgian population had registered their objections to donation. It is mandatory that the register be checked before any organs are removed, and in practice relatives are still consulted. Countries that have a system of presumed consent also tend to have higher donation rates than those without.

As the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) pointed out to the House in July 1998, there is well-documented and convincing evidence that when Belgium changed from contracting in to contracting out there was an increase in organ supply. In Antwerp, they kept the opt-in system, but had a big public education campaign. In Leuven, however, they adopted the new law. Over a three-year period the rate of donation in Antwerp stayed the same, whereas in Leuven it rose from 15 to 40 donors per year.

My hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health has set the challenging target of doubling the number of individuals on the organ donor register to 16 million by 2010. That is a laudable aim, and I welcome any proposals to increase donation and bring life to others. In my region, *The Birmingham Post* has run a successful campaign, regularly printing donor cards and promoting the organ donor register to its readers in the west midlands. Ultimately, however, if we are significantly to increase the rate of organ donation we also need a change in the law and a positive change of emphasis towards organ donation, which this Bill on presumed consent would achieve.

Medical experts have suggested that a system of presumed consent would increase the rate of organ donation by at least 20 per cent. in this country, thus going a long way towards tackling the problems I outlined at the beginning.

I am grateful for the support of so many Members on both sides of the House—not least for their backing for early-day motion 527. I am also pleased that 40 Members have joined the NHS organ donor register in the last few weeks. We, as Members of Parliament, should be leading the way and encouraging as many of our constituents as possible to sign the register.

The Bill is also backed by the British Medical Association, many individual doctors, surgeons and patients' groups, and many of my constituents. While

opinion in the country is mixed, a clear majority now favour "soft" presumed consent, and they look to the House to lead rather than follow.

It is time for a public debate on presumed consent. It is time to prevent any further widening of the gap between the number of organs available and the number needed for transplant. It is time to drag our organ donor laws into the 21st century. This Bill is about saving lives, and with the support of the House we can begin to address the chronic shortage of organs for transplant.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Tom Watson, Mr. Tam Dalyell, Mr. Kenneth Clarke, Mr. Parmjit Dhanda, Dr. Evan Harris, Dr. Ian Gibson, Dr. Nick Palmer, Mr. Peter Pike, Mr. Nicholas Soames, Mark Tami, Dr. Richard Taylor and Dr. Jenny Tonge.

ORGAN DONATION (PRESUMED CONSENT AND SAFEGUARDS)

Mr. Tom Watson accordingly presented a Bill to provide for the removal of organs for transplantation purposes, after death has been confirmed in a person aged 16 or over, except where a potential donor previously registered an objection or where a close relative objects; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 19 April, and to be printed [Bill 114].

Afghanistan

4.52 pm

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): I beg to move, That this House do now adjourn.

Leave having been given on Tuesday 19 March under Standing Order No. 24.

Our calling of this debate on the war in Afghanistan should not be allowed to cast any doubt on our continuing support for the Government in the war against terrorism. We applauded the Prime Minister's instant and unequivocal support for the United States after 11 September. More recently, his very clear statements about the need to deal with Iraq demonstrate that he remains shoulder to shoulder with the United States. The Prime Minister will continue to have our support while he continues to do the right thing.

In the statement by the Secretary of State for Defence on Monday, the Government announced a very significant escalation of our commitment to combat operations in Afghanistan. Let there be no doubt that we support the principle of that decision; but it was wrong for the Government to make such an announcement without anticipating the need for a proper debate on the subject. I asked the Government for a debate and they could have avoided the need for me to invoke Standing Order No. 24, but Ministers ignored our polite requests.

Yesterday was an important day for Parliament. Mr. Speaker made it clear that that situation was unacceptable to the House of Commons, and his decision to accept our request for a debate clearly had support in all parts of the House. Please will you, Madam Deputy Speaker, pass those remarks and our thanks to him?

Mr. Mark Hendrick (Preston): May I ask whether the hon. Gentleman's judgment could be called into question? There was an Opposition-day debate yesterday, which was used to discuss the Chinook helicopter crash. This matter could have been raised yesterday, instead of using this procedure to raise it here today.

Mr. Jenkin: First, I do not think that this is going to be an occasion to make party political comments. *[Interruption.]* I say to the Secretary of State for Defence that I was making a point on behalf of the House of Commons, not my party. Secondly, I think that the hon. Member for Preston (Mr. Hendrick) will find that quite a number of his right hon. and hon. Friends are grateful that this debate is taking place.

45 Commando are trained in high-altitude mountain warfare, and it is in mountain warfare that they are now to engage. They are trained for close-quarters combat, for flexible, autonomous and lightly armed operations beyond the front line, with the minimum of logistical support. The United States made the request because, undoubtedly, they are some of the finest troops that anyone will find on this earth. They are ideally fitted to the task, which is to defeat our enemies—those who threaten our people in our country and the peoples of our friends and allies. That is why we have our armed forces: to protect our people.

The men of 45 Commando Royal Marines understand the dangers, but they will relish the challenges ahead, provided they have a clear mission, under a clear chain of communication and command, access to tactical lift and close air support when required, and the best equipment.

[Mr. Jenkin]

The House is entitled to ask Ministers about the reasons for their decision and for assurances. In the spirit of genuine inquiry, I invite the Secretary of State to use this occasion to build confidence in this deployment and in the Government's decision.

First, can the Secretary of State tell the House exactly *when the Government first received indication of the* request? I believe that it may have some bearing on the short notice of his statement.

Secondly, on the mission, the objective must be to assist United States armed forces to search out and defeat the remaining elements of largely non-Afghan al-Qaeda terrorists. Once that job is done, 45 Commando should come home. Can we be sure that that is indeed their mission? Can the Secretary of State clarify exactly who is still resisting in the mountains of Shah-i-Kot? Do we have enough intelligence to assess their number, their capabilities and their determination, and to develop a clear understanding of how they operate? What lessons have we learned from Tora Bora and, Operation Anaconda? How will we improve the effectiveness of co-operation with indigenous Afghan forces, and what measures will be taken to prevent al-Qaeda from simply running away, as they have in the past?

The CIA informed the Senate armed services committee yesterday that coalition forces will face increased danger of attack from small pockets of al-Qaeda and Taliban fighters, who remain hidden in the mountains in what was described as "classic insurgency format". They will use very small groups of fighters to attack and perhaps to pin down much larger coalition formations. Can the Secretary of State explain how we will avoid being bogged down in such fighting, so that we can press ahead to the main objective and a swift conclusion?

I would be grateful if the Secretary of State explained what he meant when he said on BBC Radio 4 yesterday:

"It is an open-ended commitment to the extent that we have a job to do to deal with the remaining elements of al-Qaeda and Taliban."

He cannot seriously be saying, and I do not for a moment think that he is, that he has no idea how long the operation will take. However, the House should be aware that the Canadians are already extending their six-month commitment to these operations.

There is also the question of force rotation. How long is it intended that 45 Commando remain in combat before being relieved? With each commando of 3 Commando Brigade being short of one company—that is, short of 100 men each out of some 900—that will create manning challenges across the whole corps. Can the Secretary of State say something about how that will be addressed?

Thirdly, the chain of command should be clear. I understand that 45 Commando and 3 Commando brigade headquarters, which will be set up at Bagram airport, will be fully integrated into the US operational command of Operation Enduring Freedom. That is under the field command of the US General, Major-General Hagenbeck, who commands the US 10th Mountain Division. Why have we been asked to provide a brigade headquarters at all, as it is unnecessary for the deployment of this one battle group? Are we keeping an option open to deploy further British troops to expand the UK commitment to Enduring Freedom, or will Brigadier Lane take command of some of the US elements already in the field?

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): On that point, if a brigade headquarters is effectively sitting on top of commando headquarters, it will be a top-heavy structure that will get in the way of the operational deployment of the commando itself.

Mr. Jenkin: I hear my hon. Friend's concern and hope that the Secretary of State will deal with that point.

My understanding is that the United States would not have made its request unless it was confident that we already shared a joint concept of operations and that Brigadier Lane already had a relationship and operational understanding with those with whom he will be working. The Royal Marines should be more than happy to work alongside 10th Mountain Division's second battalion or US 101st Airborne Division. Standard NATO operating procedures will underpin their effective co-operation.

Will the Secretary of State tell the House how many troops of all nationalities this formation will put in the front line of operations? The UK will have some 900 troops, plus some unspecified minor elements in the front line. The United States has only 2,000 troops in this theatre, as against our 1,700. How many US troops will be held forward for front-line operations? Might the British force comprise as much as 30, 40 or even 50 per cent. of the front-line fighting capability?

Fourthly, Lord Inge, former Chief of the Defence Staff, raised an important issue in the other place on Monday—the lack of British dedicated air power, known as close air support. The Americans already have carrier-based F-14s and F-18s and land-based F-15s and A-10 ground attack aircraft alongside the Apache attack helicopters and heavy bombers based in Diego Garcia. Have we considered offering to deploy our own dedicated close air support? The Italians are flying off a carrier in theatre and the French have deployed Mirage 2000D jets based in Kyrgyzstan and Super Etandards from the carrier Charles de Gaulle in the Indian ocean.

Sadly, too many British ground-attack Jaguars are either committed to other operations or laid up waiting for new engines, other spares or pilots. If we have nothing else to deploy, has the Secretary of State been given the necessary assurances by the United States about the availability of close air support for British forces as and when required?

Will our Royal Marines on the ground be able to communicate directly with US aircraft, which is vital for quick response and to minimise the risk of friendly-fire self-inflicted casualties? Frankly, only dedicated air support to a particular operation will do.

That leads to the wider question of communications. What systems will 45 Commando be using? Will they be secure, and will they be fully interoperable at all tactical levels with the Americans and any other nation's forces in theatre?

I am sure that the House can have every confidence that a suitable welfare package will be in place for communication with families back home and that they will have the best medical support available. If we are to rely on US field hospital support, will British medical personnel be available to deal with casualties?

I shall now move on to the other British military operation in Afghanistan that is part of the war against terrorism—the international security assistance force, or ISAF, under UK command in Kabul. That, too, was originally intended to be a swift and decisive deployment, but has proved more protracted than the Government originally anticipated. There needs to be a clear understanding that ISAF is completely separate from combat operations elsewhere. We are concerned about mission creep, the open-ended commitment to our leadership of ISAF and the size of our contribution to it.

The Conservative party is not always content with the way in which the Government choose to use British armed forces. We do not always agree with the way that our limited and over-extended armed forces are spread across the globe on so many lower-level peacekeeping tasks that are more suited to a gendarmerie than a fighting army. I recall the words of a soldier of 2 Para, who was reported in the press as saying that Kabul is great experience but "not what we are trained for".

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): Will the hon. Gentleman give one example of a mission from which we should withdraw?

Mr. Jenkin: If I may say so, that is a tiresome and cheap point. I do not begin to assume that it is easy to withdraw from such operations. It might be fairer to ask which original deployments we would not have made. *[Interruption.]* No, that is right. We have made our views on that clear. I draw the right hon. Gentleman's attention to the fact that short deployments are justified from time to time, but all too often under him, and his predecessor, those have become open-ended commitments, putting further pressure on our already stretched armed forces. We should not devalue the gold standard of our armed forces in this way.

Mr. Malcolm Savidge (Aberdeen, North) *rose—*

Mr. Jenkin: I will press on because many people want to speak.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): May I ask a tiresome question? Does the Conservative party have any qualms about supporting what is both a military action and a peacekeeping role? Can one do the same thing in the same country at the same time?

Mr. Jenkin: That is a question that I have raised from the Dispatch Box before and I note that it has also been raised by the leader of one of the minority parties. I do not believe that the Government have ever given a satisfactory answer. [HON. MEMBERS: "You answer the question."] Well, the answer is that if everything goes well and there are no unforeseen eventualities, there might not be any difficulties. However, as soon as something unexpected occurs, such difficulties might be created. It is unsound military doctrine to have two completely separate types of operation in the same theatre under split chains of command with split objectives. It invites another uncertainty into the picture, and we remain concerned about that.

What exactly is the goal that we are trying to achieve in Kabul, and when do we think that it will be achieved? How did we ever believe that it could be achieved under a United Nations mandate of just six months? Why did the Government give such fulsome assurances that we would get away with only three months' commitment from our troops? What has been the outcome of discussions about the future leadership of ISAF? The Government led us to believe that Turkey had made a firm offer to take over. The Secretary of State said:

"We have received an offer from Turkey, which would be willing to take over at the end of the three-month period".—[*Official Report*, 14 January 2002; Vol. 378, c. 5.]

On Monday, we expected that to be confirmed by the Turkish Prime Minister. An announcement has yet to be made.

I also asked on Monday about the financial contribution that Britain is being asked to make to support Turkey's leadership. I understand that Turkey is now demanding $300 million for a six-month operation, which is likely to be funded by the United States and the United Kingdom alone. The Turkish Defence Minister is in London today. Will the Secretary of State give us an update on the situation? What provision has been made, if any, for the eventuality that Turkey declines to take over ISAF? I dare say that the Turkish commanders are asking the same questions about the long-term prospects of ISAF.

I regret to inform the House that many of the fears that we expressed when the Government announced ISAF are becoming a reality. It looks as though our troop commitment will become longer; it will be impossible substantially to reduce the numbers that we have committed and no other nation is willing or able yet to make a commitment to take over ISAF's leadership. Now Mr. Brahimi of the United Nations has called for an extension of ISAF's mandate, which can only compound the difficulties facing the Government. Of course, there remains the underlying issue of two operations taking place in the same theatre, which the Father of the House raised a moment ago.

I want to keep my remarks as short as possible. This debate was vital for the House of Commons to be able to do its job of scrutinising the Government's decision, but it is also an opportunity for hon. Members on both sides of the House to send a message of support to all those in the British armed forces who have been called upon to fight for our security, our values and our beliefs. I regret that the Foreign Secretary—or indeed the Prime Minister—is not in his place, but I am sure that the House will join me in wishing our forces in the field the very best of luck and every success in the weeks and months ahead.

5.11 pm

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): The House already knows a great deal about the deployment of British troops to Afghanistan—I went through much of the detail during my statement on Monday. I do not intend to repeat that detail, but I am delighted to be able to take this opportunity to answer the various questions that have been asked and to clear up a number of misconceptions.

Let me begin by making three points to set the context for the rest of what I will say. It is essential that, in discussing the detail of the deployments, we do not lose sight of the bigger picture. First, we are right to act in Afghanistan. The terrorist attacks in the United States last September were only possible because Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda had been able to draw on the support and

[Mr. Geoffrey Hoon]

shelter offered by the Taliban regime. If we had not responded, there was no doubt that bin Laden and his accomplices would have carried out further attacks—perhaps, by now, even in the United Kingdom.

We were right, therefore, to act in self defence under article 51 of the UN charter. We were right to act to prevent Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda from posing a continuing terrorist threat, and we were right to act to break the links between Afghanistan and international terrorism and to try to reintegrate Afghanistan as a responsible member of the international community to ensure that those links could never be established again.

Secondly, the action that the international community has taken has been remarkably successful. As I said on Monday, Afghanistan is now a very different country. The decision to deploy considerable military force against the terrorists and their supporters has been vindicated. Osama bin Laden and his al-Qaeda network have been dealt a heavy blow. The Taliban regime, whose support was so important for al-Qaeda, is no more. The decision to deploy the international security assistance force to Kabul to help the Afghan Interim Authority to maintain security in the capital has also been vindicated.

Afghanistan is beginning to return to something like normality. Given its recent history, perhaps that is hard to believe, but I saw that change for myself when I visited Kabul some weeks ago. There were market stalls full of food, people out on the street and normal life was slowly returning.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Notwithstanding what the Secretary of State has just said, surely the seriousness of the deployment shows that the conflict in Afghanistan is very far from over, despite what the Prime Minister said a number of weeks ago. Does that not underline the danger of the foolish talk of extending spheres of conflict to other countries before the situation in Afghanistan is fully stabilised? Is it correct, as press reports suggest, that the German and Russian Governments believe that any offensive military action on Iraq would require a new and specific UN Security Council resolution? What is the Government's attitude to that position?

Mr. Hoon: I had the privilege of meeting the Russian Foreign Minister this morning and the subject of Iraq was not raised or discussed. The hon. Gentleman and journalists seem to be raising the prospect of military action, although the Government have, in fact, repeatedly said that the question of Iraq has not even been decided and, certainly, that the prospect of any military action has not been resolved.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. I remind all hon. Members that this Adjournment debate is about Afghanistan, not Iraq.

Mr. Hoon *rose—*

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hoon: I will give way on the subject of Afghanistan.

Mr. Hogg: As one who supports the deployment of British troops to Afghanistan, but one who also wants to reinforce parliamentary authority, may I say to the right hon. Gentleman that it would be right for the Government to come to the House and ask for an express vote authorising that deployment? Will he be so good as to say why he is not seeking the express authority of the House?

Mr. Hoon: The right hon. and learned Gentleman has much longer experience of this House than I. He has supported Governments who have deployed forces and has never raised that question previously. He has sought to do so only when a Labour Government have taken responsibility for such decisions. He therefore needs to ask himself why he makes that point today when he never made it to a Government whom he supported over a long period. With his experience of the House, he knows that there is no automatic need for a vote. Why, then, should we take seriously such a question today?

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): What forces does the Secretary of State have available to reinforce those whom he is rightly deploying in Afghanistan? What forces does he have available to reinforce those in other theatres while we are deploying in Afghanistan? I repeat that I fully support the moves that he and his Government are making at the moment.

Mr. Hoon: I am grateful to the hon. and learned Gentleman for his question. I assure him and, indeed, the House that we have a sufficient number of forces to take on any military actions that might be necessary in the short term, notwithstanding the deployment of 45 Commando—not least because it has been held in readiness for precisely this kind of operation for some time.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex): I also entirely support this deployment, but will the right hon. Gentleman clarify the answer that he gave to my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier)? Given the specific and inevitably dangerous and time-limited nature of the deployment, what forces has he further stood up to replace the 45 Commando battle group in the event of the commitment being required to continue?

Mr. Hoon: As the hon. Gentleman knows from his experience in the Ministry of Defence, there is a process whereby forces who are deployed are replaced. That is part of the normal process of plotting the commitment of Britain's armed forces over a long period. He also knows—he might need to assist some of his Front Benchers on this question—that the issue is the nature of any further operations that arise. As he well knows, if there were an immediate threat to the territory of the United Kingdom, for example, then a great number of deployments would have to be effected and a great number of forces returned to the UK to deal with that threat. I assume that he is not talking about that kind of operation. Therefore, the normal arrangements for the rotation of our forces would proceed as planned.

Mr. Savidge: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Hoon: If my hon. Friend will forgive me, I need to make a little more progress.

Another context in which I make my remarks is that of British forces playing a vital role in the success of the situation in Afghanistan. I shall not run through in detail once again the contribution that British forces have made, but it has been very considerable. British forces have a reputation right around the world for their skill and professionalism. Time and again, they have made a massive contribution to bringing stability to the world's trouble spots. Afghanistan is the latest example of that. We take immense pride in all that our forces do and in the credit that they bring to the United Kingdom. Let me take this opportunity to note our appreciation for the widespread support in the House for the work that British forces have done in Afghanistan and for the work that they will continue to do. That support means a great deal to our forces and in particular to their families.

Mr. Savidge: Specifically on the subject of this deployment, does my right hon. Friend recognise that, although many of us would support it, we should still feel, for many reasons such as overstretch or the risk of distracting ourselves from the main campaign against terror relating to the events of 11 September, even more wary of getting involved in war in Iraq?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I have already said that this Adjournment debate is about Afghanistan.

Mr. Hoon: I turn now to the more detailed issues and questions that have been raised. I shall deal first with the international security assistance force. As the House is aware, the United Kingdom agreed to take on the leadership of this force from its inception for a limited period. We took on this role for a number of reasons. It was a job that had to be done, and done well, if the Bonn agreement was to have the best possible chance of success.

The United Kingdom was particularly well placed to do that. Our armed forces had the right capabilities and experience in expeditionary operations and rapid deployments. We knew that we could provide effective command structures and enablers to get a force in and up and running in the time scale required. We were right to take on that responsibility.

The fact that we have been leading the security force is reflected in the number of British troops that have been deployed to Kabul—up to 1,800 personnel, along with another 300 or so to repair Kabul international airport. Of course, the actual size of our contribution fluctuates from day to day. The sort of capabilities that we need change over time, and we are also limited, to a certain extent, by the capacity of the local airstrips.

We made it clear that we would hand over our leadership of ISAF after three months. We always planned to transfer the responsibility by the end of April. As I said in the House in January, and again two days ago, Turkey has indicated an interest in taking over as lead nation of ISAF. We are in detailed discussions about that with Turkey. Good progress was made when a joint UK/US team of officials and military officers visited Ankara last week. We are making more progress in further military technical discussions with Turkey this week.

That such negotiations take time should surprise no one. What is at issue is the transfer of the leadership of a large and complicated multinational force that has a demanding task to fulfil. Of course, Turkey wants to get it right, to make sure that it has the right structures, and, where necessary, the right support, to ensure that ISAF is as successful up to June as it has been so far.

Turkey will need continuing contributions of troops from other nations. Certainly the United Kingdom will continue to have troops in ISAF after we have handed over the lead. We have promised Turkey that that will be the case. Other nations have done so as well. That does not change our determination to draw down the number of British troops deployed as part of ISAF at that point. As I have made clear on a number of occasions, we are looking to make a significant reduction in the number of British troops, but not to withdraw them completely.

Mr. Bill Wiggin (Leominster): On 19 December I asked the Prime Minister if he could tell us the maximum amount of time that our troops would remain in Afghanistan. In the course of his answer, he said:

"I know that there has been some speculation that we would be sending thousands upon thousands of troops—we are not—or that they would be there for a very long time—they will not be."—[*Official Report*, 19 December 2001; Vol. 377, c. 287.]

Has that changed?

Mr. Hoon: No, that has not changed. The position is precisely as the Prime Minister set out and as I have set out. We are seeking to engage in a process of rebuilding Afghanistan—ISAF is an important part of that process—while at the same time ensuring that Afghanistan is secure against any continuing threat from al-Qaeda or the Taliban, and that the wider international community is similarly secure.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley): Given the fact that when Russia had its troops in Afghanistan, it got a bloody nose and got bogged down, particularly in the mountains, what is the difference now between the two conflicts?

Mr. Hoon: That is one of the things that I did discuss this morning with the Russian Foreign Minister. *[Interruption.]* I am amazed that the Opposition find that remarkable. Surely it is vital that we should discuss the situation in Afghanistan. Opposition Members, having instigated the debate, should recognise that.

On my hon. Friend's question, the difference is the way in which the Soviet Union tried to deal with Afghanistan—largely by occupying ground, which obviously made it vulnerable to attack, whereas the whole purpose of the operation that we are discussing today is to ensure that in swift search-and-strike operations, we remove any threat, not specifically to our own forces, although that is part of it, but more generally to the stability of Afghanistan. That is a very different concept and approach.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): The Secretary of State says that we will not have thousands and thousands of troops in Afghanistan. Can he tell the House how many troops we have in Afghanistan?

Mr. Hoon: I shall certainly be able to do that in a second, as I go through the detail. It is more sensible that I should do so in the context of what I am saying to the House.

[Mr. Hoon]

As for the wider future of ISAF, the House will know that United Nations Security Council resolution 1386 permits the force to remain in Kabul for six months—that is, until 20 June. As I said on Monday, the resolution may well be renewed, extending the duration of its deployment within its existing area of responsibility. Certainly, it is clear that such a force will have a continuing role to play in bringing security to Kabul and its immediate surroundings.

Let me make it clear that speculation that ISAF will become a NATO force, a European Union force, or anything other than a "coalition of the willing" is just that—speculation.

Linda Gilroy (Plymouth, Sutton): My right hon. Friend referred earlier to the pride felt by the families of service men going out to Afghanistan. He will also know that those families are used to dealing with facts that are often difficult, and that their pride is mixed with anxiety. However, speculation about the future can cause particular difficulties, especially for families with young children. Will my right hon. Friend join me in urging Members of this House, and commentators, to be measured and restrained when raising issues, and considerate of the families involved?

Mr. Hoon: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who makes a good point. I entirely endorse what she says. One reason why so much trouble is taken to brief forces personnel and their families about the precise nature of operations is to avoid the sort of speculation that so often causes the worries that my hon. Friend quite properly describes.

Mr. David Laws (Yeovil): The Secretary of State will be aware that families will be very interested in the duration of the latest deployment. He will be aware that, after he made his statement on Monday, senior Ministry sources briefed newspapers that the latest deployment could be expected to last about three months. However, the right hon. Gentleman has said that the latest deployment represented an open-ended commitment. Will he tell the House which version is correct?

Mr. Hoon: Like the spokesman for the official Opposition, the hon. Gentleman is taking my comments out of context. When I was asked whether the deployment was open ended, I responded by saying that it was, but that the number of forces that would be deployed had to be limited by the length of time that any individual could be asked to spend in a very difficult situation such as obtained in Afghanistan.

The deployment will last as long as it takes to deal with the continuing threat. However, the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Laws), and the official Opposition, appear to want me to give a precise figure for the length of the deployment. That simply does not make sense. The deployment will be for as long as it takes to deal with the continuing threats. If it becomes necessary to replace the Royal Marines in-theatre, that decision will have to be taken according to circumstances on the ground. Anyone who considers the matter for any time will appreciate the common sense of that approach.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): I agree with the Secretary of State: the deployment must be open ended, as we have to win the battle. I fully support the deployment of 45 Commando to Afghanistan, and the wonderful work being done in Kabul, but will the right hon. Gentleman assure me and the House that our military will not be deprived of any of the resources or equipment necessary to undertake the task successfully?

Mr. Hoon: That is uppermost in my mind, and in the minds of the senior military personnel responsible for the deployment. As I shall explain in due course, we are sending the Royal Marines in part because of their considerable skill at operations of this nature. They are trained for precisely the circumstances that obtain in Afghanistan. I certainly endorse the comments of the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton), and I shall ensure that his recommendation is carried through.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): Will the Secretary of State give way on that point?

Mr. Hoon: I really do need to make a little more progress. I hope that hon. Members will be patient. I have yet to deal with the deployment of 45 Commando. If questions are raised when I do, I shall be able to deal with them in context.

There has also been speculation about a possible expansion of ISAF's area of responsibility. This is set out clearly in UN Security Council resolution 1386 and in the military technical agreement between ISAF and the Afghan Interim Administration. The security situation outside Kabul is very different from the situation in the city. What is clear is that, ultimately, security in Afghanistan is a matter for the Afghans themselves. We will continue to look at how we can help them in this, especially through the process of security sector reform.

Before I move on to talk about the deployment of 45 Commando, let me repeat that the United Kingdom is committed to the continued success of ISAF. Transferring our role as lead nation will not change that. ISAF has done great work, not just by patrolling the streets of Kabul, important though that is. Helping to train the first battalion of the new Afghan national guard—helping, for that matter, the new police force with such basic needs as pens and notepads—helps to ensure the future stability of Afghanistan.

Mr. Garnier: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for giving way to me for a second time. I want to follow up the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton). I know that the MOD will wish that its resources are fully behind those who are to be deployed in Afghanistan and the majority of the House is behind the MOD in that. I wanted to be assured that the Chancellor of the Exchequer and his Ministers were equally behind the MOD, because without the Chancellor's support, much of what the Secretary of State is doing, perfectly properly, will be hampered.

Mr. Hoon: I assure the hon. and learned Gentleman that the Chancellor of the Exchequer fully supports the deployments that have been made and will ensure that all the financial costs of these deployments are returned to the MOD budget in a way that has been consistent across a number of Administrations. There is no difficulty

about ensuring that process, which is agreed between Departments and has been agreed regularly between the MOD and the Treasury.

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): With this new deployment of fighting troops in another part of Afghanistan, are not the ISAF troops in Kabul in much greater danger? If they are attacked by one of the remnants of al-Qaeda, as they are called—we do not know how big these remnants are—will they stand by and say, "Sorry chaps; we do not fight. We are here to keep the peace"? Will not the war then spread back to Kabul?

Mr. Hoon: I will try to be as fair as I can to the hon. Lady, but the short answer to her question is that if she had been listening to anything said since 11 September, she would know that there have been fighting troops in Afghanistan since the first deployments. That has not affected the security of the ISAF during that long period of time.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): What is the Secretary of State's analysis of the situation in Afghanistan beyond Kabul? How far does the writ of the Afghan Government run? How many of the various warring factions of the Northern Alliance are still at war with each other? Is there a Government in control of the whole country? Are we not in danger of involving ourselves in a long-term and serious civil war?

Mr. Hoon: That is a good question and one that clearly needs addressing. The issue has concerned Chairman Karzai, who raised it here during his visit. I recognise that it remains of concern to the Administration there. But—this is a very important "but"—the people that I met when I was there, who represented a number of different ethnic groups from different parts of Afghanistan, were all equally determined to take this opportunity of rebuilding that country. They wanted to take the opportunity of the international community's support to ensure that the kind of civil war that has so disfigured Afghanistan in the past will not be allowed to return.

That is not to say that there are not tensions, or that there have not been, from time to time, clashes. But, overall, the country has remained remarkably committed to the process of reconstruction; more committed, perhaps, than at any other time in its recent past. That is a testimony to the determination of the Afghan people to take this chance to ensure that their country can return to the international community.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): Is it not the case that if we had not intervened in the first place, the only Government in existence in Afghanistan would have been the Taliban? I wonder whether some of the critics would like that to happen again. If I have any criticism of the allies, it is that they have been somewhat over-optimistic about the elimination of terrorism. But is not the essence of this matter that if the terrorists are not eradicated—I assume that the whole purpose of the exercise is to do precisely that—the allies will be revisiting this business in Afghanistan within a short period of time? It will come back as a nightmare.

Mr. Hoon: My hon. Friend's second point, which I made at the outset, is absolutely right. On his first point, I suspect that that is a matter for historians. When the history of this period comes to be written, what I think will be remarkable is not the Northern Alliance's reoccupation of a territory in the north of Afghanistan, but the astonishingly rapid collapse of the Taliban in those areas where many commentators said that they were strongest because they drew their strongest support—in the south. The Taliban collapsed in the south in a matter of weeks, indicating that ordinary Afghans simply had no time for their extremism.

Mr. Jenkin: We have given the Government unequivocal support in that battle on that question. My question arises from the remarks of the hon. Member for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn). What is the Secretary of State's assessment of the numbers of Taliban and al-Qaeda forces that are still resisting in the mountains in the east of Afghanistan? Does he have an assessment?

Mr. Hoon: There is an assessment. The number is initially in the hundreds; clearly it could be in the thousands. If the hon. Gentleman thinks about the nature of the deployment that we have announced, he will realise that the purpose of putting forces on the ground is, in the first place, to search out the remaining elements. Without putting forces on the ground, it will otherwise be an extraordinarily difficult military task to identify numbers. In those circumstances, we will need to take decisions as and when that information becomes available. We will ensure at that stage, according to the operations that are being conducted, that we have the right kind and number of forces to be able to deal with that threat.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Hoon: I should like to make some progress if right hon. and hon. Members will forgive me.

The deployment of 45 Commando to Afghanistan is entirely consistent with our campaign objectives. It does not undermine, or even threaten to undermine, our support for ISAF. Since the military campaign began, we have made clear our determination to act to prevent Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda from posing a continuing terrorist threat. That is why British forces have been involved in operations on the ground in Afghanistan for some months now.

We have also made it clear that rooting out the remaining elements of al-Qaeda will take time. That was a constant theme of our statements in the early days of the military deployment. Even in the early period after 11 September, defence analysts rightly pointed out that search and strike operations against al-Qaeda and Taliban elements were likely to continue into the spring. Certainly, al-Qaeda ceased to exist as a coherent force some months ago, and the Taliban regime has long since been removed from power.

However, as the recent USA-led Operation Anaconda has demonstrated, sizeable elements of al-Qaeda and the Taliban remain in Afghanistan, hidden away in the remoter areas of the country. We have to deal with those threats. The threat of attack from these groups and individuals remains high. If we do not deal with them, they will threaten all that the Afghan people and their supporters in the international community have achieved so far. They would certainly work to retain Afghanistan

[Mr. Hoon]

as a base for training and organising terrorism. Left to regroup, there is no doubt that al-Qaeda and its supporters would continue to pose a direct threat to states outside Afghanistan, including the United Kingdom. That is why we are deploying 45 Commando to join United States troops in continuing operations against these al-Qaeda and Taliban remnants. It is simply continuing the work that we started last October.

The decision to deploy 45 Commando makes sense. They are able to deploy quickly, having been held at high readiness on HMS Ocean in the Arabian sea and in their bases here in the United Kingdom. They are also trained to be able to manoeuvre quickly across difficult terrain. The Royal Marines are expert in mountain and cold-weather warfare—they have trained in this role since the 1970s. All Royal Marines undertake mountain training every year—45 Commando last did so only last December. Elements of 3 Commando brigade exercise in Norway each year. They are equipped to fight in arctic conditions.

The Commando group is also able to sustain itself. It must be able to call on the support of heavy weapons. The Commando group is equipped with machine guns and mortars. It also has a battery of 105 mm guns—a formidable piece of highly mobile artillery.

Mr. Oliver Heald (North-East Hertfordshire): I of course support the deployment announced by the Secretary of State. Will he tell us whether it is correct that other Governments are continuing to support al-Qaeda? There is a suggestion in the press today that Iraq might still be supporting al-Qaeda.

Mr. Hoon: I have certainly seen the press speculation. I have said—this remains the best information on the subject—that there are no obvious links between Iraq and the events of 11 September. However, we are well aware of Iraq's general support for terrorism and its condoning various terrorist acts, which clearly is a great cause for concern. I cannot comment further on the press reports. I certainly have nothing to add to what they say.

Mr. Michael Weir (Angus): On 45 Commando, which is based in my constituency, I understand what the right hon. Gentleman is saying about its usefulness for this operation and I agree, but given his earlier answer about the unknown number of al-Qaeda fighters in the mountains of Afghanistan, the fact that the terrain is difficult and treacherous and that those fighters can fight fanatically, as was shown in Operation Anaconda, this could be a long operation. Has he had any discussions with other nations that have specialist troops in that area about those troops rotating with 45 Commando or other British troops to ensure that the operation can finally be finished?

Mr. Hoon: The hon. Gentleman makes a proper point, but perhaps I need to explain in a little more detail the sort of operations that 45 Commando will be conducting and, indeed, the sort that were conducted by the Americans and others during Operation Anaconda. We are not talking about a pitched battle, or about tens of thousands of al-Qaeda lining up to fight the Royal Marines. We are talking about a series of small pockets of resistance.

Frankly, part of the difficulty is that it is almost impossible to say precisely how many of those small pockets there might be in the remoter parts of Afghanistan, or the numbers involved. Each operation against each of those discrete pockets—there is little doubt that we have been able to deal with communication between elements of al-Qaeda—will be separate. As we progress through the country—that is very much the programme that General Franks has outlined—we will be able to take each stage at a time.

I think that the hon. Gentleman implied that this is an all-or-nothing commitment—we either commit ourselves to deal with all the elements of al-Qaeda that we discover or we do not. The answer to his question is that this is a continuing series of smaller scale operations, working through the country to eliminate those pockets of resistance as we find them.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Hoon: I will give way to the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve).

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): The operations in the east of the country clearly lie close to the border with Pakistan and there has been much comment about the porous nature of that border and the ability of al-Qaeda terrorists to move back and forth across it. What steps will be taken to deal with the problem of al-Qaeda terrorists taking refuge in Pakistan in the tribal areas and then returning to Afghanistan? Unless that is dealt with, there must be a danger that there will be a continuous pool of fighters who can cross the border and cause problems.

Mr. Hoon: The hon. Gentleman makes a fair point—it was raised on Monday in the questions following my statement. In truth, as I set out then, it will be an extraordinarily difficult military exercise to seal that border. I was asked whether that was contemplated and I can assure the hon. Gentleman that it is not; it is simply not possible, given the terrain and the circumstances. Obviously, part of the military planning is to have a means of organising the forces involved to deal with those who might try to escape from the initial pocket of resistance that is attacked. That was part of the battle plan for Operation Anaconda—a part that worked extremely successfully.

Mr. Robathan: I support this deployment. The Secretary of State mentioned the equipment for 45 Commando and its arctic training. That equipment is vital while the snows are in place in the hills of Afghanistan, but within a month those snows will be melting and heat will be the problem. He is talking about small groups of troops deployed across the country. They will need to change from arctic to tropical or desert kit. Has that been worked out?

Mr. Hoon: I do not think that there is much desert at 10,000 ft in Afghanistan, but I will certainly ensure that those troops have the appropriate kit should the circumstances that the hon. Gentleman has described arise.

Mr. Peter Kilfoyle (Liverpool, Walton): My right hon. Friend described in some detail the sort of operations that

45 Commando would be involved in—highly mobile and highly focused. Would he characterise those operations as in any way similar to the search-and-destroy missions that took place at an early stage in the Vietnam conflict?

Mr. Hoon: Not in the least. The terrain is very different, as are the circumstances and there is a very different history. My hon. Friend has sought hard to make that comparison and I am sorry to disappoint him with my answer.

Hugh Robertson (Faversham and Mid-Kent): One element that was missing from the order of battle that the Secretary of State took us through was any light armoured component to the commando force. Such a component was used very successfully in the Falkland Islands and in a number of other operations since, and would seem to be ideal for the present operation. For example, what about the use of mobile gun platforms? Has any thought been given to that matter? If not, will the right hon. Gentleman give it some thought?

Mr. Hoon: I am sure that some thought has been given to it, but I am not entirely sure that I agree with the hon. Gentleman's premise. I am not convinced, given the terrain in which the troops will be operating that I have seen and the rapidly moving nature of the operations that I anticipate, that light armour will be of much assistance. Certainly, that was not the case for Operation Anaconda. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman should study more carefully the contour map of Afghanistan before making that suggestion.

Hugh Bayley (City of York): The campaign objectives are to prevent al-Qaeda forces from carrying out further terrorist attacks, which is why almost all hon. Members on both sides of the House support the deployment. What will happen to prisoners who are taken? Will they remain in Afghanistan and will they be treated under British or American law?

Mr. Hoon: Prisoners will be dealt with on exactly the same basis as they have been in the past. Most are still held in Afghanistan. I anticipate that those prisoners who can contribute to further understanding of the events of 11 September will be handed over for questioning to the United States.

Before I took those interventions, I was pointing out that 45 Commando has a long history of operating and training alongside US forces, including in northern Iraq and Kosovo. The Royal Marines possess highly skilled forward air controllers, who train regularly with US forces. So, 45 Commando is ideally placed to join troops from the US and a number of other nations in further operations against al-Qaeda and Taliban remnants in Afghanistan. The House will recall that troops from several nations took part in Operation Anaconda. That is why we have decided to deploy that particular force. Our decision is not—absolutely not—as some have suggested anything to do with British public opinion being more ready to accept the possibility of casualties than US public opinion. That suggestion deserves the contempt that it has already received.

Mr. Jenkin: I fully concur with the right hon. Gentleman on that matter. Can he inform the House of when the Government received the request from the United States for this deployment? Obviously, his decision is a response to that request. I understand that he was indisposed over the weekend and therefore had some difficulty responding personally to some of the issues.

Mr. Hoon: I will deal with that question in due course as it makes more sense to deal with it in the chronology that I have prepared.

Some people have tried to read things into the fact that we have chosen to deploy the group now. The decision was taken following a formal request from the United States at the very end of last week, and in close consultation with them. It has not been taken because the Americans or the other coalition forces are exhausted or need to be rescued, or have somehow failed—they did not. They fought in Operation Anaconda and they won against a heavily armed enemy, dug into prepared defensive positions in the rocks and caves. We should applaud their success, not try to decry it as some have done.

Therefore, the specific answer to the question posed by the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) is Friday. Obviously, that decision followed, as such decisions always follow, a long period of contact, consultation and discussion—not only about the particular requirements that an ally has, but the sorts of forces that we have available and that can be deployed in appropriate time and in the appropriate circumstances.

The Opposition defence spokesman also suggested the other day that we were deploying this force without dedicated air support—something that he repeated just now. As we have made clear time and again, the Commandos will operate alongside the United States. They will be able to call on an extraordinary array of air power. The expert military advice that I have received is that there is no need to augment coalition air power with our own strike aircraft in support of this particular deployment. The House should be aware that British forces have very recent and very relevant experience of co-operating with the United States and drawing on its close air support during ground operations in Afghanistan. As the commanding officer of 45 Commando made clear on the radio this morning, we routinely train with US forces and use common procedures. He is quite content with the arrangements for fire support, as am I. That is not to say that the Royal Air Force has no role here. It does, most obviously through the Chinook helicopters that we are deploying, but also through the range of reconnaissance, air transport and air-to-air refuelling that has supported the coalition so successfully since last October. I am sure that these assets will continue to play an important role in future operations, including those that 45 Commando may undertake.

Some have suggested that this deployment will contribute to the supposed overstretch of the armed forces. Certainly, our three services are extremely busy. That is also true of the Royal Marines. This time last year, no one could have predicted that more than 6,000 British service personnel would be engaged in operations in Afghanistan. However, there is no doubt that it is right that they are there. We keep these commitments under review and always assess them against routine programmed activities, and, where necessary, make adjustments to ensure the necessary balance between operations and other tasks.

[Mr. Hoon]

It is worth remembering that the Royal Marines were first put at high readiness for operations in Afghanistan in late October last year, and 45 Commando have been at high readiness—some on board HMS Ocean and others at home in Arbroath—since mid-November. We have therefore been ready for an operation of this sort for some months. There is no overstretch.

There have also been questions and concerns about the command and control arrangements in place for 45 Commando Group. It is entirely separate from the international security assistance force and will have separate command and control arrangements. ISAF comes under national command, although US Centcom has responsibility for ensuring that there is no conflict between ISAF activities and those that continue as part of Operation Enduring Freedom; 45 Commando Group come directly under Centcom's command. Brigadier Roger Lane and the headquarters of 3 Commando Brigade will therefore be embedded in the American-led coalition headquarters at Bagram. That means that the ISAF commander, Major General McColl, will not have authority over 45 Commando Group. In turn, Brigadier Lane will not have command over ISAF. They command distinct forces with distinct jobs to do in discrete parts of Afghanistan. Other nations which have contributed troops to ISAF are in exactly the same situation. It will not have escaped the notice of the House that Denmark, France, Germany, and Norway have all sent ground forces to participate in Operation Anaconda, while other elements of their armed forces remain in Kabul under General McColl.

Our decision to deploy 45 Commando Group to Afghanistan was not taken lightly. However, it is the right decision. The remaining al-Qaeda and Taliban elements must be dealt with. We shall continue to pursue them until the job is done. We must complete the task in full. The events of 11 September have shown us what could happen if we do not.

That is why I am not prepared to put a precise date on when we will bring these troops back home. Clearly, the decision will be taken in the light of the circumstances on the ground and in the light of the tasks that these troops may undertake. Our exit strategy is that we will leave when the task is completed. I welcome the fact that there is so much support in the House for this deployment and widespread appreciation of why it is so necessary.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind hon. Members that Mr. Speaker has imposed a 10-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches.

5.54 pm

Mr. Menzies Campbell (North-East Fife): I apologise on behalf of my hon. Friend the Member for Hereford (Mr. Keetch), who is unavoidably absent. I shall allow myself the indulgence of the following thought. Whatever our views on hunting—I accept that there are very strong views on both sides of the House—it is a relief that this week we have found time, however it was achieved, for a debate on the deployment of so many of our armed forces. Had we not, I suspect that people looking at the House of Commons from outside would have wondered precisely where our priorities lay.

I believe that the Government are entitled to the support of the House for this deployment. More particularly, our service men are entitled to that support. They are being asked to undertake hazardous operations in conditions that are unimaginably inhospitable—a long way from the air-conditioned comfort of this Chamber. Just as the Government are entitled to our support, the House, too, is entitled to clear military and political explanations from the Government for this deployment.

The truth is that the decision to make this fresh deployment is tactical, not strategic. The strategic decision has already been taken. It was taken in the immediate aftermath of 11 September, when, by common consent, the House agreed that military force should be used in Afghanistan to achieve four stated objectives. The first was to bring Osama bin Laden to justice. The second was to disrupt and destroy as far as possible al-Qaeda's network of terrorism. The third was to drive the Taliban Government out of Kabul. The fourth was to allow the people of Afghanistan to have the chance to choose their own Government. At this date, only the third of those objectives has been achieved.

If the deployment or the decision to make it had been announced before Christmas, I doubt whether there would have been any concern other than from those who honourably and sincerely oppose the use of force in principle in Afghanistan. What is different today is, first, the speed of response to the request from the United States, which, as the Secretary of State has just told us, came formally on Friday last week. It was so recent that the Government could not offer the usual consultation on Privy Council terms with other parties in the House. Secondly, and perhaps more significantly, a perception had grown up here and elsewhere that we had enjoyed early and comprehensive military success, and, consequently, all that was left to do was some form of mopping up—a description of military action that is as factually inaccurate as it is militarily inept.

Those who joined the chorus of "I told you so" may now wish to reflect at leisure on the American expression, "It isn't over until it's over." Perhaps unconsciously, that principle lay behind the observations of which I understand the Secretary of State has given further explanation today, and on which he has been reported as saying that this may be an open ended commitment. In that regard, I agree with an intervention by, I think, the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton). The truth is that, in the war against terrorism, the commitment is always open ended. That is particularly the case, if, as we now know, the terrorist uses the principles of what is described as asymmetric warfare—never risking full-blooded confrontation. The truth is that in a campaign against terrorism, it may be virtually impossible to answer the question, "How do you know when you've won?" If one looks for a classical allusion, the mythology of the dragon's teeth comes easily to mind.

It is axiomatic that military force should not be used unless clear political objectives can be achieved. In modern military thinking, however, it is increasingly accepted that just as intervention must be justified against clear criteria, such intervention must also be accompanied by an equally clear exit strategy. There must be a point at which one concludes that one's objectives have been

achieved, or—more difficult, and often more important and acute—a point at which one concludes that one's objectives cannot be achieved and that withdrawal is the necessary response. We have not yet heard—nor, I suspect, could the Secretary of State provide—clear exit criteria of that kind. However, a point must surely arise in the conduct of the operations that he has described in which the need for such criteria will be paramount. Although the House takes him on trust—I shall return to that point—we are entitled to say that we expect him to be sufficiently rigorous in his supervision of these operations to be alive to the need for clear exit criteria of the kind that I have described.

We must also recognise that we are sending highly specialised troops into circumstances that are admitted to be of very considerable danger. The Secretary of State was rightly sombre in his statement to the House on Monday when he described the nature of the risk. We are sending troops against the background of an uncertain immediate history, which—notwithstanding what he has just said—may be capable of explanation only by accepting that the United States troops previously engaged have, in truth, bitten off more than they could chew both physically and tactically. That seems to underline the risk to which we are inevitably exposing those whom we now wish to deploy.

All of us who support military action—and I mean all of us and not just the Government—have an overwhelming moral obligation not to exploit the competence, bravery and professionalism of our troops. I therefore, wish to make a point in parenthesis. Reservations have been and will be expressed by others in the debate. However, if we were American senators or members of the House of the Representatives and the circumstances were reversed, there could be no doubt that we would all raise the same issues on behalf of those whom we represented as matters of principle.

There is nothing disloyal in wanting to put to the test a Government who face the awesome responsibility of making such deployments or in forcing that Government to come to the Chamber of the House of Commons to justify their actions. Indeed, it is my recollection that precisely the same principles applied during the Gulf war, Kosovo and in other similar engagements.

This deployment is perforce a very public one. The Secretary of State was quick to dismiss any reservations that Members might have about two different deployments. However, I suggest that, although we might be clear about the separation between ISAF and 45 Commando and the roles for which they are being deployed, the distinction may be less obvious to those with malign intent. Indeed, they may positively ignore it. In an age of asymmetric warfare, we are dealing with a terrorist organisation whose sophistication is warranted each time we come across the places where it keeps a cache of manuals or equipment, so I postulate whether it is impossible that someone will say, "Well, we won't take on the British uniforms of 45 Commando in the mountains. We may find it rather easier to target the British uniforms of the Royal Anglians in Kabul." There is some justification for the view that there may be an increased risk to the forces in Kabul.

I had the good fortune to visit Kabul a few weeks ago at the invitation of the Foreign Secretary. On these occasions, it is conventional to talk with pride of the achievements of British forces. Sometimes we do that as a matter of ritual rather than of substance, but I genuinely felt a swelling of pride at the quality and competence of those who were wearing the Union Jack. That competence has been built up in operations such as ISAF, but is based to a large extent on our pretty horrific experiences over 30 years in Northern Ireland. Such operations form as important a part of the range of abilities of British armed forces as does the most high-intensity war fighting.

There are risks in concentrating on operations such ISAF, because our capacity for high-intensity war fighting may be irremediably eroded. I think that that has been the experience of the Canadians, but I have no doubt that we possess a capacity as a result of our experiences in Northern Ireland that is vital in many circumstances. We should never attempt to describe that capacity in such a way as to cause people to think that it is something second rate.

The hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) asked about the porous border between Afghanistan and Pakistan. There is at least anecdotal evidence to suggest that the border has been freely crossed by elements of al-Qaeda who have gone for rest and recreation in Pakistan. They have regrouped and, with fresh men and material, returned to Afghanistan. I suspect that that pattern may be repeated for a considerable time and, if it is, the length of the commitment to which the Secretary of State referred will be greater. Those of us who support this deployment should not do so without recognising what the consequences might be.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): When the Secretary of State replied to my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve), I thought that he missed the point. The issue is what Pakistani forces will do within the borders of Pakistan to ensure that a safe haven for al-Qaeda is not created there. It is impossible to make the border impenetrable.

Mr. Campbell: The hon. Gentleman is right. What might in other circumstances might be described as host-nation support by elements of the Pakistani armed forces could make al-Qaeda's opportunities for reinforcement all the greater. I acknowledge that point and if it happens—it is not unreasonable to assume that it might—it will have consequences for the nature and length of the commitment into which we may enter.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones (Cardiff, Central): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Campbell: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, but I wish to make progress. I know that many other Members wish to speak. Although I am not subject to the 10-minute rule, I do not want to abuse my position.

There is no greater political or moral responsibility for any Government than to commit forces to combat in which their lives are at risk. By endorsing the decision—as most of us in the Chamber do—we take unto ourselves a share of that responsibility. However, on this deployment as on so many decisions that the Government have taken since 11 September, it is necessary for the House and the country to take the Government on trust. I listened carefully to the Secretary of State and he said nothing this afternoon which in any way could prejudice the security or the operational effectiveness of the troops

[Mr. Campbell]

that we are about to deploy. I understand that. It would have been improper for him to have given away information that might have led to such consequences. However, in turn, that merely reinforces the fact that we have to take him and the whole Government on trust.

A failure in this area could lead to seismic political consequences. Circumstances now are nothing like those in the first and second world wars, but students of history will remember that Asquith was replaced, as Chamberlain was 35 years later, because the House of Commons lacked confidence in the conduct of the war.

I believe that the Government are entitled to our support, and so too are our forces. We have a duty both to Government and to the forces. However, the Government have a duty as well. They have a duty to the House of Commons and to the country to make sure that they get it right.

6.10 pm

Mr. Bruce George (Walsall, South): Events in Afghanistan may initially have appeared to vindicate proponents of air power. It seemed that one could win a war from 20,000 or 30,000 ft, but the events of the past few weeks have suggested that there is still a role for ground forces, and that wars cannot be won through the use of one branch of the armed forces alone.

Those who thought that the conflict was winding down to a quiet termination were truly naive or stupid beyond words. Even in December, before the conflict had reached its current state, the Defence Committee said:

"Whatever the outcome of the present action in Afghanistan or the fate of Osama Bin Laden and al Qaeda, we cannot expect to neutralize the new threats easily or quickly . . . This is not to say that the battle against global terrorism cannot be won; it can be and it must be. But it will not be won quickly, and it is likely that whatever success is achieved against al Qaeda itself, a number of groups associated with it or sympathetic to its causes will continue to pose a threat."

Perhaps it was thought that the first stage of the battle in Afghanistan had been won, but it has not. I am afraid that those who think that we can get back to normal in one month, two months, six months or a year will be disappointed.

I recently read a wonderful book, entitled "War Without End", which is dedicated to the subject of terrorism. We live in an era in which the war against terrorism will be an almost perennial feature of our existence. Regrettably, we will have to operate in many theatres, although hopefully not all.

Mr. Garnier: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. George: I am sorry, but I have only eight minutes left.

I agree with much of what the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) said, but I am not sure that it is wise to talk publicly about an exit strategy only a few months after establishing an entry strategy. To do so would give potential adversaries an advantage in calculating how to deal with the threat.

I give the Government my near-unequivocal support, and I am not going to list a host of provisos. The Government's actions during this crisis have been quite correct, and most people in the House and outside it endorse what they are doing. I certainly agree with current deployments, but the additional forces will have a rather different task.

The Opposition's support is very welcome, and any differences that emerged were largely marginal. However, those of us who support deployment in the war against terrorism will continue to be accused of warmongering and imperialism—I was accused on the radio of being slightly racist—and of being stupid for not realising what others have realised. Of course, Islamicists will not be too pleased either.

I do not denigrate those who argue differently from the majority of Members, but in my view what the Government have done and are doing is absolutely correct in every sense—morally, politically and in terms of international law. Some will find the deployment of the Royal Marines rather surprising. Perhaps it was a surprise, but they have been operating in the Indian ocean for the past six months. They are not there simply to get a bit of a sea breeze. It seemed pretty obvious to me and many others that the Americans would request their presence at some stage—and not just for the peacekeeping operation in Kabul. To put it modestly, they are the among the best armed forces in the world; to put it correctly, they are the best armed forces in the world.

The call did indeed come. Last October, 40 Commando were on stand-by on board HMS Fearless, in the Arabian sea. They were then sent to Bagram. More recently, 45 Commando were on stand-by on board HMS Ocean. So the deployment of the Royal Marines was not a complete surprise. Nor was it a complete surprise that the conflict in Afghanistan did not have the perfect ending that we associate with major American films, in which everything happens as one would wish. I suspect, however, that those who said that the conflict was coming to an end were addressing their domestic audience, and will live to be rather embarrassed by their statements.

The idea that there was any alternative to what the Government are doing is rather fanciful. If the Government had accepted the argument of some Labour Members that we should not have participated in the operation, what message would that have sent to other special forces, our own public, the Americans, the Germans and other countries—including the Canadians, for whom such an operation is spectacular—that are participating alongside the United States? It would have sent the message that the United Kingdom was not prepared to join them because it was fearful of the consequences—that its troops would be exposed to risks and that the war might last a long time. If the Government were unwise enough to follow that line of argument, we could do without a Ministry of Defence, because the future deployment of troops in the national and international interest would be unlikely.

Of course there are risks, as the Secretary of State made clear. One cannot fight a very capable but non-professional al-Qaeda force in a home territory consisting of caves, and at an elevation of 10,000 ft, without the aid of tanks such as Challenger 1 and 2. Lives may well be lost, perhaps even those of our adversaries. On embarking on such a task, one has to be realistic and not assume that the light casualties of the past 30 or 40 years constitute a virtual right or a scientific law.

The point made by the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge), which some Members mocked, is a serious one. Dual and contrasting roles will pose problems. The roles of peacekeeper and of fighter may not be totally incompatible, but it could prove exceedingly difficult to persuade people that a demarcation has been drawn between two unique operations.

Yes, there may be mission creep, but I doubt whether the conflict will turn into another Vietnam, as Afghanistan's Interim Administration will have greater legitimacy. It is vitally important that, in conjunction with the Interim Administration's national guard, we put considerable effort into training indigenous forces, as we have done in Sierra Leone. Such forces are best able to fight al-Qaeda—if necessary—for an indefinite period, and they have the greatest legitimacy. It is wrong, however, to assume that our operation will come to a swift end.

The Government did not decline the United States' request. Threats and risks do exist, but those of my hon. Friends who think that we should not have undertaken this task are in essence saying, "Countries such as Russia, Uzbekistan and Pakistan can take a risk, but Britain must be risk-free. The boys can come home unscathed, with no adverse consequences to their, or this House's, reputation."

I should tell those of my colleagues who are devotees of the Labour party and its history that it has been an internationalist party throughout its existence. The idea that socialism ends at the borders of Europe is mistaken. We have commitments to help Governments in other parts of the world, however far from our shores. During Operation Saif Sareea, the Defence Committee met several Royal Marines. We saw them climbing mountains. They frightened us, and I am sure that they will have an adverse effect—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. The right hon. Gentleman's 10 minutes are up.

6.20 pm

Mr. Michael Portillo (Kensington and Chelsea): As the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) commented, it is an awesome responsibility to commit our forces in this way. This is a situation of grave danger and the Secretary of State has taken a great responsibility upon himself. He has been much in my thoughts during these days. Even more in my thoughts have been the Royal Marines who are being committed and their families.

I very much support the mission to which the Secretary of State has committed those forces. Because of that, it is highly regrettable that at first he sought to give the House no opportunity to have a debate. It is unfortunate that he had to be forced into having a debate, because that leaves him looking shifty and lacking in confidence at the very time when we need him to appear sure-footed and confident. My hon. Friend the Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) dealt with the issue of the discourtesy to the House, but when our soldiers are being put into such extreme danger, it is a grave discourtesy to them to suggest that the sacrifice that they offer the nation is not worth three hours of debate in Government time. It is marvellous to have the opportunity this afternoon for so many Members of Parliament to express their commitment to our forces and their support for the decision that the Government have taken.

Mr. Hoon: I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman will accept that the Government did not oppose this debate in any way, shape or form.

Mr. Portillo: None the less, the Secretary of State will accept that he did not give the House the opportunity of a debate and it would have been better if he had. However, I commend him on his performance today, when he did appear sure-footed and confident. That is what we all expect from him if he is to lead us through these difficult days.

This is not an American war. It is a war of many allies, in which we have committed ourselves to defeat terrorism. We did not commit ourselves for the short term or say that we would be committed to defeating terrorism for as long as it remained easy; we said that we were committed to that objective until we had achieved it. I remember that our first thought was that the campaign would be very difficult. Subsequently, it appeared to be easier than people had anticipated, but I agree with the right hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George) when he said that those who thought that that was how it would turn out were deluding themselves. The situation that we now face in Afghanistan is the one that we first anticipated: we would face tough resistance, with the terrain against us; it would be a hard struggle; and we would have to be willing to bear casualties.

This is no time to flinch. The right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife referred to the decision to commit the Royal Marines as a tactical decision in support of a strategic decision that had already been taken. He is right in that, but thank goodness that tactical decision has been taken, because it demonstrates resolve. If we failed to take that decision, the terrorists would not lose much time in regrouping, as the Secretary of State pointed out. If they were to do so, they would pose a major threat to the rest of Afghanistan, neighbouring countries and countries throughout the world. More than that, the fact that they were left intact and undefeated would be a major encouragement to extremists and militants all over the world. Therefore, their defeat remains a critical strategic objective.

I would go further and say that the attacks on New York city and Washington were a test for western society on whether it was willing to defend the values of a free society. The background to the attacks on 11 September was not, as many people have alleged, a decade in which the United States had shown an overbearing and arrogant foreign policy towards the rest of the world. I take the opposite view. The decade that preceded 11 September was one in which people had become unclear about the resolve of the United States and, therefore, the resolve of the allies.

First came the failure to topple Saddam during the Gulf war, for reasons that we all understand, which was taken as a sign of irresolution. Then came the series of moral victories that Saddam was allowed to win, including continuing with his programme of weapons of mass destruction and his decision to expel the United Nations inspectors without any satisfactory response from the allies. Perhaps most extraordinary were the attacks on the US embassies in Africa and the attack on USS Cole, which met with a perfunctory response from the US.

[Mr. Portillo]

I regret to say—and many of my hon. Friends will not like me saying this—that even the September 2000 proposals by President Clinton and Prime Minister Barak, with major concessions proposed by Israel under the United States' umbrella, were taken by enemies as a sign of weakness—*[Interruption.]* They may have been good proposals in themselves, but my point concerns how they were interpreted.

Since 11 September, the US response to terrorism has been extraordinarily clear. The response of the UK Government has also been clear. It has not been completely consistent, but it has been consistent at the major points of decision. Like the right hon. Member for Walsall, South, I find it surprising that elements in the press and on the Labour Back Benches would now wish to give a less clear-cut answer to terrorism. That would put us in a great deal of danger. We are committed to the struggle and it is important that we demonstrate resolve.

Perhaps most important of all in the perception of the terrorists who took advantage of western society on 11 September was the perception that the US would be unwilling to sustain any casualties in combat. In New York city on that day, there were 3,000 casualties. The US has turned over a new leaf in that respect and is now willing to face the prospect of casualties in order to defend its society and its way of life.

Let me now comment directly on this deployment. The forces that the Secretary of State has chosen to send appear to be well constructed, robust and capable of defending themselves. The number and range of capabilities also appear to have been well chosen. We are contributing some capabilities that the US does not have, including, in particular, units that are able to locate mortars more effectively. Mortars represent a formidable weapon in this campaign. Let us also remember that UK staff are fully integrated into the battle staff in Tampa, which is an extraordinarily privileged and important position for this country to enjoy.

During the past few months, I get the feeling that some commentators have learned a few pieces of random terminology about military affairs, including phrases such as "mission creep" and "exit strategy". Sometimes those phrases are applied without sufficient thought being given to whether they are appropriate. I agree with the Secretary of State when he says that the mission is to defeat terrorism and that when Afghanistan has been secured and the mission completed, that will be the time to leave and that is the exit strategy. In war, there is little else to be said, and I am pleased that so many right hon. and hon. Members have made that point during this debate.

Last night I and several other hon. Members had the privilege of attending a dinner to honour those who had earned Victoria Crosses in the past, in the presence of the widow of Colonel H. Jones and a couple of Victoria Cross winners from the second world war. I am convinced that the people who are now being sent to Afghanistan are capable of showing the same bravery, courage and valour and of making the same sacrifice. The people we are sending are lions and, I am pleased to say, they are not led by donkeys, as it is alleged once happened in our history. These lions are also commanded by lions. All I would say to the Government, as they make this difficult decision and see it properly debated in the House, is that my wish for those fine people whom we are sending to Afghanistan is that they may always receive from their political masters the respect and consideration that they so richly deserve.

6.29 pm

Mr. Doug Henderson (Newcastle upon Tyne, North): Three or four years ago, I spent three or four days in northern Norway with 45 Commando, whom I hold in the highest regard. I saw at first hand their dedication, motivation, skills and professionalism.

This deployment is a major deployment by comparison with anything in recent times. Lives are at risk, as the Secretary of State said in his statement on Monday, and I believe that we owe it to those soldiers to display clear thinking in the House and provide an opportunity for debate on the issues that affect them.

It is always said that in military action two tests must be satisfied. First, there must be a just cause; secondly, there must be a reasonable chance of success. When we discussed these issues six months ago in the House, many colleagues addressed those tests. There is a danger that one begins to forget the tests as the campaign develops. If we are to have credibility as a House, we must subject the campaign to those tests as it develops, because public opinion will be taking note of what happens.

There was clearly support among the British people for intervention although, as opinion polls showed, there were differences of view as to how that intervention could best take place. The danger is that if we are deflected from continually testing on the just cause and on the best way forward and the likelihood of success, we are likely to begin to lose public support. One thing that will very much influence public opinion in this country and in the United States is the extent to which our forces, and the politics that underpin our forces, are perceived in the theatre as forces that are acting for the good of the people there.

My first concern today is that because of the dual role—the peacekeeping role and the offensive role—there is a danger that local support in Afghanistan, and the other Islamic parts of the world that will identify with Afghanistan, may begin to doubt whether a just cause is being pursued.

The subject of American contributions to peacekeeping forces was aired in the House earlier today. I cannot understand why it is acceptable or appropriate for Britain to be involved in a dual role in Afghanistan yet it is not acceptable for the other major player, the United States, to be involved in a dual role. The United States might argue that Denmark and Germany are involved in a minor way in a dual role, but that is a very different situation because people in the streets of Kabul and elsewhere probably will not know that Denmark or the Czech Republic, for instance, are involved but they will know that the Americans and the British are involved. It is somewhat unwise to have that dual role—I do not understand why it is right for the United Kingdom to undertake that dual role, but it is apparently not right for the United States to accept that role.

My second worry is linked to the previous one. We have heard, and I read in the press, about the support that the different contributors to the provisional Government in Afghanistan give to those who are helping them establish the process of law and order in that country.

Collectively they undoubtedly support the involvement, although they may have different motives and factional fights are still taking place.

Although I do not have access to the intelligence reports that Ministers have, I am not convinced from the reports that I read that support on the ground in Afghanistan is as strong as the support among the political factions. That problem could be aggravated if people on the ground in Afghanistan see British soldiers in two different capacities. As the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) said, some opponents in Afghanistan might fancy a pop at a peacekeeper whereas they would not fancy a pop at a Royal Marine up in the mountains.

I have only 10 minutes in which to speak, so I shall be brief. My third point relates to the test of whether there is a reasonable chance of success. It is not good enough to apply that test only at the start of a campaign; it must be applied throughout. I agree with the hon. Member who said that we are talking not about strategy but about tactics. We have had our arguments about the strategy, but on tactics, is the next tactic that we are deploying consistent with the original criteria that we laid down as necessary for a degree of success?

There are many unknowns in this issue. I recognise that Ministers have a difficult task, as they may have access to information that it would be unwise to share with the House or the public because it would give knowledge to our enemies. However, there is a real danger that we may get bogged down in something that we cannot control in Afghanistan. That is a very serious worry.

Some might say that we have already had offensive soldiers in Afghanistan, and peacekeepers over the past three or four months, but the number of offensive soldiers has been small. They have not been very visible and have probably not been known to the civilian populations in Afghanistan. However, when one starts introducing 1,700—who, for all we know, may need to be reinforced by many thousands more for logistical or fighting reasons—it becomes obvious to the people in Afghanistan what is happening.

The worry is that if law and order begin to break down, if the local population gradually cease to support those who are trying to keep peace and trying to rid us all of the threat of al-Qaeda, and if people begin to see that that is not happening, we could easily become involved in a civil war in which we are forced to choose, in any particular military situation, between backing one faction in the provisional Government and another. I read in the press that fighting is indeed taking place. If we have many soldiers in that theatre, we might have no choice but to take sides or to become involved in such a situation.

It would be bad enough to get caught in a civil war; it would be tragic to get caught in an imperial war. The danger is that one transforms into the other very quickly. What starts as a battle between factions in Afghanistan could easily end up as fighting between those from outside the country and those within the country, which would be perceived by the local population and by important Islamic-friendly states as a 21st century imperial intervention by a number of countries that were tied together in the coalition.

There is that grey area between an intervention with a specific purpose, a clear mission and a targeted operational structure—something that is understandable, has local support and is recognised internationally—and something much bigger, that is perceived as an outside force, that has lost its way, that does not have local support and that gets bogged down in something that it does not want to become involved in, and cannot see an exit strategy for itself.

Those are the dangers. I am not predicting that that will happen, but I will say that if hon. Members read the clear and detailed history of Vietnam, they will find that there are very many parallels with the way in which the numbers of American forces grew from a few thousand in 1965 or 1966 to 550,000 by 1970. I have no doubt that all were established initially as acting as a force for good. I do not expect Ministers to share all their information with the House, but there is a balance to be struck.

6.40 pm

Sir Peter Tapsell (Louth and Horncastle): I happened to be in New York on the morning of 11 September, and I remained in the United States—because no one could get out—for the next seven days. I therefore have a clear picture in my mind of the force of American public opinion on that terrible tragedy and their continuing determination to get their revenge.

Revenge is not a word that is often used in this context, but I have a great many American friends and I have been back to the United States since 11 September, and I can tell hon. Members that it animates their policy. They are determined to get revenge, and I have no doubt that they will do so. I fully support the United States in its desire to stamp out international terrorism. However, that is not to say that we should not, in our cool, British way, consider the situation as it develops and make quite certain that each step down the road is carefully chosen.

There is a great danger in using the broad brush. People talk about those who are fighting in Afghanistan—the Taliban, al-Qaeda and the third group, who might be described as tribal gangsters—as though they were all the same sorts of people, but they are entirely different. I know Afghanistan fairly well. Indeed, I have my father's 1919 Afghan medal, my grandfather fought in the second Afghan war and I grew up in a house full of Afghan carpets, daggers, pistols and so on.

The last time I was in Kabul was a few weeks before the Russians invaded. They stayed in Afghanistan for 10 years, put in 300,000 troops and left 30,000 dead behind them. Those are useful statistics to bear in mind when talking about sending 1,700 immensely gallant and highly trained Royal Marines into the snow-clad mountains of eastern Afghanistan. I have walked in those mountains—although not very high up, and certainly not when there was snow around—and it would be impossible to use armoured vehicles on those tracks, which one can hardly get mules up and down. As we all remember, by the time the Russians left Afghanistan the whole country was littered with burned-out Russian tanks. The nature of the challenge should not be underestimated.

The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson) mentioned Vietnam. I visited Vietnam three times during the war. The first time I went, there were 300 American advisers in civilian clothing. The last time I went there were 500,000 American troops in uniform. During that visit, General Westmoreland, the great US commander of the day, assured me that the war would be over by Christmas. It is always worth remembering the difficulties that have arisen in the past as a result of intervening in such situations.

[Sir Peter Tapsell]

The Afghans have been fighting each other all through history. In reality, there is no such place as Afghanistan. Until the late 19th century, it was simply called the Afghan region. A British civil servant called Sir Mortimer Durand drew a line on the map and said that that was going to be the frontier between the then India and Afghanistan. People use the extraordinary phrase "a porous frontier" to describe the area. They have heard only of the Khyber pass, up which I have driven from Peshawar to Kabul on three occasions, but I am told that there are approximately 200 passes on the 900-mile frontier between Pakistan and Afghanistan. The tribesmen can move backwards and forwards with total freedom, as the Secretary of State admitted.

Although each war is different, I should like to make another historical reference. When a Conservative Government put one battalion into Bosnia, I asked the then Foreign Secretary, "What is the use of sending one battalion when you need four divisions to do the job?" The Serbs capitulated only when four divisions were in Macedonia on the frontier of Kosovo. We should therefore understand that sending in the magnificent Marine Commandos will not end civil war in Afghanistan, which will go on for decades in different forms, as it always has done.

We must consider the importance of the war in the wider world context. Although the attack on the twin towers and the terrible suffering and grief that it caused in America were appalling, if we are to consider the matter objectively we must study our enemy. It was a brilliantly organised terrorist strike. Anyone who has tried to organise a cheese and wine party for a Conservative association will appreciate the difficulty of getting the sandwiches there on time. The attack must have been one of the best organised operations in modern history.

One of the most amazing aspects was that the strike obviously took years of preparation but was never leaked. I have spoken to Congressmen and Senators about the matter, and they have expressed great anger that the American secret service did not see it coming. A congressional committee of inquiry is currently examining that. Only yesterday, the director of the FBI said in answer to the committee that al-Qaeda was reorganising and regrouping in approximately 34 countries.

The problem is not only in the caves in the mountains of Afghanistan. I have never had great faith in what might be described as troglodyte technology. I simply do not believe that the attack on the twin towers was organised in detail from the caves. We know that no Afghans were involved in the actual attack, which was carried out almost entirely by Egyptians and Saudis who had been in the United States for a long time. They had tremendous technological training for the job. We should acknowledge that although a genuine danger of future terrorist attacks exists, not only in the United States but possibly in Britain, the people who will launch them are almost certainly in the US and Britain now, not fighting in the snow of the Afghan mountains.

We need a much more sophisticated approach to the subject than the media, at least, present. I should like to believe that the US has worked that out, that it recognises the fact that 1 billion people in the world are Muslim and that the whole Arab world has been antagonised by our actions. We must tackle the macro-strategic as well as the micro-tactical problem.

I devoutly hope that our Royal Marines can carry out their duties with minimum casualties, but I am not confident that their numbers will be sufficient to do that. We will therefore have to face the choice of greatly increasing their numbers through large-scale reinforcements or withdrawing them and concentrating on the much greater threat from Iraq.

6.50 pm

Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): I commend the speeches of the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) and my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson). The House may well choose to reflect carefully on the analysis provided by the former and the cautionary wisdom and ministerial experience offered by the latter.

The views I shall express stem from the very first announcement made to the House by the Secretary of State on Monday, in which he said

"The United States has now formally requested that the UK provides forces to join in future military operations against other remnants of al-Qaeda and the Taliban elsewhere in Afghanistan."—[*Official Report*, 18 March 2002; Vol. 382, c. 38.]

It is important to separate what we know from what we do not know. We know that 1,700 troops are currently committed by the United Kingdom to join forces from the United States. We know that those troops will be de facto under the control of the United States. What we do not know is how long they will be there, and for what purposes.

It worried me that the Secretary of State described the move as chasing the "remnants" of al-Qaeda. What do we mean by "remnants"? Estimates of the number vary from 2,000 to 20,000. On 19 December last year, the *Washington Post* quoted an FBI analysis according to which the sum of military achievements was, at best, the limiting of al-Qaeda's capacity by about 30 per cent. If that is the case, we are sending our troops to face very sizeable "remnants".

We do not know how long the troops will be there. Will they be there for 10 weeks, 10 months, 10 years? An ominous piece of string is being dangled before us, whose end we cannot see. We do not know what is the military endgame for the deployment of the troops, and we do not know the exit strategy. My fear is that we, as a Parliament, are in danger of making a commitment which, without those clear objectives, would make it easy for us to send troops in and end up counting them out.

We do know that Operation Anaconda was anything but a mopping-up exercise. We also know—thanks to, in particular, the efforts of my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) and discussions between the NATO delegation from the United Kingdom with Russian delegations—that the issue never concerned an initial military success over Afghanistan. The Russians have repeatedly pointed out to our delegation that they took over the country in six weeks. The fact is that 10 years later, minus 30,000 of the troops they had sent in, they were forced to crawl out of a country whose terrain and fighters had defeated them.

It is important for the House to consider our responsibilities with real caution before we send British troops into potentially similar conditions. We need a clear

mission statement, and we need to be clear about its limits. We also need to remember that this deployment, the largest deployment of UK fighting troops since the Gulf war deployment in 1991, is to a region where we were told before Christmas the war had ended. Our troops are being sent to a place where, in fact, the fighting has far from ended.

After 11 September many of us had real disagreements about the tactics of pursuing this war, but a number of us did not disagree about whether we should pursue Osama bin Laden or whether we should pursue and seek to dismantle the al-Qaeda network; we disagreed about the tactics and the prospects of success involved in taking such action by conventional military means.

Personally, I still favour the use of specialist troops to bring out, or take out, Osama bin Laden, but at this stage we do not know whether the troops we are sending have any idea whether they are pursuing bin Laden or his shadows. We have no real doubts now about the threat posed by the al-Qaeda network, but I think the hon. Member for Louth and Horncastle (Sir Peter Tapsell) was right to say that it is not to be found in the caves outside Kabul. The next set of terrorist threats, like the last set, are being planned in comfortable apartments outside the region rather than in caves outside the capital.

We must at some point acknowledge that one of the first casualties of our continuing down a route driven entirely by military presumptions was the death of diplomacy, and of the UN's role in pursuing non-military solutions to what is legitimately described as an asymmetrical threat to the stability of societies. I do not want to retreat from, or understate, the nature or size of that threat, but I question the wisdom and the presumption that there are conventional military solutions, and I specifically question whether those solutions will be found in the Afghan mountains.

Many Members wish to express legitimate fears that we are in danger of fighting the right war, or maybe struggle, in the wrong way. There is an additional danger, mentioned by some Members today, of our encouraging a form of mission creep that may begin in Kabul but end in Baghdad. That would not bring peace to a region or country, but would add massively to the sense of instability, threat and risk felt by all of us.

The House should issue legitimate warnings, and assert the right to ask questions about the implications of this action, its limits and its constraints. The stability of the region, the safety of our troops and the interests of the international community demand a clearer and more coherent mandate for the military action being embarked on, and a stronger likelihood of the success test mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North. It cannot be right for us to deploy UK fighting forces simply on the basis of a whistle and a wink from the American Administration. That is unlikely to be a winnable strategy, given the much more complex threat that the world currently faces.

6.58 pm

Mr. Hugo Swire (East Devon): Despite having served in the armed forces, I make no great claim to be a military strategist, but I feel qualified to make some observations, having spent considerable time on the Afghan border in the 1980s during the Soviet occupation. I have first-hand knowledge of some of the terrain so graphically brought to life by my hon. Friend the Member for Louth and Horncastle (Sir Peter Tapsell). Perhaps more relevant is the fact that Commando Training Centre Lympstone, the spiritual and in some cases actual home of the Royal Marines, is in my constituency.

As we have heard today, the Royal Marines are already doing more than their fair share in this conflict. The deployment of the remaining elements of 45 Commando and the combat and services support elements is the largest military deployment since the Gulf war. As we know and have heard again today, the lead elements of 45 Commando, its headquarters company and "Whisky" and "Zulu" companies are already in theatre on HMS Ocean.

Personally, I can think of no better force to send to that theatre to back up the more specialist forces already there than the Royal Marines. They are tough; they are highly professional; they have done extensive mountains training; and they are certainly battle fit. However, we should not for one moment delude ourselves into thinking that what they are undertaking will be like an exercise on Woodbury common with live rounds. It will not. It would be unrealistic to imagine that, out of an additional force of some 1,700 men, there will be no casualties. There will be. Nothing short of a miracle can prevent that. Given that, it is crucial that we know exactly what we are asking them to do.

Some Labour Members are concerned that the latest deployment represents mission creep. It may, but as my right hon. Friend the Member for Kensington and Chelsea (Mr. Portillo) said, Labour Members' comments serve only to highlight their ignorance of matters military. In a theatre of war—basically an anti-terrorist war—there is bound to be an element of mission creep due to the ever-changing nature of the conflict. However, that does not mean that the basic objectives need to change.

Paragraph 4 of the Government's aims, as outlined in their original campaign objectives, states:

> "The immediate objectives will be achieved by all available means, including both political and military . . . unless the Taliban regime complies with the US ultimatum, taking direct action against Usama bin Laden, the Al Qa'ida networks and the terrorist facilities in Afghanistan, and where necessary taking political and military action to fragment the present Taliban regime, including through support for Pushtun groups opposed to the regime as well as forces in the Northern Alliance".

Events have obviously moved on since then. The Taliban did not comply, and in my view there has been a singular failure to support the most effective Pashtun forces. Incidentally, it is exactly that failure which has led to the continuing resistance by some of the recalcitrant elements of the Taliban.

The aims, though broadly the same, have changed slightly. It is now a stated aim to find and bring to justice Mullah Omar as well as Osama bin Laden. It is my suspicion that bin Laden has long since departed Afghanistan and is almost certainly elsewhere—in Chechnya or even Algeria. Mullah Omar may or may not still be within the national borders—the 250,000-odd square miles that constitute Afghanistan, but we know that large remaining elements of al-Qaeda and Taliban fighters are. What if some are not? What if, as is believed, there are elements in neighbouring Baluchistan, the North-West Frontier province or even Kashmir? What will the orders to our troops be then?

[Mr. Hugo Swire]

To my way of thinking, something has already gone slightly wrong with the campaign. I suspect that it is a failure of operational intelligence. I suspect that the number of al-Qaeda fighters killed was overestimated, and the remaining number still alive and willing to fight underestimated.

We know that the Americans have encountered much heavier fighting than they had anticipated during Operation Anaconda. We do not know accurately what casualties they have suffered to date. While I, like other right hon. and hon. Members, applaud the work of the US 10th Mountain Division, it is clear that elements are battle-weary—hence the request for assistance from the Royal Marines.

I believe that it is right that we have responded positively to that request, but given the history of British and even Soviet involvement in Afghanistan, we need to bear in mind an exit strategy. For how long should we be prepared to be there? Clearly, until we have finished the job.

Only yesterday, CIA director George Tenet stated in evidence to the Senate armed services committee:

"you're entering into another phase here, that actually is more difficult because you are probably looking at smaller units who intend to really operate against you in classic insurgency format."

It is obvious that the United States is nervous about being drawn into a protracted guerrilla war in Afghanistan. History shows that it has every right to be but it must not be up to Britain to fill the vacuum in the event of America's attentions being diverted to new theatres.

It is not an easy time for the Secretary of State for Defence or indeed the Government to commit British forces to front-line combat operations. As we have heard again and again in speeches from hon. Members on both sides of the House this afternoon, we have the finest, most professional forces in the world. We know that they will do whatever it is they are asked to do. That is their duty, just as it is our duty as politicians to support their endeavours; to make certain that the task set for them by the Government is achievable; that they have all the necessary back-up and equipment they need; that their orders and aims are made crystal clear; and that their families and loved ones left behind are properly taken care of. We know that they will not let us down. We in turn must play our part in supporting them to the fullest.

7.6 pm

Jim Knight (South Dorset): I join other hon. Members from both sides of the House in welcoming the deployment of 45 Commando and their support element in Afghanistan.

There is little pleasure, I am sure, in sending service personnel into highly dangerous combat, but there must also be great pride that British armed forces are found to be the best for the job, and it is right that we should play a full part in finishing off what we started in standing shoulder to shoulder with the United States after 11 September, which has already achieved the ending of the Taliban regime and of a safe haven for al-Qaeda.

It has already been shown that UK armed forces are uniquely skilled in peacekeeping. We have highly skilled troops deployed all over the world, most recently to great effect in Operation Essential Harvest in Macedonia, and now in commanding the international security assistance force in Afghanistan. Others are increasing their capability in that growing area of work but I believe that the UK is still uniquely respected in that role. That is a dangerous job, albeit perhaps not a popular or glamorous one, and I pay great tribute to the troops currently deployed in Kabul. I am delighted that the ISAF headquarters is being handed over to the Germans, as was successfully done in Macedonia. I will come back to the handover of the command of ISAF later.

It is surely a great compliment that the United States, the supremely equipped military power in the world, which on the face of it does not need us, has called on us for the very difficult and dangerous remaining mission in Afghanistan. It is not just our peacekeeping capability that deserves great pride.

I again pay tribute to our armed forces. I was fortunate enough to meet members of "Whisky" company in Oman, one of the companies in 45 Commando. The hon. Member for Newark (Patrick Mercer) described them as

"the finest body of men that we are ever likely to deploy overseas."—[*Official Report*, 18 March 2002; Vol. 382, c. 47.]

I do not have the colonel's expertise but they seemed very tough, very keen and very professional to me. Incidentally, they were also successfully using the first roll-outs of the Bowman communications system when I saw them in Oman. I know that, waiting in the less than perfect conditions aboard HMS Ocean, they will be eager to do the job they are trained to do as part of the deployment. I say to my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, South (Alan Simpson) that they are specialist troops ideal for removing the threat that remains in the scattered parts of the country.

The pride that I have in our armed forces is matched by a pride in the work of the Department for International Development in so often leading the world on debt relief, poverty eradication and emergency response, and pride in our foreign policy which projects a balanced and just response to events around the world. Our credible military and humanitarian force is matched by our diplomatic skill, but questions do remain and I welcome this opportunity to raise them.

The capability to which I have paid tribute is remarkable and we achieve great value for money, but we are right up against limits of capacity. Yesterday, with other members of the Select Committee on Defence, I visited RAF Coningsby. It has no recruitment problem but retention is very difficult. The situation is starting to improve with the new retention package but there is no doubt that, particularly for support grades such as catering, continuous overseas deployment is damaging family life, and the strain is showing. There is a vicious circle: as another person leaves, it increases the strain on those who remain. I know from my constituency and from feedback I have had from Bovington that those in Coningsby and, indeed, in the RAF are not alone in that regard. I know that in broad terms the Army deployment is now at 1997 levels but I do not think that that is the full story when we look at individual grades and individual services within the armed forces as a whole.

We are close to having to take some difficult decisions, which the deployment brings into full relief. I see only three options. First, to reduce our long-standing commitments: do we still need the current level of

deployment in Northern Ireland or the Falklands? Secondly, we could make fewer new commitments and pool some capabilities with our European allies—the former supported by the Opposition, the latter perhaps not. Like the Opposition, I cannot name what to cut, so I effectively discount the option of commitment cuts. Thirdly, we could continue to do more, but with more resources and more recruitment.

My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary cannot comment on discussions with the Treasury, but I wish him well in securing the necessary extra money to go with the extra chapter of the strategic defence review, the option that I favour. We must continue the Government's upward trend on defence spending.

I have some further questions. Will the Minister comment on a report from Reuters this morning on Vice-President Cheney's visit to Turkey? It states:

"'I think we're pretty close,' he said referring to talks with largely Muslim Turkey on leading the security force. 'They've agreed to consider the possibility.'

Issues outstanding include financial support, how forces would be transported, communications and intelligence support.

'I think there's general agreement that what we are talking about here for the ISAF is focused in and around Kabul. We're not talking about expanding it to other regions. The United States will clearly have to find ways to deal with problems that may arise in Mazar-i-Sharif . . . or Kandahar.'"

How close are we to agreement on Turkey's takeover, given that the list of outstanding issues in that quote from the Vice-President seems pretty major? What discussions have the Government had with the United States about dealing with problems that may arise outside Kabul? Is it likely, as the Vice-President suggested, that the force would be US-led, and under what mandate?

Finally, will the Minister comment on the longer term? We are talking about a substantial level of deployment. Should our foreign policy require further ground operations, is there further capacity to do more in Afghanistan or elsewhere in the middle east? Do we need to scale back commitment elsewhere and increase capability in other sectors, such as special forces?

In conclusion, I have made my support for the deployment in Afghanistan clear. I also support our foreign policy with accompanying commitments for the varied skills of our armed forces. I know that the new chapter of the strategic defence review will deal with many of my questions, but I would be grateful if the Minister responded to some of them today.

7.13 pm

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for South Dorset (Jim Knight), whose remarks were informed and measured. He asked several questions and this debate provides the ideal forum for the Minister to respond. I am pleased that Mr. Speaker granted the Standing Order No. 24 emergency debate today, allowing the House the opportunity to present to the Government its views on the substantial deployment of troops in Afghanistan in a war situation. It is different from the position in Kabul where the international security assistance force is guaranteeing security, helping to ensure law and order and assisting the interim Government.

I can only pray, as have other contributors to the debate, that the warlords, the Northern Alliance and the Pashtun forces can work together as part of the interim Government and bring permanent stability and peace to Afghanistan, depriving terrorist organisations of refuge in the country. Remaining elements of al-Qaeda and the Taliban are now fighting from caves in the eastern mountains of Afghanistan. I hope that the special forces that we are sending in—they are without reservation the best trained and most disciplined in the world—will be successful in routing those elements. I make no bones about the need to remove them, because they are a danger to mankind and to the future stability and prosperity of Afghanistan.

I said in an earlier intervention on the Secretary of State that I entirely endorse the Government's actions, as does my hon. Friend the Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin). We are fully behind the deployment of 1,700 additional personnel to Afghanistan to carry out a job for which they are ideally trained and suited.

In common with my hon. Friend the Member for Louth and Horncastle (Sir Peter Tapsell), I was in America on 11 September. I was not in New York on that date, but 60 hours before the two towers of the World Trade Centre were bombed by hijacked civilian aircraft, my wife— my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton)—myself and our second son who works in New York, just two and a half blocks from what was then the World Trade Centre, were on top of the south tower, so we felt close to the American people in what they experienced on 11 September.

I would not go as far as my hon. Friend the Member for Louth and Horncastle in saying that the American people are seeking revenge. What happened on that date was that, for the first time in history, American soil was invaded, so their attention was highly focused on the dangers of international terrorism. The world as a whole, after many decades of tolerating international terrorism, has realised that it is a scourge that needs to be eradicated.

That can be done in many ways, but it is not the purpose of this debate to describe how to ensure that countries do not become a haven for terrorist organisations such as al-Qaeda led by Osama bin Laden. However, we can work in Afghanistan to narrow the scope for world terrorism to operate: it will be reduced, squeezed and reduced again. In the end, the evil that terrorists perpetrate will not be tolerated in any part of the world.

I am one of the few Members on either side of the House who has served in Her Majesty's forces—in my case, not as a regular soldier, but as a national service soldier in the late 1950s. That experience has stayed with me ever since and was a wonderful teacher. Having served in the Army then and, two years ago, having participated in the armed forces parliamentary scheme—I recommend it to all hon. Members as a worthwhile opportunity—I have come to understand what motivates those who serve in the armed services.

I sought an assurance from the Secretary of State earlier, when he was responding to my hon. Friend the Member for North Essex, that the Government would guarantee that all facilities, all resources and all equipment will be provided to our forces who are facing a war situation in Afghanistan. If we expect our soldiers—men and women—to fight and risk their lives, the House should ensure that the Ministry of Defence guarantees them all that they need to carry out that work.

[Mr. Nicholas Winterton]

I have a tremendous respect for our armed services, who do a wonderful job. I believe that they are the most respected armed services in the world. I am not critical in any way of the United States, the most powerful nation in the world, but historically and traditionally, our armed services are trusted and respected and have always proved their worth wherever they have fought in defence of freedom and peace.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Kensington and Chelsea (Mr. Portillo) uttered wise remarks when he drew on his experience to give a measured explanation of how he viewed the situation. It is for such a reason that the emergency debate is essential. I only wish that the Government had offered the time themselves. However, I commend the Secretary of State on the full and proper way in which he expressed the Government's position and responded to many interventions. That is what the House is about. I praise our armed services and fully support the Government. I hope that the House sends the message to our armed services that we are entirely with them in the difficult job that they are doing and that we wish them success.

7.20 pm

Mr. Malcolm Savidge (Aberdeen, North): I have supported our action in Afghanistan from the beginning and I agree that the new deployment is necessary as part of our legitimate response to the atrocity of 11 September and of our legitimate aim to destroy the al-Qaeda terrorist network.

As ever, the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) made a thought-provoking speech. He raised the concern that security troops will be in Kabul while combat troops are elsewhere. I would never take any of his concerns lightly, but I share the hope expressed by the Prime Minister in Prime Minister's questions that the risk of retaliatory action may be reduced because they are in distinct areas of the country.

During the campaign we have heard, because we are dealing with Afghanistan, the usual jeremiads about the experience of the Victorian British and the USSR. People who cite those are guilty of three things: first, of presenting a far too mechanistic theory of history; secondly, of underestimating the extent to which victory has already been gained; and, thirdly, of underestimating the fact that al-Qaeda in particular and the Taliban in general, are not indigenous Afghan forces, but largely foreign and alien forces.

My hon. Friends the Members for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle) and for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson) raised the spectre of Vietnam. In one important respect the action that we are discussing moves us away from one of the dangers of Vietnam, where high-altitude, and sometimes indiscriminate, bombing led to too many innocent people being killed and to the alienation of the indigenous population.

Mr. Paul Marsden (Shrewsbury and Atcham): How does the hon. Gentleman explain, therefore, that up to 8,000 civilians died as a result of the bombs dropped on Afghanistan? Does he not think that that alienates the population?

Mr. Savidge: I do not know the precise number of civilian casualties and I suspect that some people have exaggerated them considerably. However, I was worried that some of the bombing might be less discriminating than it should be. I was especially concerned about the bombing of certain towns. The form of deployment that we are discussing means that specialist forces can target action specifically at armed enemies, and that is a correct approach.

The campaign has been more successful than the Jeremiahs predicted, but the very fact that the new deployment is necessary should be a salutary reminder that war is not an easy option. There is a real danger that we may suffer serious casualties, which is why it is right that the tone of the debate has been sombre.

In our continuing campaign against terrorism since 11 September, we must recognise that it will not necessarily be appropriate to take similar military action in all circumstances. We must also realise that major wars to change Governments are certainly not an easy option. For that reason, and because of the concern about overstretch, we should be wary of extending our war to countries not related to events on 11 September. We should concentrate on the present campaign against terror that is related to those terrible events.

It is important to our Afghan campaign that we have the backing of a United Nations resolution and the support of a broad international coalition. We must be wary of doing anything to alienate that coalition or to divide it, or of taking any actions that could appear to be unilateral.

Reference was made in an intervention to press speculation that there might be an association between al-Qaeda and Iraq. It is important to remember that that speculation was started by a member of the present Bush Administration who, during an interview in Congress, said it should be recognised that countries like Iraq are happy to co-operate with terrorist organisations like al-Qaeda. That does not sound as if it is based on hard intelligence and we should be wary of using such silly speculation as a basis for considering future action. British military action should be based on intelligence in both senses of the word. It should never be based on the ideology of the US hard right. Under no circumstances should we consider sacrificing British interests or British lives for the sake of a special relationship with a particular US Administration.

The action in Afghanistan is based on a just cause—our response to events on 11 September. We must be careful, however, that we do not take action when it is less obvious that we have a just cause or a proper right, or if it could seem in any way that we are assuming a right to start wars with other countries. We should not lightly go to war in this region. We have been successful because we have had clear objectives and there were predictable consequences, despite the delicate situation in relation to Pakistan. We should not lightly go to war in regions where there could be wholly unpredictable consequences and if there is a chance of causing a catastrophe, possibly involving exchanges of weapons of mass destruction, with perhaps one side using biological and chemical weapons and another using nuclear weapons.

I support the action, but I hope that when we consider future action, we seek to maintain the unity of the international community in dealing with a dangerous and difficult world.

7.28 pm

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): I intend to be brief because the key part of our purpose in calling for the emergency debate was to give the House itself a chance to express its views. I am sure that you will agree, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the quality of the debate and its measured nature have fully vindicated Mr. Speaker's decision to accede to our request. Furthermore, it is inconceivable that our involvement in Afghanistan could be increased from a peacekeeping role to a war-fighting role without Parliament having the opportunity to consider the issue.

The debate also provides us with an opportunity to correct the record. The Prime Minister told the House on Monday that my right hon. Friend the leader of the Opposition

"does not believe that we should be in Afghanistan".—[*Official Report*, 18 March 2002; Vol. 382, c. 25.]

That is entirely untrue. My right hon. Friend and the Conservative party fully support the deployment of British troops for fighting terrorism, as part of an important contribution to the coalition with the United States in attempting to eradicate the al-Qaeda terrorist network in Afghanistan. Indeed, we have consistently made the point that our troops are trained for war fighting, although sufficiently versatile to perform superbly in the role of peace enforcers. I hope that no hon. Member is under any illusion, given the speeches made by my hon. Friend the Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) and my other colleagues, about the fact that we support the Government in their move to deploy our forces further in Afghanistan.

This is not an occasion on which to divide the House tonight. My hon. Friend the Member for North Essex asked a number of key questions that we believe the Government should address, and I intend to turn to them in a moment. The issues raised are not pedantic points of debate, but critical questions that the House and the British people are entitled to ask. We are entitled to seek assurances that the Government have addressed those issues before committing our troops to what the Secretary of State said on Monday would be missions

"conducted in unforgiving and hostile terrain against a dangerous enemy."—[*Official Report*, 18 March 2002; Vol. 382, c. 39.]

Indeed, the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) articulated the view of the House when he said that there was nothing disloyal in seeking to call the Government to account before deploying our troops.

In the short time available to me, I should like to go through some of the points made in the debate, but if I miss a few hon. Members' contributions, I hope that they will not take it as a personal slight on what they said. I first turn to the right hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George), the Chairman of the Select Committee on Defence, whose near unequivocal support of Her Majesty's Government ought to go down in the history books; it was as near as any Government have come to having his approbation on a defence issue. The Government are entitled to take that as full support from him. He was right to say that the Select Committee always maintained that the war will not be resolved quickly, which is certainly the realisation of all hon. Members tonight.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Kensington and Chelsea (Mr. Portillo) made a splendid speech—a man who was unquestionably one of the finest Secretaries of State for Defence that we have seen in modern times and a man who commanded enormous respect in the military community throughout the United Kingdom. His loss to that office in 1997 was a loss to the country as well. He was right to say that this is no time to flinch and that, if we fail in this mission, al-Qaeda will regroup, thereby threatening not only Afghanistan and the stability that we seek to create there, but other neighbouring countries, as well as those further afield. Leaving al-Qaeda intact would, as he said, only serve to encourage terrorism elsewhere in the world.

The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson)—a former Defence Minister—made an extremely important speech and a very interesting contribution, in which he set out the great difficulties involved in Britain having a unique dual role. I shall turn again to that matter in a moment.

My hon. Friend the Member for Louth and Horncastle (Sir Peter Tapsell) is a man who provides the House with continuity. I always feel that we have a connection right the way back to many Parliaments before this one, and it will come as no surprise to the House to know that, like me, he has been up the Khyber. As ever, he speaks with great authority—he is a man who understands parts of the world that many of us will never have been near. He was right to say in our rather cool British way—indeed, in his rather cool British way—that we should carefully consider every step on the road, not make hasty decisions.

My hon. Friend was also right to utter some salutary warnings, not only about the experiences of the Russians when they were in Afghanistan, but to remind us, the country and indeed the civilised world that—even if we root out all those people from the caves and clear them from Afghanistan, which we are sure will be done—there are nevertheless sleepers in the United States and the United Kingdom who threaten us and remain permanently ready to cause mayhem and havoc in our country.

The hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Alan Simpson) made an interesting speech. As he said, he does not know where the military endgame will be, and I fear that that is something which we all feel.

My hon. Friend the Member for East Devon (Mr. Swire) made a perceptive speech. He spoke on behalf of one of the great homes of the Royal Marines and was right to remind us of his own military experience, which he brings to the House and which we therefore value. He also reminded us of the condition of the families—those wives, mothers, daughters and indeed, I suspect, husbands sons and others—whose loved ones are about to embark on a mission for us in defence of freedom. He was right to remind us that we owe them a debt of gratitude and that, throughout the forthcoming weeks, we must support them as well.

The hon. Member for South Dorset (Jim Knight) made a very perceptive speech. Indeed, he put his finger on the key point that the Government face two options—we all face them: one is to reduce our long-standing commitments; the other is to provide more resources, and he made his views absolutely explicit.

[Mr. Gerald Howarth]

My hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) made, as ever, a robust contribution, in which he said that we must have the necessary kit. I am sure that Ministers will be well aware not only of the need to do that, but that any failure to provide our troops with the kit that they require will be a dereliction of duty, and I am sure that Ministers will not wish to be cast in that light.

I wish to ask four questions that have not been adequately dealt with by the Government, and I hope that the Minister will do so in responding to the debate. First and foremost, will he say what proportion of the front-line forces in the mountains will be provided by the United Kingdom? That question was put to the Secretary of State, but I do not think that he was able to answer it. We are entitled to know to what extent those forces are being provided by us and to what extent by the United States of American and, indeed, other countries whose forces are active in the front line.

Secondly, if the numbers of al-Qaeda produce a greater threat than we anticipate, what plans exist to reinforce 45 Commando? Thirdly, what is ISAF's mission? That is a critical point about ISAF's role, which was mentioned by the hon. Member for Nottingham, South. Is our commitment to ISAF open ended? For example, 3 Commando Brigade headquarters will be inside ISAF's remit area. If the peacekeeping forces come under attack and need to be reinforced, can the Minister explain how the lines of communication will work? How will that issue be resolved operationally, so that those forces can be reinforced—presumably by troops under the command of US Central Command, Centcom?

Finally, the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North raised the issue of Britain's unique role in providing front-line combat troops and peacekeepers on the streets of Kabul. The Minister will have heard the hon. Member's comments on the very real difficulties involved, and the right hon. and learned Member for North–East Fife also made that point. The House would welcome more explanation from the Minister, to try to help us with that issue.

The House has made it abundantly clear tonight that it is under no illusions about the dangers that our troops face and the responsibility that rests on the House, and especially on those Ministers who are responsible for the deployment. As Major General Hagenbeck, commander of US ground forces in Afghanistan, has said, the al-Qaeda and Taliban fighters represent

"a very smart, aggressive and sophisticated enemy."

The latest deployment is composed of commando gunners, engineers, logisticians, signallers, medics and medium-lift helicopter support personnel. Together they constitute a coherent battle group, which has had the advantage of taking part in the recent demanding exercise in Oman, and we acknowledge, as the right hon. Member for Walsall, South said, the foresight of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in holding them well forward in preparation for just this eventuality.

However, the heart of the operation will be the infantry. The Royal Marine Commandos enjoy an awesome reputation around the world, by land and by sea—per mare per terram. We know that, just as in the Falklands, those green berets will instil fear in the hearts and minds of al-Qaeda, as they have in this country's enemies ever since they took Gibraltar 300 years ago. They are tough, versatile and highly trained. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Kensington and Chelsea said, they are lions commanded by lions. On behalf of Her Majesty's loyal Opposition, I wish them all possible good fortune as they embark on a mission which, although many thousands of miles from these islands, is designed to search out and destroy those responsible for one of the most appalling atrocities of modern times and whose continued existence threatens our very way of life.

7.40 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): We have been fortunate in the considerable time that the House has been able to find over the past six months to comment on and debate the war on terrorism. That has provided some thoughtful and measured exchanges. It is certainly evident that, as the debates have progressed over the months, the quality of contribution has improved. Today's debate is certainly no exception.

I assure the House that its general support and many, if not most, of hon. Members' contributions are appreciated by the Government. It is important, of course, that the outside world and our armed forces see and understand the strength of support that the Government command in our actions. I thank the House for its support. The opportunity to reaffirm support for our armed forces, which has been taken in all quarters of this House, is clearly vital, particularly at a time like this. We heard that on Monday, but it always bears repetition.

I shall attempt to answer as many specific points raised as possible—of all the debates to which I have responded from the Front Bench, the fewest questions have been asked of me in this one—but I want first to highlight some of the points made earlier by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. First, we believe that we are right to act in Afghanistan. Secondly, we think that the House should note that the action that the international community has taken to date has been successful. Thirdly, British forces have throughout played a vital role in that success.

I hope and trust that many in the House were reassured by my right hon. Friend's explaining that, first, there is no incompatibility or inconsistency in operating within the international security assistance force and undertaking the missions that we are planning with the deployment of 45 Commando.

Secondly, on the question of Turkey, we have been as honest and open as possible in explaining the status of the negotiations and the prospect of Turkey assuming leadership of ISAF. Frankly, all that I can add is that discussions continue, they will be continuing this week, and we hope that they will reach a resolution very quickly. Thirdly, we have constantly stressed—I am sure that that is why the point has also been accepted by the Opposition, certainly by the official Opposition—that the rooting out of the remaining al-Qaeda elements would take time, but that it must be done.

Members have commented and made suggestions on a number of what I would term specific and quite detailed military issues. I hesitate to disappoint Members of all parties, but we generally take our advice from our military staff. That may answer many of the helpful and, perhaps

particularly, not quite so helpful suggestions that have been made. I know that many Members have an interest in military affairs, and I certainly recognise that some have military experience—some over many generations, including in the regions concerned—but I do not think that any would claim to match that of the Chief of the Defence Staff.

The House might care to note in passing that in the autumn the Chief of the Defence Staff said:

"We are in this for the long haul".

He was right then, and he is right now. We do not send our forces off around the world on a whim. His advice has been crucial in determining what forces we deploy, for which missions and for how long.

I want to address one or two specific points mentioned. I hope that the Opposition are now satisfied with the response that they have been given: 45 Commando group command and control is entirely separate from that of ISAF, and is integrated in the system for patrolling active operations in the country. The 45 Commando group will come directly under Centcom's command, through our own officers. Frankly, that is entirely normal and correct.

Exit strategies have been mentioned, in which regard I sometimes feel one is expected almost to assume the mantle of the forecaster of tomorrow's racing. It really is not like that. We make the best estimates that we can. The exit strategy on this occasion is simple: we will leave when the task is completed.

I want to cover some of the more detailed points made in the debate. It was suggested by—I think—more than one hon. Member that perhaps some form of armour should be available to the force. That point was equally quickly knocked down by those who have ever been in the area. To provide such armour would surely create a force that is the antithesis of the Royal Marines. It is correct to say that 45 Commando soldiers are lightly equipped. That is one reason for their being what they are. They are mobile and their use in mountain terrain in much of Afghanistan depends on that ability. They rely on speed, surprise and flexibility of operation. They form a composite unit; they have their own light artillery, logistic support and engineers.

Hugh Robertson: I should like to clear up that point. There is all the world of difference, as I am sure the Minister realises, between armour and light armour. The Marines, as a light-armoured force, have been training with light armour for many years. Indeed, I went on such an exercise with them in Norway and spent a whole summer attached to them. Such light-armoured vehicles could play some part in Afghanistan.

Dr. Moonie: I do not want to go into too much operational detail about what we are doing. I assure the hon. Gentleman, however, that if we need armoured vehicles they will be supplied.

Mr. Jenkin: Is the hon. Gentleman able to answer the question that the Secretary of State was unable to answer? Obviously, many of the Marines whom we are deploying will be in the front line. What proportion of the front line will be British forces rather than Americans and others?

Dr. Moonie: That is a rather difficult question to answer. I am not here to give details of an operational point. This is not a single deployment. We are sending troops to add to the forces that are available in order to root out remnants of the al-Qaeda network. Therefore, on the basis of the information that we have, each deployment will be of the strength thought necessary to carry out the job involved. I cannot answer the question with any certainty. One can conceive of an operation involving part of the frontline strength, and of an operation involving all of it. One can conceive of them acting on their own in relatively small numbers, and of engaging all forces committed to the action. I cannot give any more or clearer answers than that. I hope that that is enough to satisfy the hon. Gentleman.

On the support that is necessary, we must recognise that complete air supremacy is available in Afghanistan. Therefore, at any time during any conflict, the Marines will be able to call on quite a wide array of air-support measures. Clearly, as I have said, we will make provision should armour be thought necessary, but I honestly do not think that that will be necessary.

The point was made again about the Pakistani border. Anybody who has been anywhere near the border in Afghanistan will know full well just how difficult it is to contain. We acknowledge that the terrain, geography and ethnicity of the people are factors that demonstrate the difficulty of ensuring that the border remains closed to any member of al-Qaeda who is trying to evade capture. We certainly continue to urge the Pakistan Government to take measures to help to seal the border where necessary, and they have been very helpful in that regard.

We can confirm—again, I shall not give any details—that full operational intercapability of communications is available, as it has been throughout our operations in Afghanistan. Our Marines routinely train with US forces, so they are well used to operating together.

On some of the specific points made, the analogy of the dragon's teeth is not a particularly good one, as Perseus defeated the warriors involved—

Mr. Menzies Campbell: After some time.

Dr. Moonie: But he did defeat them. I shall recite the story in Greek, if the House wants; in fact, I cannot. Enough of such unseemly levity. The right hon. and learned Gentleman pointed out that our people are going into a dangerous situation.

Much has been made of the risk to ISAF. When ISAF was deployed, it was never envisaged that it was going into a risk-free situation. There have always been exits in view, so that if the worst came to the worst and anything really vicious happened there, the force could withdraw to Bagram and defend itself. I can assure hon. Members in all parts of the House that it can defend itself very well.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: A question was asked about the number of troops that were part of our contribution to ISAF. Am I right in thinking that the figure is about 1,800?

Dr. Moonie: The figures is about 1,600 at present and is scheduled to drop as the mission develops.

Our forces are involved in two distinct roles—peacekeeping duties and top-level fighting. We excel in both. That point must be underlined.

Mr. Weir: The Minister has not mentioned the families of the soldiers, a subject that was mentioned during the

[Mr. Weir]

debate. He will understand that those families are interested less in geopolitics or the war against terrorism than in the fact that the soldiers are in action. Has the Minister any plans to visit the families?

Dr. Moonie: I have had plans to visit that area for some time. As the hon. Gentleman knows, I live near there. I shall be happy to visit the families involved.

It being three hours after the commencement of the proceedings, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *interrupted the proceedings pursuant to Standing Order No. 24 (Adjournment on a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration) and the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.*

Adoption and Children Bill (Programme) (No. 3)

7.52 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Jacqui Smith): I beg to move,

That the Orders of 29th October 2001 (Adoption and Children Bill (Programme)) and 23rd January 2002 (Adoption and Children Bill (Programme) (No. 2)) shall be varied as follows—

Consideration and Third Reading

(1) Proceedings on consideration and Third Reading shall be concluded in three allotted days.

(2) The proceedings on consideration shall be taken on each of the allotted days as shown in the first column of the following Table and shall be taken in the order so shown, and each part of the proceedings shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion at the time specified in the second column of the Table.

Table

Proceedings	*Time for conclusion of proceedings*
First allotted day	
Amendments relating to Clauses Nos. 2 to 16, New Clauses relating to the Adoption and Children Act Register, amendments relating to Clauses Nos. 116 to 120, 123 and 124	Two hours after the commencement of proceedings on the Motion for this Order or Ten o'clock, whichever is the earlier
Second allotted day	
Amendments relating to Clauses Nos. 81 to 88, 121, 122, 125, 52, 54 to 63 and 75, Schedule No. 1, Clauses Nos. 76 and 77, Schedule No. 2, Clauses Nos. 78 to 80, 89 to 94, 96 to 100, 103, 105, 106, 114 and 115, New Clauses relating to Part 2, amendments relating to Clauses Nos. 107 to 112	Ten o'clock
Third allotted day	
New Clauses relating to the remainder of Part 1, amendments relating to Clauses Nos. 1, 17 to 51, 53 and 64 to 74	Three hours after the commencement of proceedings on the Bill
New Clauses relating to the remainder of Part 3, amendments relating to Clauses Nos. 113, 95, 101, 102, 104, 126, Schedules Nos. 3, 4 and 5, Clauses Nos. 127 to 134, Schedule No. 6, Clauses Nos. 135 to 137, remaining new Clauses, new Schedules and remaining proceedings on consideration.	Four hours after the commencement of proceedings on the Bill

(3) The proceedings on Third Reading shall be brought to a conclusion six hours after the commencement of the proceedings on the Bill on the third allotted day.

(4) An allotted day is one on which the Bill is put down on the main business as first Government Order of the Day.

Because of this afternoon's emergency debate, we had to revisit the programme motion late yesterday. I take the opportunity to thank the usual channels for their co-operation in enabling us to make the necessary changes. Following a resolution of the Programming Sub-Committee, it had previously been agreed that Report should be taken over two days, to allow for the fullest possible consideration of the issues that had arisen in Committee, the changes that the Government undertook to make in response to concerns raised by hon. Members during an extremely useful Committee stage, and

concerns raised by those who gave evidence in the Special Standing Committee. So far, the process has been always been open to input from stakeholders.

The motion provides for debates to take place over three days, including tonight. I emphasise that in providing for this revision, it is our intention to allow even more time than was previously available. The second day is not programmed in detail. There will be an opportunity to revisit the motion when the timing of the remaining stages becomes clearer. Of course, there will be full consultation before any revised motion is laid.

The proposed programme provides extensive opportunities to debate aspects of the Bill that attracted particular interest in Committee—for example, disclosure of information concerning adoption, the modernisation of the legal process of adoption, and some of the important changes introduced by the Government, such as the extension of the Adoption and Children Act register to Scotland. We should have an opportunity to discuss that this evening.

I commend the programme motion to the House.

7.54 pm

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): I thank the Minister for a generous allocation of time, which has come about because of the emergency debate this afternoon. The Opposition welcome that. We are itching to get back to this important Bill, from which we have been absent for some two months, since we finished the 24th of our sittings in Committee and Special Standing Committee, way back on 17 January. We are keen to get on with the work of progressing such an important Bill, giving it as much time as possible to be considered in another place, and allowing it to become law as soon as possible. Many of the measures that we have been discussing in detail are sorely needed in the best interests of many children who need stable homes—a luxury that they do not have at present.

I take issue with the need for a programme motion at all, and the need for the programming of the entire Bill through its various stages in the House. Right from the start, the Bill clearly had cross-party support. All hon. Members interested in the subject made a constructive contribution on Second Reading and in some detail, with considerable expertise, during the Committee stages.

This is a case in which programming has been counterproductive. It is a shame that, because of the Standing Orders of the House, we were not able to have more sessions or longer sessions during the pre-scrutiny witness stage at the outset, which we all found exceedingly interesting and helpful, but which was severely curtailed. Given the short period between the witness stage and Standing Committee, there was little time to revisit in more detail some of the issues that the expert witnesses brought up in response to our questions.

Because of the previous programme motion, there was an imbalance in the way the time was allocated during the Committee stage, the result of which is that 43 clauses were unscrutinised, and seven were only partly scrutinised before the knife fell. That means that 37 per cent.—more than one third—of the clauses had no Committee time. Even the more generous allocation that we are getting because of this afternoon's debate does not make up for what we missed out in Committee, where we had little time to debate the detail of placement orders, the problems of recovery of children by parents, parental consent issues, and the finer detail of the adopted children register and the adoption contact register. Two of the five schedules received no consideration in Committee—those dealing with registration, disclosure of birth records and so on.

We welcome the additional time. It is not my intention to take up the entire time allocated for discussion of the programme motion, as we want to get on with the debate. The way in which the emergency debate this afternoon shifted the timetable is helpful. It was only at the end of last week that the Government disclosed their hand on the Bill and tabled about 90 amendments and four new clauses, with a long letter by way of briefing notes from the Minister. Why has it taken two months for those amendments to be put before the House, giving us little time to consider some intricate and technical issues? It is a shame that we have not had longer to consider them.

As many witnesses attested, the Bill is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to change the situation regarding adoption and adoption law in this country. We need to get it right, and we are more likely to do it by maximum scrutiny of the highly technical amendments that we will discuss on Report. It is worth mentioning that the Bill raises certain issues, especially relating to adoption by unmarried couples, domestic violence and contact orders, which, although important, have received undue publicity in the press. I would not like those two issues to overshadow and dominate a Bill that deals with many other important, complex and detailed issues relating to providing better homes for children. It is important to have a good spread of time for those issues.

The Minister said that we may have to revisit the programme motion. I believe that that is a strong likelihood, either because there will be another emergency debate or because many more Government amendments will be tabled later. Few Government amendments have been tabled so far for the second allotted day, especially for the latter half of it. No Government amendments have been tabled for the third allotted day, on what are likely to be interesting matters for debate.

When are the second and third allotted—and, I hope, full—days likely to be? Will the Minister assure us that she will do everything in her power to ensure that they take place sooner rather than later? It is an oddity, although I gather that it is not unique, for Report days not to fall in quick succession. We do not want the trail to go cold.

We shall not object to the programme motion, but we have some difficulties with it. We are agreeing to it reluctantly and giving the Government a great deal of trust. I hope that in return the Government will give us as much notice as possible of any further amendments, with as full an explanation of them as possible. I hope too that the gap between the Government giving us the information and our being able to debate the amendments will be as long as possible.

There is great and increasing interest in the Bill from outside the House. The many interested professional bodies and voluntary agencies take a close interest, and they have been immensely useful to Committee members of all parties in the way that they have informed our debate. In addition, ordinary people have a real interest in adoption, either because they want to adopt or because

[Tim Loughton]

adoption may become a real option for younger members of their families. The current system does not work as well as it might in helping people in such circumstances.

The Opposition will not oppose the programme motion, but it is worth putting those provisos on record. In the spirit of co-operation, I hope that the Minister will respond generously.

8.3 pm

Mr. Hilton Dawson (Lancaster and Wyre): In supporting the principle of programming, which has focused the House's attention effectively, I draw my hon. Friend the Minister's attention to a big problem looming in the first part of the third allotted day. Three hours have been provided for what is bound to be a huge debate involving a wider range of people than those involved in Committee about unmarried couples' ability to adopt.

The issue of access to information is also involved. That huge, complex and important part of the Bill needs thorough debate about the issues to do with placement, centred on clauses 31 to 33. Might a way be found of distinguishing between those issues, and in particular between unmarried couples and placement orders? That would afford discrete time, in particular to debate placement decisions, which I fear might be completely pushed out of debate by the weight of interest in the unmarried couples issue.

Finally, when our consideration resumes, I should prefer the two days to be taken together to facilitate debate.

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): The need to discuss both placement orders and unmarried couples depends on how contentious the latter issue is, at least for Ministers and hon. Members of many parties who support the contention. If the Minister were to clarify the Government's thinking on that, it would help us decide whether the proposed amount of time was about right.

Mr. Dawson: I hope that we shall not encounter much contention about placement orders, either. I look forward to my hon. Friend the Minister tabling a few amendments on that issue, too.

8.5 pm

Sandra Gidley (Romsey): I shall be brief, because I do not want to take up too much time. I welcome the extra time provided for the Bill. However, an awful lot of Government amendments have been tabled, and, unlike the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton), I have not received an explanatory letter. I should be grateful if the Minister would ensure that one reached me. That was possibly the result of an office oversight, but it would be useful if an explanation were forthcoming.

8.6 pm

Mr. Robert Walter (North Dorset): I hesitate to delay the House on a measure that has considerable cross-party support, but I have two points. First, the Special Standing Committee was an example of how the House should consider legislation and take evidence from interested parties. On several occasions, the overwhelming weight of the evidence and opinion in the Committee was at one, and the only people who were out of step were the Government. We shall discuss some of the issues involved again as we proceed.

Secondly, I want to express frustration with the concept of programming and especially about some of the provisions in the programme motion. As my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) said, some 90 Government amendments have been tabled. We have seen them only recently and they will require debate. Some are technical, and others are more complex. I am delighted that at least one is identical to an amendment that I proposed in Committee. The Government said that they wanted to take it away and think about it. I take some small credit for that technical measure.

It was frustrating in Committee when debate on important items was cut short. I remember a vivid example when the hon. Member for Luton, South (Margaret Moran) proposed some important amendments that related to access by violent parents, which reappear in the amendments listed for consideration. She had barely minutes in which to put the case, and there was no time for debate. It is important to have time for debate.

We shall not divide the House. I am grateful that we seem to have slightly more time for debate. If we must have such programme motions, we should be more creative in considering their implications.

8.9 pm

Mr. Jonathan Djanogly (Huntingdon): May I—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. The traditional way for hon. Members to catch my eye is for them to rise in their place.

Mr. Djanogly: I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I rise to support my hon. Friends' comments. The Standing Committee was the first on which I served, and I was surprised that we did not cover a third of the amendments. It was not as though it was an unfriendly Committee or that we argued needlessly. I believe that everyone who attended would agree that it was a constructive format in which to discuss an important measure. There are lessons to be learned from that in terms of programming.

My hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) mentioned that he hoped that we would not be sidetracked by a handful of contentious issues. I fully support that, but they are indeed contentious. I have received more correspondence from various organisations on the issue of contact than on virtually everything else put together. That is of some concern, considering that we did not even cover the contact clauses in Committee. I hope that the issue will be considered properly as we continue debating the Bill.

8.10 pm

Jacqui Smith: I agree with the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) that we need to address a range of issues, and that is why I welcome the extra days now available to consider the issues. I am disappointed with his comments about the Government

amendments. He cannot have it both ways. The Government have been at pains to respond to the issues raised in Committee, and we will debate the Walter amendment on Report. However, some even more important issues have been raised by stakeholders and it was important to discuss them in detail before we tabled amendments. We have listened, and taken on board their concerns.

In relation to the points raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson), we are certainly considering more amendments on the important issue of the placement process. We are looking at the evidence from stakeholders.

On the timing of the second and third days, Ministers are at the—

Tim Loughton: Mercy?

Jacqui Smith: The business managers of the House are extremely merciful. They will be the source of the decision concerning days two and three. We have heard hon. Members talk about the importance of ensuring that there is adequate time for debate. That is why I said that it was important that we also looked again at the programming motion.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Wyre that we need separate discussions on the important placement provisions and the interesting issue of the amendments on unmarried adoptions.

I apologise to the hon. Member for Romsey (Sandra Gidley) for the fact that she has not received the letter, which I believe was sent to all Committee members. I will ensure that she gets another copy because it was a good letter. It was short on flow charts, but big on explanation. I hope that that will be our approach throughout Report.

Question put and agreed to.

Orders of the Day

Adoption and Children Bill

[1ST ALLOTTED DAY]

As amended in the Standing Committee, considered.

Clause 4

ASSESSMENTS ETC. FOR ADOPTION SUPPORT SERVICES

8.13 pm

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): I beg to move amendment No. 6, in page 4, line 24, after "needs", insert—

'or needs of connected persons'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): With this it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 7, in page 4, line 30, leave out from "services", to end of line 31 and insert—

'the local authority has the duty to provide suitable services to that person.'.

No. 3, in page 4, line 30, leave out "decide whether to".

No. 4, in page 4, line 31, after "person", insert—

'and provide a written explanation of their reasons if those support services will not be forthcoming'.

No. 5, in page 5, line 9, after "conditions", insert—

'and provide for a review of a decision not to provide adoption support services,'.

Government amendments Nos. 48 and 37.

Mr. Brazier: As this is the first group of amendments in a three-day Report stage, I would like to say how much I enjoyed the Committee stage of the Bill. Originating from a long-running national and cross-party campaign, the Bill aims to help some of the most disadvantaged children. The Committee was packed with people with specialised knowledge and interest.

I will not try your patience, Mr. Deputy Speaker, by reiterating the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) about the guillotine of the Committee. I share his concerns about that, but I am pleased to have been part of the process.

Our amendments concern support services for adopters. It is difficult to exaggerate how valuable and how brave many parents who adopt a child from care are. It is easy to forget that many children are in care because they have been abused or severely neglected. They bring a package of problems into the homes of the adoptive parents, who must deal with them without any professional training.

I wish to give one example from my constituency of two little boys adopted by a family who discovered that one had been thrown out so often into the cold that his feet had to be treated for gangrene; in fact, he came close to having them amputated. The other had been locked in a cellar for years and, as a result, had no power of speech. Teaching a child to speak at the age of seven involves specialist support services. It is those sorts of specialist services that we are talking about in the amendments.

The Opposition's concern about clause 4, which deals with these services, is that, as it is drafted, social services are required to make assessments, but are not required to provide any services to support parents who have adopted children from care.

[Mr. Brazier]

There are several points that need making here. The first concerns assessment itself. An assessment must be carried out by a qualified person, in many cases a social worker. We are short of social workers. In nearly all cases, an assessment must be carried out by someone from a category of professionals of whom we are short. Yet very often it is obvious what needs doing, and if the local authority is willing to make resources available, carrying out an assessment involves an inordinate delay and a waste of time. Amendments Nos. 3 and 7 would place on a local authority the duty to provide the suitable services that adoptive parents need.

Mr. Hilton Dawson (Lancaster and Wyre): I am entirely in sympathy with what the hon. Gentleman is saying about adoptive parents receiving any service that they have been assessed as needing. Would he also apply that to natural parents, and to children living in residential care, foster care and other circumstances? Why should it apply only to adoption?

Mr. Brazier: In Committee, we agreed that there should be a requirement in some of those cases. Children being adopted from care are special cases. A failure of an adoption is very expensive for the state, as well as being a disaster for the child. This is a matter of prudence for the state, although we would all agree that the overriding concern is the child.

I wish to refer to another case from my constituency surgery; that of a girl adopted by constituents of mine from a London authority. She had been sexually abused over a long period by her father. As a result, she needed profound professional therapy. The family that adopted her was receiving no financial allowance of any kind from the London authority and it provided her with no advice. The adoptive parents were extremely poor and it must have been a desperate decision to take the child on. However, they went out and found the therapy. Their request to the authority was to have the bus tickets paid for, so that the girl could go for therapy two or three times a week. In a case such as this, what possible purpose could there be for wasting resources and time on specialist assessments if the therapy has been found by the parents? Surely the best thing would be to provide them with the bus tickets. In that case there was a happy ending—their MP chased the matter up and eventually we got the relatively small sum out of the local authority.

Mr. Dawson: A hero.

Mr. Brazier: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his kind remark.

Let me give another example. An adoptive mother rang the Adoption Forum last week, asking how she could get immediate help. One of her two children had been through a particularly bad spell and was being threatened with expulsion from school. The mother said that she had a good enough relationship with her local authority but knew that it would take many weeks, if not months, for it to respond to a request for help. She needed advice right then and there because she could see no way forward. She described how desperate she was. She felt that, in her frustration, she might be driven to a physical attack on the child or other drastic action that could be harmful to this already deeply damaged child.

The lesson here is different because the family situation might well need assessment; certainly, some serious work would be needed for the family. However, the mother needed help at the time of her call, or at least very soon. She did not need long-term assessment with no determinate date or promise of help at the end of it.

As Barnardos put it:

"the provisions contained in Clause 4 do give rise to considerable concern. The right to an assessment of their needs will be available to children and families but the local authority is then under no obligation to provide any of the services that it may have decided are needed. Any potential adoptive applicant reading this Bill would not be reassured that should they decide to take on the—"

difficult—

"task of parenting a child with very complex needs, they will not be left to cope without any real entitlement to support."

The Local Government Association sums it up very well:

"Support is vital in promoting successful placements and preventing adoption breakdown and should encourage more potential adopters."

That is the Government's No. 1 objective—more potential adopters.

The point, which relates to amendment No. 6, is that much of the help needed is for the carer—that is, one of the connected persons in the legal terminology—rather than for the child in isolation. Parents taking on a severely damaged child often need help, hence the wording of amendment No. 6.

Let me give an example from the moving testimony that we received from the Catholic Children's Society. Bath time is an important time for every mother—or perhaps, in this enlightened age, I should say every parent. It takes on a whole new dimension, however, if it involves a small child who has been repeatedly sexually abused at bath time, which is apparently the most frequent time for sexual abuse to take place. The challenge of trying to bathe a child who is terrified of being taken into the bathroom is one of a quite different order. In those circumstances, the connected person rather than the child may need the assistance.

Amendment No. 4 is a less stringent requirement for local authorities to provide a written explanation of why support services are not forthcoming. Amendment No. 5 would provide for a review of the decision not to provide such services. I will not dwell on the latter now, as we will come later to a group of amendments on independent reviews. However, if the Government cannot accept amendments Nos. 3 or 7—and I rather hope that they will—surely they could at the very least accept Nos. 4 and 5.

All too many debates in this House relate to resourcing, so it is important to place the amendments firmly in context. The question of the hon. Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson) was a fair one. Keeping children in care is very expensive. Not only is a child far more likely to thrive when adopted, but adoption also places a far smaller burden on the state and means that the child is much less likely to impinge, tragically, on the criminal justice system or mental health establishments later on.

Mr. Jonathan Djanogly (Huntingdon): My hon. Friend makes a very important point about how short-sighted it is of the local authority not to pursue the

assessment and pay for the support that is required, because compared with the cost of years in care, it is peanuts.

Mr. Brazier: I am indebted to my hon. Friend, not least for bringing to mind a particularly telling quote made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden (David Davis) when, as Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee, he used to pride himself on being the greatest Scrooge in the House of Commons. Those of us who went to meeting after meeting to discuss adoption and left unwatered might even extend that comparison further. He none the less made the very point that my hon. Friend has just made. He said that this was the one area that he had come across in Government spending where there was a case for unlimited resourcing because the saving would be massive compared with the very small sums in outlay. The sad fact is that 20 per cent. of adoptions fail. This willingness to spend relatively small sums up front can save huge sums later.

It is not just about money. A child may go completely off the rails and end up in prison. Some 40 per cent. of under-age prisoners have been in care. We, as representatives of the state have failed them. It is not simply that they are expensive; those children's lives have gone from abuse to an even worse downward spiral and when that happens, we really have failed them. The question is not just what price we put on a child's welfare but what the future holds for the state as well as the child if we do not help adoptions to succeed.

Will the Minister explain where Government amendment No. 37 comes from? It requires the Treasury to be kept informed of certain expenditures. Has Her Majesty's Treasury just woken up to the fact that the Bill involves money?

In summary, the leaders of all the major parties and hon. Members in all parts of the House have drawn attention to the scandal of children languishing in care. They are all solidly behind this measure to get children in care adopted by loving families. The adopters are providing a wonderful service to society at considerable risk to themselves, taking these often very damaged children into their homes. Offering them guaranteed support when they really need it should be a mandatory requirement, rather than simply assessing them.

Sandra Gidley (Romsey): I would like to add my voice in support of the amendments. I tabled similar amendments in Committee. I must admit to disappointment that, despite a wide-ranging debate in Committee, the Government have remained completely intransigent on the issue. That was not only the case in Committee; it was highlighted on Second Reading. We heard two submissions earlier, but nearly every submission raised that very point. During the evidence-gathering stage of the Bill, many of the witnesses highlighted that point.

As the Bill stands, a local authority must assess the need for adoption services, but is under no obligation to provide those services. Even if it decides to provide them for a short time, it is under no obligation to continue to do so for a prolonged period. The Minister has repeatedly assured us that the rights of the child are paramount. The refusal to provide the necessary adoption support services flies completely in the face of that statement. We want to get real for a moment.

As has been highlighted, we are not talking about cuddly babies—in 2002, babies are not the majority of children being adopted. A significant number of the children being adopted today demonstrate considerable problems and have complex needs. A significant number of them have mental health problems too. It is not putting too fine a point on it to say that prospective parents can be taking on a considerable case load. Of course, they do it out of a sense of love and the hope that they can make a significant and positive difference to a child's life. However, those parents may not necessarily be in a financial position to provide all the services that have been identified to support their child adequately if the local authority is not in a position to do so. Similarly, a short-term agreement to fund certain services is totally inadequate. The parent is making a long-term commitment to the child, so the Government, via the local authority, should also provide a long-term commitment.

8.30 pm

Much in the Bill is sensible and I believe that the Government's heart is in the right place on the issue, but this matter was discussed at length in Committee and all Opposition Members were disappointed at the Minister's response. I will remind the House of what she said:

> "I turn to the argument . . . that local authorities are very likely just to ignore assessments. That is not my experience of local authorities. In the past, local authorities may not have provided adequate adoption support services when they did not have a duty or the resources to do so."—[*Official Report, Special Standing Committee*, 13 December 2001; c. 595.]

Unwittingly, the Minister backed my arguments, as she acknowledged that in the past services failed when resources were inadequate.

The Government announced extra funding in December 2000, which was to last three years. By the time the Bill is on the statute book, that pot of money will have disappeared—it will be at the end of its useful life. Who knows what the Government's priorities will be then? There is no guarantee for the future of adoption services in the Bill. Many hon. Members want a greater and more prolonged commitment.

I also support the comments that have been made on the right to appeal. Much has been said about appeal being built into every stage of the procedure. If services are refused for financial or other reasons, the parent, who is acting in the best interests of the child, is in no position to challenge the decision. I ask the Government to think again.

Mr. Djanogly: I speak in favour of amendments Nos. 3, 4 and 5. The Government have made much of the worthy proposal that local authorities will provide adoption support services. Indeed, many organisations involved in adoption congratulated the Government on bringing support to the fore in the Bill. It is fair to say that that was before many of them had had a good look at clause 4, which basically states that an assessment must be carried out if a person requests it but that, having made the assessment, it is up to the authority to decide whether it wishes to provide the services.

The reality is that the level of services provided varies considerably from authority to authority. Some councils have effective, efficient and helpful services and some do not. One of the good points about the Bill is that it is

[Mr. Djanogly]

intended to raise the general level of service to what is considered to be best practice. The clause as it stands could, however, work directly against that aim. In fact, it could lead to more money being wasted. Hundreds of assessments could be undertaken but they might not lead to the provision of any support, which would be a travesty.

I fully support amendment No. 3 because if an assessment is carried out, support should be provided. Equally, I support amendments Nos. 4 and 5, which would pick up councils for wasting taxpayers' money on pointless assessments by making them explain why they refused to act on them. Surely, however, the Government have done their sums on this matter. If they believe in support, they should back that up by paying for it. Alternatively, if they feel that funds will be inadequate, would it not be more appropriate to limit at the outset those who would be eligible for assessment, rather than paying for everyone to be assessed and turning them down afterwards? That could lead to fewer adoptions rather than more, which would be totally contrary to the purpose of the Bill.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff, West): Is the hon. Gentleman therefore suggesting that he wants councils to carry out assessments of whether somebody needs an assessment?

Mr. Djanogly: I am not suggesting that. I am speaking in favour of the amendment, under which assessments should be carried out and funding provided. My argument is that if we accept the Government's approach, it would be more sensible to do as the hon. Gentleman suggests. That would at least avoid getting people into the system, building up their expectations and then spitting them out again. That is what could happen, which could lead to real dangers in the system.

Kevin Brennan: The hon. Gentleman has agreed that his suggestion is as I said—everybody who would otherwise present themselves under the Bill in its current form would present themselves for an assessment as to whether they needed an assessment.

Mr. Djanogly: I am not suggesting that, but I shall move on. I have made the point that clause 4 still lacks clarity. I do not believe that it is in the spirit of the Bill, and I hope that the Government will re-address the issue.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): I support amendments Nos. 3, 4, 5 and 7.

First, I want to deal with the question of duty. As we know, local authorities have various duties, some of which are obvious, such as that under the Education Act 1944 to provide a reasonable standard of education. Some of them are even more mundane, such as the duty to collect refuse. If, at the core of this Bill, the interests of the child are paramount, I cannot understand why we decline to impose a statutory duty on local authorities to follow their own assessments and provide what is seen to be necessary per the assessment.

Mr. Dawson: Can the hon. Gentleman indicate any other area of local government social policy in which there is a statutory duty to meet and identify assessed need of an individual or family?

Mr. Llwyd: Yes. It exists in relation to children who are statemented and to provision for dealing with special needs in schools. Even if I were wrong—I think that I am right—the hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) has already referred to a more learned person than me making an exception of this area in terms of Government spending. I realise that we are dealing with a finite purse, but only a given percentage of youngsters will be subject to adoption. We have already heard that 20 per cent. of adoptions fail; it is a tragedy when that happens. We all know what occurs: the slide into criminality, awful drug problems and so on. Often—not always, of course, thankfully—the root cause is an unhappy childhood, and frequently that is partly because an adoption has gone badly wrong. I hope that this will be a landmark Bill, but clause 4 is badly drafted and does not provide for this particular duty to be imposed.

The ignoring of assessments was raised earlier in the debate. I am not saying that local authorities will ignore assessments, but their funding will be finite, and they will therefore be directed as to what services they provide by the amount of money that they have. That is a fairly obvious equation. When local government makes assessments of the care component and the residence component for the elderly, all manner of fun and games occur. The assessments are cost-driven, and we all see the unfortunate results of that.

I took part in the Special Standing Committee procedure. I congratulate the Government on that positive step forward. We heard from many knowledgeable people and received memorandums from individuals, experts and societies—or stakeholders, in the Minister's words. However, why are the stakeholders being so obviously ignored? The hon. Member for Canterbury referred to the views of Barnardos—it succinctly asked what the point of an assessment would be if it were not followed through. That point is logical.

The Bill—there is much to commend in it—seeks to introduce uniformity in practice across England and Wales. As we know, one of the problems is that the quality of adoption services depends on where one lives. We have heard of postcode prescribing, and in adoption some areas are switched on while others are most definitely not. The Bill also seeks uniformity among providers and agencies, so I do not wish to criticise the Bill for the sake of it and merely because I sit on this side of the House.

These points were made in Committee but, more important, they reflect what the stakeholders say. Unlike me and possibly several other hon. Members, the stakeholders are experts, and we are here to produce the best possible legislation. If stakeholders tell us time after time that delivery must follow the assessment, we should pay attention to them.

As I pointed out in Committee, the ATD Fourth World memorandum states:

"Section 4(4) only places a duty on a local authority to decide whether to provide any services to that person. It is recognised by all parties, including the Department of Health, that adopted children, birth parents and adoptive parents all need support. Support services should be on offer to everyone involved who can take them up as they see fit".

The Adoption Forum's memorandum added:

"One of the laudable aims of this Bill is to bring adoption/permanency support into the front line."

I agree entirely with that, as I am sure we all do. It went on:

"Adoptions that fail do so because families feel unable to cope and support has been all but impossible to find and fund."

We all want to improve the rate of success, and the memorandum continued:

"If the rate of success is to be improved—and it is difficult to see why there would be much point in upping adoption figures unless adoptions are going to succeed—then there must be help available."

I could read further memorandums, and we all heard the evidence in Committee. I am disappointed that that evidence is being brushed aside without proper consideration.

I know that the hon. Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson) shares my wish to improve the Bill, but I know what he will say. That is not to suggest that he is boring. I readily admit that he has far more experience in social services than I have, and he will say that funding is finite. However, I have experience in child law, and I anticipate that he will argue that we cannot issue a blank cheque. Perhaps I am wrong, so he might wish to intervene and make another point.

Mr. Dawson: I cannot resist the invitation. The hon. Gentleman makes a point, but no one is talking about writing blank cheques. Surely his remarks about a lack of support services entirely underestimate the effects that the Bill will have. It will provide a remarkable improvement in adoption and post-adoption support services to children and families. I question why he is so concerned to give unlimited resources to particular people in certain circumstances when he is not arguing the same for children in all other parts of the care system. He is certainly not arguing the same for families with children living in poverty.

8.45 pm

Mr. Llwyd: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says, and those arguments will doubtless be made in another debate, but today we are dealing with adoption law.

The hon. Gentleman asks why there should be a carte blanche in terms of resources, but we are dealing with the most needy and vulnerable people in society. The point is that these young kids have probably already been through turmoil in reaching the point of being placed for adoption. We should make the resources available, so that a need can be met whenever an assessment identifies one. Otherwise, there is no point in any of this, and we will be letting children down. Although we all sign up to the principle of the paramountcy of the child, the risk is that the Bill will let children down.

I agree with the hon. Gentleman that there is much in the Bill to commend it. It contains several mechanisms that are most welcome and extremely useful, but a weakness has been identified, and in the light of the circumstances, the Special Standing Committee procedure and so on, it is right and proper that we debate it.

Mr. Djanogly: Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that a form of postcode lottery operates, whereby people are in effect dependent on living in an area that happens to have a good agency? If the agency can provide the necessary support, they are in luck; if not, that could be to the detriment of the child and others.

Mr. Llwyd: That is right, and to be fair to the Government, they have identified that problem. Much of the thinking behind the Bill is very clear, but the laudable aim is to introduce uniform quality of service throughout local authorities in England and Wales. However, the hon. Gentleman is right: as things stand, there is a postcode lottery. The system is haphazard and the outcome depends on where one lives. Those of us who are members of the all-party adoption group—including the hon. Member for Canterbury—have heard that said year after year. We are therefore delighted that the Government are introducing the Bill, but I am afraid that it is flawed, and it behoves us all to make plain our dissatisfaction with this particular aspect of it.

Of course, there are degrees of adoption services—some major and others relatively minor—and the Adoption Forum has expressed concern in that regard. It asked what will happen if a local authority agrees that support is needed, but says that it does not have the staff to provide it. Such a situation is not acceptable, but under the Bill as drafted, a local authority could say as much. That is totally unfair.

I support amendment No. 4, which would require a written explanation of reasons why support services were not forthcoming, and amendment No. 5, which would require a review. As other Members have made plain, many local authorities are failing, and often because of nothing more than a lack of resources. Although it has been said that some local authorities are prejudiced against adoption, I doubt whether any are, and I shall not pursue that red herring now. If the problem is a lack of resources, we must look to Government to provide them. As I have said, in any event we are dealing with only a percentage of youngsters. The problem could be worked out, and the Government could examine the budgeting situation.

Given that we have gone through the Standing Committee process, heard evidence from the experts in Special Standing Committee, and heard extremely useful and constructive contributions from Members on both sides of the House, it would be a terrible shame if we fell short of our intention to bring in a ground-breaking Bill that will provide an excellent service for those most in need of support.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): I am following the hon. Gentleman's comments with interest and great support, but the problem may be even worse than he suggests. Because of the crisis in many social services departments, whether in the care of children or of the elderly, departments are increasingly having to limit their activities to their statutory responsibilities. Therefore, the responsibilities that are not statutory requirements are taking a lower priority, whether the departments wish that to happen or not. That is exactly what would happen to adoption support services if they do not take on the statutory obligation.

Mr. Llwyd: The hon. Gentleman has hit the nail on the head. That is precisely the position as I see it. Adoption UK told us that it welcomes some of the changes to clause 4 and is delighted that adoption support services will include all those affected by adoption. However, it continues to make the point:

"Our 30 years experience of supporting adoptive families has shown us that these families need access to the actual provision of support post-placement and post-adoption, not simply an assessment to determine the nature of that support."

[Mr. Llwyd]

I have made the case as strongly as I can, but I wish to refer briefly—in due deference to the fact that several Labour Members have previously been involved in social work—to the British Association of Social Workers, which said:

"Clause 4 needs substantial improvement . . . Social work support in connection with adoption should always be available and it should not initially be conditional on an assessment of the person's needs having already been carried out."—[*Official Report, Special Standing Committee*, 21 November 2001; c. 168-352.]

That goes even further than what we are arguing.

I hope that the Minister will reconsider the Government's position on clause 4. She rightly referred several times to stakeholders as she opened the debate. If stakeholders mean anything, they should be listened to.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): I feel as if I am entering a private party among the members of the Committee. I contributed on Second Reading, but I was not a member of the Committee so I am returning to some of the issues. In this instance, it is a surprise and a disappointment that the issue was not resolved in Committee in the direction that my hon. Friends and other Opposition Members have urged the Government to take.

I support my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier). He rightly referred to the group of amendments and their various aspects. If it were my choice, I would ask the Minister to fix on amendment No. 7 as most deserving of acceptance by the Government. One slight difficulty that the hon. Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson) has advanced is that inevitably there will be limited circumstances in which the Government will legislate that a local authority has a duty not only to provide services but to provide all such services as are required by a person regardless—effectively—of the resources available to it. As hon. Members have rightly pointed out, the Exchequer and individual local authorities would receive obvious positive benefits from a successful placement for adoption, but resource constraints may still make provision of the services in question difficult for local authorities. Amendment No. 7 would at least recognise that local authorities would exercise a judgment, having interpreted the need for adoption support services, and then be able to follow that through. Rather than support all the amendments willy-nilly, I express my support for amendment No. 7.

In Cambridgeshire, the annual report on adoption and permanence for the local social services illustrates my point well. Some 26 children were placed for adoption in 2000-01 and adoption allowances were agreed for 16 children, six of which were in-principle agreements that focused on the possible need for treatment or extra provision in the future. The report drew attention to the high proportion of adopted children who require such financial or other support. It states that it

"is a reflection of the physical and psychological difficulties which many children have and/or of the need to keep siblings together. The 6 "in principle" allowances reveal the uncertainty which adopters accept when children's previous history or genetic inheritance suggest significant difficulties may develop in future."

That passage points to the importance of providing a countrywide system of support on which those adoptive families can rely, if we are to sustain—as is one of the Bill's principal intentions—the number of those adopting and prevent the disruption of those adoptions once they have taken place.

My hon. Friends have referred to the difficulties associated with the current inconsistency in the levels of support that are being provided. I understand that the legislation is intended to deliver greater consistency, but there is a question as to the level at which consistency will be delivered. In Cambridgeshire at the moment, a more stringent means test is being applied to adoption allowances. Cambridgeshire now falls mid-band among local authorities in the level of the means test but, as the report also shows, difficulties have emerged when families who adopted in the past, under a more generous scheme, have sought an allowance for a further adoption. If we are going to introduce a degree of consistency we must expect it to be consistency at a level of provision that is relatively high when compared with the present level; otherwise, there will be substantial disincentive effects.

I am keen that, in the course of amending clause 4, we should push not only for consistency but for a fairly high level of provision, and a degree of certainty on the part of adoptive parents that that provision will be made available to them if they are assessed as having need of adoption support services.

When I approached the legislation afresh I was seriously concerned that the Government, having understood what was required, had failed to legislate precisely for that to happen. It was the Government, in their White Paper "Adoption: A New Approach", who presaged this legislation. In paragraph 6.27, they said that they would introduce new legislation

"to place a clear duty on local social services authorities to provide post-adoption support, including financial support, planned jointly with local education authorities and the NHS, and any other relevant agencies. This support will be available from the time a placement is made, for as long as it is needed."

That was not a commitment on the part of Government to introduce legislation providing that local authorities had a duty to decide whether to provide post-adoption support. It was a clear commitment to introduce legislation placing on social services authorities

"a clear duty . . . to provide post-adoption support".

In the absence of amendment No. 7, the Government will have moved away from the commitment in the White Paper to something watered down. The loophole that will have been created is one through which it would be possible to drive a coach and horses in subsequent years, if local authorities were not properly resourced and the Government did not give them the necessary support. I therefore urge the Government to adopt amendment No. 7.

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Jacqui Smith): I agree with parts of the arguments made by Opposition Members. In particular, I agree that at present the provision of adoption support services across the country is patchy and inconsistent, in that in many areas very little support is available for adopters once a child has been placed for adoption. However, we part company over the suggestion that the Bill does not significantly address that issue, because its new provisions on adoption support will tackle that inconsistency.

The Bill places for the first time a clear duty on local authorities to make and participate in arrangements to provide adoption support services, which will include

financial support, delivering on the commitment that we made in the White Paper quoted by the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley). That new duty is set out in clause 3 and it will ensure that local authorities make available adoption support, including that financial support.

9 pm

Clause 4 gives people affected by adoption a new right to request and receive an assessment of their needs for adoption support services from their local authority. That is a new right introduced by the Bill that delivers a key commitment made in the White Paper. The Bill goes even further than the White Paper, in which we made a commitment to give families adopting children a new right to such an assessment. The Bill extends the right to an assessment to all the people listed in clause 3(1), namely children who may be adopted, their parents and guardians, prospective adopters and adopted people, their adoptive parents, birth parents and former guardians.

Mr. Brazier: Does the Minister accept that she is talking about assessments, not about the services themselves? As every major stakeholder who has written to us pointed out, clause 4 covers assessments, not services.

Jacqui Smith: I shall deal with the importance of assessments in a moment.

I was talking about the important duty in clause 3 to provide the service, the important right in clause 4 to receive an assessment, and the extension of that right to people prescribed in regulations made under clause 4(1)(b)—namely, those listed in regulations made under clause 3(3)(a). The Government intend that they will include birth and adoptive siblings of adopted people and children who may be adopted.

The assessment will ensure that adoptive families and others no longer have to fight against the system to get the help and support that they need. The hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) referred to such fights, and many of us will have heard tell of them at constituency surgeries. They are the legacy of a system that has not properly prioritised the need for local authorities to provide adoption support.

Mr. Llwyd: The Minister said that clause 3 provides the services required, and she is now helpfully moving on to cover assessment. I ask her to look at clause 4(4), which reads:

> "Where, as a result of an assessment, a local authority decide that a person has needs for adoption support services, they must then decide whether to provide any such services to that person."

I am afraid that that drives a coach and horses through the hon. Lady's argument.

Jacqui Smith: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will be relieved to know that I am coming on to that point. The Bill will ensure that public services are properly joined up in the provision of support services on adoption.

Several hon. Members asked about the nature of the assessment and expressed concerns that it might contribute to delay. I assure them that assessment under clause 4 can cover a full range of assessments from a quick decision with a very rapid response to a full multi-disciplinary assessment where that is required to put together a support package. People who gave evidence in the Special Standing Committee told us that there may be occasions on which it will be important to have such a proper assessment in relation to a child with multiple needs. That was seen not as a barrier to the provision of adoption support services, but as an important gateway to the provision of those services and to ensuring that they were provided in a joined-up way. Of course, adoptive families will not need to wait until an adoption order has been made to request and receive an assessment of their needs for adoption support services. They will be able to request an assessment at any time—for example, when they have been matched with a child or when the child has been placed with them.

Amendments Nos. 3 and 7—Conservative Members have not tried to hide this—seek to restrict the discretion of local authorities to make decisions about the way in which they provide adoption support services. Local authorities must, of course, act reasonably in deciding whether to provide adoption support services following an assessment, but clause 4(4) makes it clear that it is for the local authority to make a decision on whether to provide adoption support services in each individual case.

Sandra Gidley: It occurs to me that there are interesting parallels with education. Since becoming a Member of Parliament, I have frequently been approached by parents who are unhappy with the provision for their children. The county council's attitude seems to be, "This will do," rather than, "This is what is best for the child." The Minister appears to be describing a similar set-up.

Jacqui Smith: I was actually talking about the need to ensure that local authorities had discretion in this context, as they do—my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson) made the point—in the context of many other public services.

The hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) mentioned assessments of older people's needs, but did not go as far as suggesting that the proposals to limit authorities' discretion should also apply to them. I do not know whether that reflects his relative priorities when it comes to needy older people and needy adopted children. The hon. Member for Canterbury was very honest in expressing the view that adopted children's needs should have priority over those of others needing social services assessments, including children in care. He was honest; I am not so sure about the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy.

Mr. Brazier: I shall not repeat my reasons for considering these children to be a special case, in both personal and financial terms. I merely say that if we compare this provision with provision for special needs in schools where local authorities have statutory duties, we see that there are fewer children adopted from care in a single year in most local authority areas than there are special needs children in many individual schools.

Jacqui Smith: There is no argument about the importance of adoption support services. That is why, for the first time, we have a Bill that imposes a duty on local authorities to provide such services.

Mr. Llwyd: As the Minister accused me of dishonesty, let me point out that I thought she was dealing with the

[Mr. Llwyd]

Adoption Act 1976, which deals with children. To say that I rank children below or above elderly people is to reach an unjustified conclusion which in fact does little justice to the Minister. May I declare an interest? My own mother is going through an assessment, and I am offended by what the Minister has said.

Jacqui Smith: I am sorry if I offended the hon. Gentleman. I was simply examining the logic of the argument that discretion for making decisions about the provision of adoption support services should be removed, while discretion relating to other services should not. Members must face up to the logic of their arguments in the context of amendments Nos. 3 and 7.

Mr. Djanogly: The Minister still has not dealt with the basic point. If councils are to have discretion not to provide services, how is it rational to require them to provide an assessment? Why should they have to waste money on an assessment if they are not going to spend money on support afterwards?

Jacqui Smith: As I have said, an assessment is important as a gateway to the provision of services. Given the extra investment and given the duty imposed by the Bill to provide adoption support services, it cannot be said that the vast majority of authorities will not supply massively better services for adopted children and their families than were supplied under the Government whom the hon. Gentleman supported until 1997.

My point is that amendments Nos. 3 and 7 remove local authorities' discretion. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made clear on Second Reading on 29 October last year, ultimately local authorities provide the adoption service, so they must decide who needs what level of support. I would like to provide two more quotes about the importance of the discretion given to local authorities. Quote No. 1 is:

"We will put our faith in local councillors, the people who are closest to those who will rely on us to deliver better public services."

Quote No. 2 is:

"community government must mean giving greater freedom to local authority.

We can deliver that freedom if we are prepared to trust that our councillors will use that freedom responsibly to deliver better services."

Those were the words of the Leader of the Opposition, who appears to disagree with hon. Members this evening. Discretion for local authorities is important. The effect of the amendments would be to remove that discretion from local authorities.

Tim Loughton: That argument is even more disingenuous than the argument that the Minister used in Special Standing Committee to try to weasel out of the commitments. She is not taking away the requirement on local authorities to provide an assessment, but she is allowing local authorities to place a lower priority on providing support services. That is nonsense. It is a waste of money, and it has absolutely nothing to do with giving greater autonomy to local authorities. If the requirement on providing the service is there, there is a greater chance that the Government will, rightly, provide the resources for the services that we all agree are essential, so let us not have any ridiculous arguments about the autonomy of local government being infringed by what we are proposing.

Jacqui Smith: I appear to have hit the mark. Opposition Members seem to be suggesting that the legislation reduces the likelihood that local authorities will offer adoption support services but it is placing a duty on local authorities to provide those adoption support services in a way that never existed before. It is providing a right for people to be assessed for those services, which will lead to local authorities being able to provide the appropriate packages, but they must have the discretion that exists in relation to every other assessment to determine how those services are provided.

Mr. Dawson: Does not this part of the debate exemplify the way in which the Opposition missed the point over the issue of assessment? Surely, when we are delivering a much improved adoption support service, the process of assessment will follow much more naturally and organically out of the improved relationship and ongoing commitment of local authorities to children who have been adopted.

Jacqui Smith: As always, from his experience, my hon. Friend makes a very important point.

Opposition Members have raised the issue of resources. We can expect a substantial amount of the extra £66 million for adoption that was announced in the White Paper to be used by local authorities to improve their adoption support services. It will ensure that many more people receive the support that they need. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) is chuntering about support to social services departments. This is £66 million on top of the 20.4 per cent. real-terms increase that has gone to social services authorities, an annual real-terms increase of over 3 per cent. per year. I ask hon. Members, in considering the provision of adoption support services and social services funding, to compare that amount with the 0.1 per cent. real-terms increase in the last five years of the Government whom the hon. Gentleman supported.

Tim Loughton: On that point, simply repeating and re-repeating the sum of £66 million under the quality protects programme does not make that figure any more than £66 million over a three-year horizon. If the Minister is serious about it, will she give an undertaking now that when the three years have run out, a serious sum of money—at least as much as that, and at least as much as is required to provide serious support services—will be forthcoming? Simply to repeat the sum of £66 million does not make it go any further.

Jacqui Smith: I was talking not only about the £66 million but about the other significant investment that the Government have put into social services—money that the Conservative party notably failed to pledge to match at the last general election. I will give the hon. Gentleman a commitment: of course we will consider the provisions on adoption support as part of the current spending review process. When the results of that process come through, I shall challenge the hon. Gentleman on whether his party, if in government, would match the investment that we are making in social services.

9.15 pm

I shall now deal with the other amendments. Amendment No. 4, which was debated in Committee, would require local authorities to provide a written explanation of their reasons for not providing adoption support. As I said in Committee, that is not a matter for primary legislation. It may be good practice for local authorities to provide a written explanation of their reasons, but it is more appropriate for that to be covered in guidance to local authorities. In some cases, it may be more appropriate to provide a verbal explanation.

Amendment No. 5, which we have also debated in Committee, would enable regulations to provide for a review of a local authority's decision not to provide adoption support services. Where a local authority decides not to provide adoption services following an assessment of needs, a complaint can be made to the local authority in the usual way. Adoption is a mainstream social services function. It is therefore appropriate for complaints to be dealt with, following the changes in the Bill, through an improved local authority social services complaints procedure.

Amendment No. 6 would require the local authority, in addition to carrying out an assessment of needs for adoption support services of the person who has requested the assessment, to carry out an assessment of the needs of connected persons. It does not make clear who those connected persons might be. The examples mentioned by the hon. Member for Canterbury were largely of adoptive parents who already have a right to an assessment under clause 4(1). I do not dispute the importance of the issue, but those people are already covered, so the amendment is unnecessary.

I shall briefly move on to the Government amendments. Amendment No. 48 relates to clause 9, which provides a general power to make regulations concerning the activities of adoption agencies and adoption support agencies. Regulations may be made for any purpose relating to the exercise of the functions of local authorities and voluntary adoption agencies in relation to adoption and the exercise of functions of adoption support agencies in relation to the provision of adoption support services.

Subsection (2) provides that this general regulation-making power is not limited by any of the specific powers included in the Bill. Amendment No. 48 is therefore a technical amendment stemming from changes made to the Bill during the Special Standing Committee. It inserts in subsection (2) of clause 9 a reference to clause 52, which was added to the Bill by Government amendment in Committee.

Hon. Members present in Committee will remember that clause 52 makes it clear that the general regulation-making power in clause 9 may be used to set out the key stages at which adoption agencies are to provide information to prospective adopters, and the information that they are to be obliged to provide. The amendment makes it clear that the exercise of the regulation-making power in clause 9 through clause 52 does not limit the generality of that power.

Finally, Government amendment No. 37, which the hon. Member for Canterbury asked about, relates to payment of grants to local authorities in respect of their adoption services. Clause 124 amends section 93 of the Local Government Act 2000, which enables the Secretary of State to pay grants to local authorities in respect of welfare services.

Clause 124 clarifies that grants may be paid under section 93 in connection with welfare services, as well as for their direct provision. That means, for example, that the Secretary of State may pay grants to local authorities to help re-engineer or develop their current adoption services, as well as to help them provide new services.

These provisions are important because they will be used to meet commitments made in chapter 7 of the White Paper to support local authorities in generating best practice models for managing and improving their adoption services. We intend to pay grants to support local authorities in piloting new ways of working, such as the commissioning of children's services and arrangements for consortiums.

Amendment No. 37 clarifies the Treasury's powers to give consent to, or withhold consent from, spending Departments for the making of grants to local authorities in England under section 93 of the 2000 Act. It explicitly recognises that the Treasury must approve the proposed terms and conditions of any grant made under that section, and it is able to take those factors into account when deciding whether to consent to the making of a grant. The Treasury rightly takes an interest in everything that happens across government, and it is, of course, appropriate to represent that in the amendment.

I ask hon. Members to support the Government amendments and reiterate the significant improvements that the Bill makes to the provision of adoption support services. I oppose the Opposition's amendments. They fail to recognise those improvements and would limit the discretion of local authorities to make them.

Mr. Brazier: The purpose of the amendments is to assist a small but deserving number of people. We are not convinced by the Government's arguments, but in the spirit of our support for the Bill, and in light of the fact that there is little time to discuss other important measures, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 9

GENERAL POWER TO REGULATE ADOPTION ETC. AGENCIES

Amendment made: No. 48, in page 7, line 42, after "12" insert "52".—*[Jacqui Smith.]*

Clause 10

MANAGEMENT ETC. OF AGENCIES

Jacqui Smith: I beg to move amendment No. 43, in page 9, line 7, leave out—

'fee of a prescribed amount'

and insert "prescribed fee".

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following Government amendments: Nos. 79, 82 and 44 to 47.

Jacqui Smith: Before I begin, I seek your guidance, Mr. Deputy Speaker, on what happened to Government amendment No. 37.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That comes a little later in the amendment paper. I will not overlook it.

Jacqui Smith: I have every faith in you. The Bill is close to my heart and I want to ensure that we get through it all.

[Jacqui Smith]

The amendments provide greater consistency in the approach to prescribed fees and ensure that the powers in relation to fees are flexible and clear. Amendment No. 47 is relevant for the purposes of all the other amendments in the group. It inserts a new subsection in clause 131, which provides a general interpretation of the terminology used throughout the Bill, and clarifies the meaning of a power to prescribe a fee.

Where the Bill confers a power to make regulations to prescribe that a fee must or may be charged or paid, or where it confers a power to prescribe such a fee by way of an Order in Council—for example, in relation to the adoption and children register—that fee can be any of the fees set out in the amendment. It could be a fixed amount. Alternatively, it could be a fee not exceeding a fixed amount, as made clear in proposed paragraph (a), or a fee that is calculated in accordance with a formula set out in regulations or in an Order in Council, as made clear in proposed paragraph (b). Proposed paragraph (c) provides that the fee may also be a reasonable fee, determined by the person to whom it is payable.

The remaining amendments ensure that in every case in which the Bill confers a power to prescribe a fee, the term "prescribed fee" is used consistently. That ensures that any of the fees that I have just described can be prescribed in regulations or in an Order in Council. If the provisions already refer to a prescribed fee—for example, in clause 11—an amendment is, of course, unnecessary.

Although I am willing to go into the details of each amendment if hon. Members so wish, I think that that sets out our approach to them all.

Tim Loughton: These amendments will probably be known as the prescribed fee group, because, as the Minister has explained, that is essentially what they deal with. However, I should like to question her on a few issues that arise from them. She said that these amendments had been introduced in the guise of greater consistency, flexibility and clarity. I am somewhat at a loss to understand, for example, why Government amendment No. 43, which simply changes the terminology from

"fee of a prescribed amount"

to "prescribed fee", has taken two months to produce after the end of the debates in Committee.

On a more substantive point, under Government amendment No. 79, the word "prescribed" will be inserted before the word "fee" in clause 118(3), which states that the order

"may require an agency giving information which is entered on the register to pay a fee."

Will the Minister clarify—she said that she would like to do so—the guidance, which her Department issued to adoption agencies last August, that gave them the strong impression that her Department had promised to fund the adoption register? Why does the question of fees arise—whether they are prescribed fees, charges or whatever she wants to call them?

On 21 August, it was reported that the Department of Health would pay for the use of the adoption register information. A Department of Health briefing, issued on 26 August last year, stated that it

"will be fully funded by the government and will be free to use by councils and voluntary adoption agencies."

So will the Minister explain exactly where those fees will be directed and for what purpose, as certain adoption agencies have been given the impression that the register would be funded by the Department? That is something of a mystery, so perhaps she could explain that in the interests of clarity and consistency.

I have no argument with Government amendments Nos. 44 and 45, which will bring into effect the charging of prescribed fees for using the contact register, as does Government amendment No. 46.

Government amendment No. 47, which the Minister dealt with first, relates to clause 131. Will she provide further clarification of some of the definitions used in that clause? In particular, will she explain proposed paragraph (c), which states:

"a fee determined by the person to whom it is payable, being a fee of a reasonable amount."?

How would she define the term "reasonable amount"? Who will determine the amount? How often will it be redetermined to ensure that it is still a reasonable fee? Will the fee differ for the various agencies in different parts of the country? Will it differ by local authority, given that the Minister is apparently a late convert to giving local authorities greater autonomy?

Government amendment No. 47 is rather widely drafted, and hon. Members would benefit if the Minister would provide greater definition, but I am particularly keen for her to explain, for the benefit of the agencies involved, why a fee will apparently be charged, given that it was strongly suggested that no fee would be required of voluntary agencies.

Jacqui Smith: I should like to make it clear that the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) is right to say that the Government are funding the operation of the adoption and children register. The Government do not intend to charge adoption agencies for the use of the register. However, consequential effects and possible future decisions need to be represented in the legislation. Of course, the existing inter-agency fee system, whereby an adoption agency pays a fee to another adoption agency to cover the costs of recruiting and assessing an adoptive family on its behalf, will continue to operate as it does at the moment, but the Government have promised to keep the inter-agency fee under review. The provisions in clause 118(3) and 119(4) help to provide the flexibility to make changes in the arrangements should that be considered necessary. I reiterate that the Government are indeed funding the register, which is currently operating very successfully, bringing together adopted children and potential adopters.

9.30 pm

Tim Loughton: We need to get this absolutely clear. I think that the Minister is now suggesting that there will not be charges but that the Government are establishing the potential for their introduction. Will she cast her mind forward, as we need clarity for the long term? In what

circumstances might her Department institute charging for operating the register, so that it will not be wholly Government funded?

Jacqui Smith: I certainly did not say that we were considering imposing charges. I said that a review of the inter-agency fee arrangements, whereby authorities pay each other for the recruitment of adopters, could involve a routing of the fee via the adoption register. What is important is that, in drafting legislation that will exist for some time, we provide opportunities for the consideration of such issues.

The hon. Gentleman also raised the definition in proposed paragraph (c) of amendment No. 47—that the fee may also be reasonable if it is determined by the person to whom it is payable. We discussed the charging of reasonable fees at some length in Committee, such as in the context of inter-country adoption, where it would perhaps most appropriately fit. The Government intend to make regulations under clause 11(2) to enable local authorities to continue to charge prospective inter-country adopters a fee to cover reasonably incurred expenses.

In this context, a reasonable fee would of course bear in mind the fact that each adoption agency has slightly different costs and should be able to reflect those costs in the fee charged. Agencies should not, as was made clear in Committee, be able to recover more money than they expend; they should be able to recover only their costs. What would be a reasonable fee for inter-country work might vary from adoption agency to adoption agency, and it would therefore clearly be inappropriate for a fixed amount to be prescribed. The proposed subsection enables the flexibility on reasonable fees that we discussed at some length in Committee.

I hope that, with those reassurances, hon. Members will feel able to support the amendments.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 12

Independent review of determinations

Mr. Brazier: I beg to move amendment No. 22, in page 9, line 31, leave out subsection (1) and insert—

'(1) Regulations under section 9 may establish a procedure under which any person in respect of whom a determination has been made by an adoption agency may apply to an organisation or panel, independent of any local authority or voluntary adoption agency but approved by the appropriate Minister for a review of that determination.'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss amendment No. 23, in clause 14, page 10, line 40, leave out subsection (1) and insert—

'(1) If as a result of an independent review any local authority is found to have failed, without reasonable cause, to comply with any of the duties imposed on them by virtue of this Act, the appropriate Minister may make an order declaring that authority to be in default in respect of that duty.'.

Mr. Brazier: As the clause stands, most of the important detail is left to regulations. For those of us who have been pressing for many years for an independent appeals process for adoption-related matters, the clause is welcome. None the less, it is disappointing that the Minister said in Committee on 18 December at column 676 that regulations are likely to focus on only two matters—at least initially. They are, first, prospective adopters' suitability for the new national list, and secondly, the provision of information by adoption agencies.

Mr. Djanogly: The Minister may wish to clarify this, but I think that, following the Government's changes on access to information, the regulations will now focus on only one area.

Mr. Brazier: My understanding is that the review process will still focus on the two matters. Crucially, that does not seem to apply to other parts of the adoption process. In particular, it is not likely to apply to decisions on individual matchings. That is a come-down from the Secretary of State's apparent pledge on Second Reading, when he said:

"It is right that we build in independent review throughout the system"—

his words—

"whether of the provision of information to adopted children about their birth families, or of decisions to place a child with a particular family"—

the Secretary of State's very words—

"They are difficult issues."—[*Official Report*, 29 October 2001; Vol. 373, c. 659.]

Explaining the need to limit the review process, the Minister in Committee stressed issues of resourcing. She claimed that the review process inevitably draws on the same over-tapped pool of professionals and social workers, who are in short supply and must come off their current tasks to review past ones. That is a weak argument. There is a strong case for lay involvement in the review process. None the less, there is a large range of other circumstances in which things can go badly wrong in the adoption process, and there is no redress for prospective adopters, other interested parties or the child.

Given the short time available, I shall not restate points made in Committee about how expensive judicial review is or the fact that the ombudsman is powerless and that there is little point in appealing to the local authority.

Our amendment No. 22 seeks, first, to extend the scope of reviews from qualifying determinations to all determinations. That does not automatically make all determinations subject to review. It merely allows the Secretary of State to set out such wider categories as he sees fit. Secondly, the amendment seeks to set up an independent framework for the hearing of such appeals. Amendment No. 23 is largely consequential. Under amendment No. 22, the Minister will be able to allow an independent appeal process across the entire range of activities, so it seems reasonable to limit the Minister's powers to the outcome of such appeals.

Mr. Dawson: By moving the amendments, is not the hon. Gentleman in danger of putting the interests of adults before those of children? Does he not run the risk that placement decisions and the efficient and proper implementation of placements will be subject to the activities of vexatious litigants?

Mr. Brazier: In Committee the hon. Gentleman discussed the matter at length. To summarise my

[Mr. Brazier]

argument, there are all sorts of ways of putting filters into the process. Perhaps the best answer to his intervention is to go straight on to some examples.

The current appeals procedure would not cover approved adopters who are denied a match with the child whom they wish to adopt, even if there is no other applicant for the child and has not been one for a long period. Surely there could be no clearer example of the vital interests of the child. As another example, if a care plan is not being heeded or a bad decision has been made, how will the child or the child's representative—perhaps a foster carer or an independent visitor—get justice?

Further examples include a child being moved on unwillingly to yet another set of foster carers, foster carers being refused permission to adopt a child whom they have fostered for years—the hon. Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson) will know that the Government-commissioned research produced in Cardiff two years ago showed that some local authorities never allowed foster parents to adopt—and approved couples who are again and again refused matchings. I could go on. I shall give two other examples, before returning to a more detailed case. What will happen when information has been retained on a child's background? All those who served on the Committee heard strong testimony about the importance of getting that information released. There is currently no recourse if the local authority refuses to give the parents information about the child's history, which is so vital if the child has been abused. Above all, what recourse will there be for whistleblowers in the social services system? Such people are brave professionals who often write off their entire careers by putting principle before their own interest for the sake of children.

It might be helpful if I describe in detail an actual example at the end of that list of hypotheticals. Mr. and Mrs. J, who live in central London, would have liked to appeal on several grounds. No avenue of appeal was available to them, and the Bill, as currently worded, would not provide one. They said to the Adoption Forum:

"We live in a very mixed area, racially speaking. Our circle of friends and acquaintances is also mixed. We adopted a 7-year-old white English boy from our local authority in 1996 and, with the usual ups and downs, it is a stable and happy relationship for my husband, me and our boy. In 1999 we applied to adopt his mixed-race . . . half-sister, then 13. We had grown very fond of her after regular contact ordered by our local authority and she had been moved several times in foster care and expressed a desire with live with us. Our local authority refused the placement on the grounds that she was of mixed race and we were not. We did our utmost to try to persuade them but nothing was achieved. We still abide by the contact order. The girl is still in foster care (she has been in several placements) which we all value. But we believe the girl, our relationship with the girl and, inevitably, with our son, too, have been ill-served by the decision not to allow the placement".

Surely such a case is worth a review? However, as the clause is worded, without amendment No. 22, it would not get one—unless the Minister's thinking changes.

The clause also establishes an appeal structure. There is a concern that, under the clause as currently worded, the appeal might not be truly independent. For example, it might be considered by people from the local authority involved, and the adoption agency might be made to pay for it. In the case of voluntary agencies, that could be disastrous and would be a burden on local authorities, too.

The Government have a mass of tribunals stretching across many different Departments, covering everything from employment to parking fines. Surely our most vulnerable children—those in the care system whom we in Parliament have failed in all too many cases—are worth an independent appeal heard by a properly constituted independent panel.

Mr. Djanogly: I rise to support amendments Nos. 22 and 23, which relate to the new procedures to be put in place for what the Bill refers to as an "independent review of determinations". As it turns out, that title is rather ambitious. Two issues seem to be involved in reviewing what counts as a qualifying determination, as my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) suggested.

My hon. Friend also mentioned that on Second Reading the Secretary of State said:

"It is right that we build in independent review throughout the system".—[*Official Report*, 29 October 2001; Vol. 373, c. 659.]

I draw attention to the word "throughout". That does not describe what has happened, as things have turned out.

We know little about the purpose of the proposed review panels. We do not know who will sit on them, how and when they will be convened, what their procedures will be, or the time limits for convening them. Indeed, in Committee, the Government did not even know when the system would be introduced.

We need to consider why review panels are important. Gradually over the past 30 years, people have lost confidence in the adoption system. Many potential adopters feel that they have received unfair treatment at the hands of agencies and social workers, that their wishes have been sidelined, that delays in the system are unacceptable, or that a decision made in the adoption process was wrong. Currently, complaints go through councils, where one can go through three stages of complaint procedure. Of course, one is taking one's complaint to the very same council that one has the complaint against, which is hardly an independent process. Alternatively, in some cases, one may be able to go to judicial review, but that is a very expensive process, open only to a very few.

9.45 pm

The main thrust behind the Bill is to emphasise the importance of the child who, under clause 1, is to receive paramount status. That being the case, it becomes more important that other parties to the adoption process should receive an independent right to redress. I would certainly accept that a properly convened, easy-access, low-cost and informal panel system would work well. That would allow for any person, including natural parents and adoptive parents, to apply in relation to any adoption agency determination. That is proposed by the amendment, and I fully support it.

It is important to appreciate that, as things stand, even if the panels are formed, they will be available only to one party—the prospective adoptive parents—and then only in relation to their being refused permission to adopt, and then only to those who make it to the formal stage of the adoption process. However, only 10 per cent. of those who apply get to the formal stage of the adoption process in the first place, which means that the measure would apply to 4 per cent. of prospective adoptive parents.

This is being called an independent review system but I would hardly call it a full and comprehensive system. It is turning out to be little more than a sham. It does nothing to demand a review of a child who is moved between foster carers, or to allow for a review of the suitability of a child for adoption with particular prospective parents. It gives no recourse to a review of delays in the process, or to the giving of parental consent to adoption, or to assessing whether the child's views have been taken into account in the process. There is no provision for a review of the parents' assessment for support—if they are to get any at all—or issues relating to the content of or access to the three adoption registers; or, indeed, inter-country adoptions.

For all those reasons, I support the amendments.

Jacqui Smith: Hon. Members have expressed concerns about various different stages of the adoption process, and their conclusion has been that the independent review process should be extended to all those stages. I hope to demonstrate not that I do not believe that those are justifiable concerns, but that, given the other structures that are in place, I do not believe that an extension of the independent review process would be the most appropriate way of dealing with those concerns.

As the White Paper made clear, the intended purpose of the independent review mechanism is to build confidence in the adopter assessment process, to address concerns that there was bias or that a decision was not soundly based and—to reassure the hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier)—to provide a means for an independent review of some of the decisions made on the access to information provisions introduced by the Government. I reassure him that that remains a purpose of the independent review. It was never intended, as appears to be the intention behind the amendments, as a means of micro-managing the day-to-day business of adoption agencies.

The hon. Gentleman referred to foster carers who, for four years, have been blocked from adopting. Under clause 41(4), they can apply, regardless of the local authority's views, if they have had care of the child for one year. Adoption standard B5 emphasises that assessment for foster carers should be speedier: four months, rather than eight.

The hon. Gentleman again raised his concern about the use of the independent review mechanism with regard to adoption agency determinations about matches between children and approved adopters. I undertook to consider whether, as we consulted on the use of the independent review mechanism, that might be an appropriate determination to be considered. The consultation is due to take place in the autumn. We have also undertaken initially to implement the independent review mechanism in 2003 and, as I said, to consult on the extension that he referred to in Committee.

I hope that I can reassure hon. Members by outlining some of the regulatory and quality assurance mechanisms. Some are enshrined in the Bill and many involve independent scrutiny, which I hope will overcome some of the concerns that have been mentioned.

As a starting point, the Bill places every agency under a statutory obligation to make the child's welfare the paramount consideration in any decision relating to the adoption of a child. All adoption agencies will be regulated by the independent National Care Standards Commission. Voluntary agencies will have to be registered to perform their functions legally. The NCSC will set national minimum standards for all agencies covering the facilities, staff, qualifications, skills and procedures that should be in place for the organisation properly to perform the functions of an adoption agency. All voluntary adoption agencies and local authorities will be subject to regular independent inspection by the commission against those standards.

Aside from the overall regulatory structure, as we touched on earlier, local authorities have to set up complaints procedures under the Children Act 1989 in respect of children and the Local Authority Social Services Act 1970 in respect of adults. Both procedures require an independent person to be appointed to supervise the conduct of the complaints process, which we are reforming and improving.

In relation to the hon. Gentleman's concerns about young people—

It being Two hours after the commencement of proceedings, MR. SPEAKER, *pursuant to Orders [29 October, 23 January and this day] put the Question already proposed from the Chair.*

Amendment negatived.

Mr. Speaker then put the remaining Questions necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at that hour.

Clause 14

DEFAULT POWER OF AN APPROPRIATE MINISTER

Amendment made: No. 34, in page 11, line 1, after "Act" insert—

'or of section 1 or 2(4) of the Adoption (Intercountry Aspects) Act 1999'.—*[Jacqui Smith.]*

New Clause 8

USE OF AN ORGANISATION AS AGENCY FOR PAYMENTS

'(1) An Order under section 116 may authorise an organisation with which an arrangement is made under section 117 to act as agent for the payment or receipt of sums payable by adoption agencies to other adoption agencies and may require adoption agencies to pay or receive such sums through the organisation.

(2) The organisation is to perform the functions exercisable by virtue of this section in accordance with any directions given by the Secretary of State; and the directions may be of general application (or general application in any part of Great Britain) or be special directions.

(3) An exercise of the Secretary of State's power to give directions under subsection (2) requires the agreement of the Scottish Ministers (if any payment agency provision applies to Scotland) and of the Assembly (if any payment agency provision applies to Wales)'.—*[Mr. Kemp.]*

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 9

TERRITORIAL APPLICATION

'(1) In this group of sections, "adoption agency" means—

(a) a local authority in England,

(b) a registered adoption society, where the registration authority is the National Care Standards Commission.

(2) An Order under section 116 may provide for any requirements imposed on adoption agencies in respect of the register to apply—

(a) to Scottish local authorities and to voluntary organisations providing a registered adoption service,

(b) to local authorities in Wales and to registered adoption societies, where the registration authority is the Assembly,

and, in relation to the register, references to adoption agencies in this group of sections include any authorities or societies mentioned in paragraphs (a) and (b) to which an Order under that section applies those requirements.

(3) For the purposes of this group of sections, references to the register applying to Scotland or Wales are to those requirements applying as mentioned in paragraph (a) or, as the case may be, (b) of subsection (2).

(4) An Order under section 116 may apply any provision made by virtue of section *[Use of an organisation as agency for payments]*—

(a) to Scottish local authorities and to voluntary organisations providing a registered adoption service,

(b) to local authorities in Wales and to registered adoption societies, where the registration authority is the Assembly.

(5) For the purposes of this group of sections, references to any payment agency provision applying to Scotland or Wales are to provision made by virtue of section *[Use of an organisation as agency for payments]* applying as mentioned in paragraph (a) or, as the case may be, (b) of subsection (4)'.—*[Mr. Kemp.]*

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

Clause 116

ADOPTION AND CHILDREN ACT REGISTER

Amendments made: No. 68, in page 66, line 13, leave out from beginning to "establish" and insert—

'Her Majesty may by Order in Council make provision for the Secretary of State to'.

No. 69, in page 66, line 20, leave out subsections (2) and (3) and insert—

'(2A) For the purpose of giving assistance in finding persons with whom children may be placed for purposes other than adoption, an Order under this section may—

(a) provide for the register to contain information about such persons and the children who may be placed with them, and

(b) apply any of the other provisions of this group of sections (that is, this section, sections 117 to 120, section *[Use of an organisation as agency for payments]* and section *[Territorial application]*) with or without modifications'.

No. 70, in page 66, line 31, leave out "Regulations" and insert—

'An Order under this section'.

No. 71, in page 66, line 33, leave out subsection (6).—*[Mr. Kemp.]*

Clause 117

USE OF AN ORGANISATION TO ESTABLISH ETC. THE REGISTER

Amendments made: No. 72, in page 66, line 38, leave out "with the Assembly's agreement".

No. 73, in page 66, line 39, leave out "his function" and insert—

'any function of his under an Order under section 116'.

No. 74, in page 67, line 3, leave out subsection (3).

No. 75, in page 67, line 9, leave out from "any" to end of line 14 and insert—

'directions given by the Secretary of State and the directions may be of general application (or general application in any part of Great Britain) or be special directions.

( ) An exercise of the Secretary of State's powers under subsection (1) or (4) requires the agreement of the Scottish Ministers (if the register applies to Scotland) and of the Assembly (if the register applies to Wales).

( ) References in this group of sections to the registration organisation are to any organisation for the time being performing functions in respect of the register by virtue of arrangements under this section'.—*[Mr. Kemp.]*

Clause 118

SUPPLY OF INFORMATION FOR THE REGISTER

Amendments made: No. 76, in page 67, line 16, leave out "Regulations" and insert—

'An Order under section 116'.

No. 77, in page 67, line 19, leave out "regulations" and insert "the Order".

No. 78, in page 67, line 21, leave out "Regulations" and insert—

'An Order under section 116'.

No. 79, in page 67, line 22, leave out from "a" to second "to" and insert "prescribed fee".—*[Mr. Kemp.]*

Clause 119

DISCLOSURE OF INFORMATION

Amendments made: No. 80, in page 67, line 35, leave out from "disclosed" to "or" in line 42 and insert—

'under subsection (2) or (3).

(2) Prescribed information entered in the register may be disclosed by the Secretary of State or the registration organisation—

(a) where an adoption agency is acting on behalf of a child who is suitable for adoption, to the agency to assist in finding prospective adopters with whom it would be appropriate for the child to be placed,

(b) where an adoption agency is acting on behalf of prospective adopters who are suitable to adopt a child, to the agency to assist in finding a child appropriate for adoption by them.

(3) Prescribed information entered in the register, or compiled from information entered in the register, may be disclosed by the Secretary of State or the registration organisation to any prescribed person for use for statistical or research purposes, or for other prescribed purposes.

(3A) An Order under section 116 may prescribe the steps to be taken by adoption agencies in respect of information received by them by virtue of subsection (2).

(3B) Subsection (1) does not apply—

(a) to a disclosure of information with the authority of the Secretary of State, or

(b) to a disclosure by the registration authority of prescribed information to the Scottish Ministers (if the register applies to Scotland) or the Assembly (if the register applies to Wales).

(3C) Information disclosed to any person under subsection (2)'.

No. 81, in page 68, line 1, leave out "Regulations" and insert—

'An Order under section 116'.

No. 82, in page 68, line 1, leave out from "a" to first "to" in line 2 and insert "prescribed fee".

No. 83, in page 68, line 5, leave out "section 116(2)" and insert "subsection (2)".

No. 84, in page 68, line 6, leave out "section 116(3)" and insert "subsection (3)".—*[Mr. Kemp.]*

Clause 120

SUPPLEMENTARY

Amendments made: No. 85, in page 68, line 13, leave out from "In" to end of line and insert "this group of sections—

( ) "organisation" includes a public body and a private or voluntary organisation'.

No. 86, in page 68, line 14, leave out "regulations" and insert—

'an Order under section 116'.

No. 87, in page 68, line 16, leave out paragraph (c) and insert—

'(c) "Scottish local authority" means a local authority within the meaning of the Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act 2001,

(d) "voluntary organisation providing a registered adoption service" has the same meaning as in section 131(2A).'.

No. 88, in page 68, line 18, leave out "sections 116 to 119" and insert "this group of sections".

No. 89, in page 68, line 24, leave out "sections 116 to 119" and insert "this group of sections".

No. 90, in page 68, line 26, leave out subsection (4) and insert—

'(4) No recommendation to make an Order under section 116 is to be made to Her Majesty in Council unless a draft has been laid before and approved by resolution of each House of Parliament.

(5) If any provision made by an Order under section 116 would, if it were included in an Act of the Scottish Parliament, be within the legislative competence of that Parliament, no recommendation to make the Order is to be made to Her Majesty in Council unless a draft has been laid before, and approved by resolution of, the Parliament.

(6) No recommendation to make an Order under section 116 containing any provision in respect of the register is to be made to Her Majesty in Council if the register applies to Wales or the Order would provide for the register to apply to Wales, unless a draft has been laid before, and approved by resolution of, the Assembly.

(7) No recommendation to make an Order under section 116 containing any provision by virtue of section *[Use of an organisation as agency for payments]* is to be made to Her Majesty in Council if any payment agency provision applies to Wales or the Order would provide for any payment agency provision to apply to Wales, unless a draft has been laid before, and approved by resolution of, the Assembly'.—*[Mr. Kemp.]*

Clause 124

PAYMENT OF GRANTS IN CONNECTION WITH WELFARE SERVICES

Amendment made: No. 37, in page 70, line 41, at end insert—

'(4) After subsection (6) there is inserted—

"(6A) Before making any determination under subsection (3) or (5) the Secretary of State must obtain the consent of the Treasury."'—*[Mr. Kemp.]*

It being more than two hours after the commencement of proceedings, further consideration stood adjourned.

Bill, as amended in the Standing Committee, to be further considered tomorrow.

PETITIONS

Sandringham School

9.53 pm

Mr. Kerry Pollard (St. Albans): I bring a petition from several thousand of my constituents in St. Albans who object to the transfer of Sandringham school out of St. Albans into the Harpenden educational area. The petition states:

"The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Secretary of State for Education and Skills to take steps to ensure that Sandringham school remains as a St. Albans school."

To lie upon the Table.

Rugby League

9.54 pm

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): I wish to present a petition signed by more than 30,000 rugby league supporters, which draws attention to their concerns over inaccurate and ill-informed commentary on their sport in some sections of the media.

The petition requests:

"that the House of Commons shall recognise the support which Rugby League has throughout the United Kingdom; acknowledge its unique contribution to the sporting life of the nation; and call upon the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport to make every effort to promote fair and constructive media coverage of Rugby League."

To lie upon the Table.

NHS Consultants

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Kemp.]*

9.55 pm

Ian Lucas (Wrexham): National health service consultants are the engine that drives the hospital sector. In the deluge of reforms that has swept through the NHS in the past 20 years, it is remarkable that the contract that governs the way in which NHS consultants work has remained largely unchanged since 1948. Therefore, I very much welcome the proposals that the Government published in February 2001 for a new approach to the consultant contract.

As a former non-executive director of an NHS trust, I am well aware of the prodigious commitment of some NHS consultants to their patients. They work long hours above and beyond the call of duty to treat patients who are in pain and need the professional skills that they offer. But I am also aware that there are consultants who are employed in the NHS, especially some of those who work under part-time contracts, who spend a great deal of their time working outside the NHS in the private sector.

Danger of abuse in the health service is always at the point where private commercialism impinges on the service. Abuse occurs when an attempt is made to marry the incompatible principles of private acquisitiveness with a public service. It was Aneurin Bevan who identified that problem in "In Place of Fear" more than 50 years ago. Half a century later, that problem affects the care of NHS patients.

At the outset, it is worth noting the present pay levels of NHS consultants. Under the present contract, the basic pay scale is between £50,000 and £66,000 per annum, although discretionary points can lead to salaries in excess of £80,000 being paid. Over and above that income, NHS consultants can earn very large sums from the private sector. I commend the excellent report of the Health Committee on consultants' contracts in the previous Parliament, which revealed that from 1999, the estimated annual average private earnings of NHS consultants in plastic surgery exceeded £75,000 and in orthopaedics were almost £59,000.

There is some evidence to show that that figure is likely to have substantially increased in recent years. The pressure to reduce waiting lists means that more public money is being used to employ NHS consultants outside the NHS and some consultants are exploiting their monopoly position to increase their income.

This week, the *Financial Times* reported one NHS trust chairman as saying:

"Consultants have suddenly realised they are in short supply and that they have market power. Last year we settled at a price of around £600 a session . . . We are now negotiating for what we will pay them after April and their opening offer to us is £1,500."

On 17 March, *The Sunday Times* reported that one David Taggart, a consultant surgeon at the Oxford John Radcliffe hospital, was paid £34,000 over and above his salary for operating on his own patients to reduce waiting lists.

One of the commonest complaints in my constituency surgeries is from those who have been given a waiting list appointment, but who are then made aware that if they were treated in the private sector they could secure the same treatment, often from the same doctor, almost immediately. That gives consultants a perverse incentive to keep waiting lists long and to encourage trusts to use additional public funding to buy health care from them in the private sector. That boosts their private income and means that long waiting lists give financial benefits to those consultants.

To my surprise as a trust board member, I learned that boards have no idea how much the consultants they employ actually earn from the private medical sector. Even more disturbing is the fact that NHS trusts have no means of knowing how many hours consultants are working in the private sector. In the era of clinical governance, that is simply intolerable. I was the chairman of a clinical governance committee with a responsibility for assessing the quality of work carried out by consultants. How can that be done when the committee has no means of knowing how many hours a week its employees, who are often carrying out hugely complex surgery, are working?

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Kemp.]*

Ian Lucas: Until there is full disclosure by NHS consultants of the work that they do in the private sector, there will be doubt that they are fully committed to NHS work and that they are not working excessive hours in the pursuit of profit. Openness is in the best interests of doctors, the NHS and patients.

I know that the Government's proposals for a new NHS contract were greeted with howls of outrage from the British Medical Association. I admit that this is a difficult issue, but I urge the Government to stand firm on the principles laid out in their proposal for a new approach to the consultants contract in February 2001.

As someone who was part of a management team at an NHS trust hospital, I do not believe that the present contractual arrangements allow NHS managers to manage consultants, who are some of their most important employees. Floating sessions allow consultants maximum freedom to work as they wish and give managers minimum power to ensure that consultants work within the aims of the NHS trust by which they are employed. In a letter to *The Daily Telegraph* published on 28 February, Mr. John Hale, who worked in the NHS for 15 years, wrote:

"one of the biggest drains on the service was consultants with part-time contracts. They spent fewer than their contracted hours working for the NHS, concentrating on their private practices. As a consequence of their commercial activities, many consultants are late arriving at their out-patient clinics or operating sessions and frequently do not attend at all."

Consultants operate on the basis of good will, not contractual obligations. In the modern NHS, in which strategic planning is of vital importance, that cannot be allowed to continue.

I welcome the fact that the BMA agrees that greater transparency should be the basis of the new contract. Consultants should know what is expected of them, managers should know what to expect from consultants, and patients should know that the generous pay levels thought to form part of the new proposed contract will fund real commitment to the NHS on the part of all consultants.

There is one further area of great concern. In February 2001, the Government proposed that new consultants should, for the first seven years of their contract, be prevented from engaging in similar work outside the NHS. It takes substantial public investment to train consultants; the private sector does not fund the training. It is right, in principle, that as the public sector funds the training, the public sector should benefit. However, it is not just a matter of principle. Those who manage the NHS tell me that such a change would dramatically increase the NHS work carried out by new consultants, which would help reduce waiting lists. The Government must therefore stand firm.

I suspect that the negotiations on the NHS consultants contract may come to a head soon. The key to successful reform of the hospital sector lies in a new NHS consultants' contract that harnesses the skills of consultants for the NHS. It has taken more than 50 years for this opportunity to come. Having created the chance for reform, the Government must not duck the issues.

10.4 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Hazel Blears): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham (Ian Lucas) on securing this debate on the important issue of NHS consultants' contract. I also acknowledge his expertise and experience in these matters, and his encouragement to the Government to stand firm in the negotiations that are currently going on.

My hon. Friend will know that the United Kingdom Health Departments—we are negotiating the contract on a UK basis; it is not just a matter for England—are currently working with the central consultants and specialists committee of the British Medical Association on the new contract. I hope he will understand that, while the negotiations are under way, I cannot discuss the details of what is under discussion. As he said, the negotiations are complex and difficult, but it may be helpful if I set out why we are engaged in trying to reform the consultants contract and describe the benefits that we are hoping to achieve for consultants and staff from the new arrangements.

We recognise the dedication and commitment of doctors throughout the NHS. We know that consultants do an excellent job for the NHS which patients very much appreciate. Consultants often work under real pressure and sometimes flat out to provide the best possible care for their patients. We want the new contract to provide a better framework within which we can acknowledge this commitment to the NHS and to the patients under their care.

We have delivered the largest-ever sustained increase in funding for the NHS, but resources alone will not modernise and improve the service. We need to make the whole system work better and be prepared to do things differently. We are beginning to see much of that change happening throughout the NHS, and our challenge is to make the change universal and to get good practice adopted everywhere. We need consultants to be at the forefront of this modernisation, leading clinical change and redesigning clinical services around the patient, so that we no longer have a top-down service. We want to put patients at the centre and to ensure that all the services meet their needs.

We must also recognise that consultants sometimes feel they are struggling against the system. They cannot always get access to theatre or out-patient slots and sometimes the equipment that they want is already being used. Too often consultants feel that they do not get rewards for their service—6 per cent. of all women consultants hold a distinction award compared with 5 per cent. for all ethnic minority consultants and 17 per cent. for all white male consultants. Clearly those issues need to be addressed.

We need to tackle the issue of private practice. We all know that the majority of consultants work extremely hard for the NHS, working long hours and showing outstanding commitment. We need to tackle head on any suggestion that there could be conflicts of interest between NHS work and private work by NHS consultants. The time has come to be transparent, open and straight with people about such issues. The place to do that is in the contract negotiations.

Many factors affect waiting lists and waiting times in the NHS, and not all of them relate to the availability of individual consultants, but they have a key role to play in making sure that waiting lists and waiting times go down. We need to be to able to reassure patients that there is no conflict between consultants' work in the private sector and their work in the NHS.

We want to develop a contract that sets out clearly and unambiguously what is expected of consultants, that allows the NHS to make the most effective use of their time and that properly rewards consultants for their commitment to and performance in the NHS. That involves changing the way the system works to make it better for patients and consultants. We hope to do that through partnership in the negotiations that are currently taking place.

The NHS plan set out our plans to overhaul the contract and to work with doctors' representatives to try to achieve a mutually agreeable conclusion to the negotiations. We set out our proposals to develop the system of medical care in hospitals so that it becomes a more consultant-delivered service, with much more direct patient care being delivered by consultants. The NHS plan also set out proposals for an unprecedented increase in consultant numbers—equivalent to an increase of more than 30 per cent. since 1999. The Government have shown a real commitment to increase the number of consultants in the NHS so that patients can be seen more quickly and more effectively by very senior members of staff who can provide excellent quality care.

To make the best use of the increased number of consultants, we must have a clear contract that sets out the commitment of consultants to the NHS. The Government published detailed proposals on the consultants' contract in February 2001, building on the commitments set out in the NHS plan. These proposals, and the British Medical Association's proposals, form the basis of the negotiations currently taking place.

Our specific aims are to develop a system that gives better rewards to those who do most for the NHS, that gives proper recognition for the intensity of different working patterns, that makes better use of consultant time and effort, and that offers incentives and rewards to those who make a long-term commitment to the NHS.

The key elements of our proposals are a higher starting salary of £60,000, compared with the current salary of £51,000; additional pay thresholds that will take the basic

[Ms Hazel Blears]

salary up to £80,000, depending on satisfactory performance; immediate access to a new and much more transparent awards scheme—replacing the current system of distinction awards and discretionary points—that will offer awards of up to £65,000 in addition to the basic salary; a new concept of phased careers, involving an initial phase of maximum patient contact and high-intensity working when people are at the beginning of their careers and have lots of energy, drive and enthusiasm; the scope to reduce work load intensity for more experienced consultants who might want to do other work or change their working patterns; and a new system of mandatory job planning, with annual job plan reviews. My hon. Friend made the important point that often NHS managers do not have available full information on what consultants are doing, and where, when and for whom they are doing it. A job planning system will make the process much more transparent.

A crucial part of the plan is an initial period of perhaps seven years during which newly appointed consultants would be restricted to working exclusively in the NHS. Following that initial period, there will be a choice of contractual arrangements, based on time and service commitments to the NHS. For NHS employers, such a contract will provide greater direct management of how a consultant's time is organised, and enable working together to design job plans. All activities will be programmed into that job plan, and an increased proportion of programmed consultant time will be devoted to direct clinical care. A clear restriction will be imposed on carrying out work for other organisations in NHS time, and the opportunity will exist to offer greater rewards for NHS service and good performance.

For consultants, the proposals offer a significant increase in pay and rewards, and better planning of their time. We recognise consultants' concerns about inability to plan work loads—particularly emergency work loads—into their job patterns. Indeed, the profession itself wants clarity in terms of its commitments. As I said, we want to ensure proper rewards and incentives in the system.

For new consultants, our proposals would provide 15 per cent. higher lifetime earnings than the current arrangements. After 12 years, the majority of existing consultants would be between 15 and 20 per cent. better off than under the current arrangements. The proposals offer a real incentive for maximising commitment to the national health service. For patients, better planning of consultant time will allow better use of staff, equipment and facilities, greater opportunity to plan the working day and shorter waiting times.

An intensive programme of negotiations is under way. They deal with job planning, organisation and timetabling of the working week, core working hours, the possibility of extended patient services, on-call and emergency work, starting salary, consultants' progression up the pay hierarchy, disciplinary arrangements and links to private practice.

I am pleased to say that good progress has been made, but some difficult issues still need to be resolved. We need to ensure that trusts and consultants work together to deliver the new contract and benefits for patients. Implementation has to be led by a strong programme of support and guidance, and we are working with the BMA to ensure that implementation can proceed smoothly, so that there are no disruptions to patients or staff.

This is the first fundamental overhaul of the consultants' contract since 1948, and we should not underestimate the work to be done. It is crucial that we get it right. We published our initial proposals in February 2001, and we have been working with the BMA since then to develop detailed proposals. Some tricky issues are involved, but we remain committed to seeing the negotiations through and improving the system.

Consultants throughout the NHS work very hard, and I understand that only 15 per cent. are on part-time contracts. Some choose such contracts for domestic reasons, and in order to have flexibility in their careers. We recognise that the vast majority of consultants work extremely hard for the NHS.

The current contract, largely unchanged for more than 50 years, is outdated. We are developing a new contract that will recognise consultants' contribution and also commitment to the NHS. We want to have a system in the future that is designed around the needs of patients, that recognises the skills that consultants bring to the service and that makes patients the driving force. That is not an easy task.

We are prepared to make a substantial investment in the right contract, and I have outlined the increases in pay and rewards that will be on offer for those who want to devote their time to working for the NHS. I am confident that we will have a package that will be seen as a major improvement on the current system and that will deliver the significant benefits we want to see for patients in the NHS. I am delighted that my hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham raised this important subject this evening and I welcome his support for the Government's proposals in the negotiations.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at fifteen minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 21 March 2002

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

CITY OF LONDON (WARD ELECTIONS) BILL *(BY ORDER)*

Order for further consideration, as amended, read.

To be further considered on Tuesday 26 March.

Oral Answers to Questions

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

The Secretary of State was asked—

Aerospace Industry

1. **Dr. Doug Naysmith** (Bristol, North-West): What steps she is taking to encourage research and development in the UK aerospace industry. [42845]

7. **Mr. Andrew Turner** (Isle of Wight): If she will make a statement on the future of the aerospace industry. [42853]

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Ms Patricia Hewitt): The Government are taking a number of steps to support and improve the competitiveness of the United Kingdom aerospace industry. These include providing substantial launch investment and we are providing support of £20 million a year through the civil aeronautics research programme.

Dr. Naysmith: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. May I, however, press her on the funding of CARAD—the civil aircraft research and technology demonstration? The aerospace industry, which has been identified by the Government as a priority area for investment and encouragement, depends heavily on research. Yet UK public investment in research, particularly in aerospace research and development, has decreased significantly over the past decade. Funding through the CARAD programme in particular has fallen by 80 per cent. over that period. Will my right hon. Friend undertake to review that programme and commit more resources to aerospace research and development?

Ms Hewitt: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend's point about the importance of research and development in this world-class sector. I am looking at whether it is possible to do more through the CARAD programme and others to support research and development in aerospace. Aerospace companies will benefit significantly from the Chancellor's proposal to extend the research and development tax credits from the small and medium-sized enterprises, to which it already applies, to larger companies. I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor will take account of my hon. Friend's views in reaching the public spending settlement.

Mr. Turner: I thank the Minister for agreeing to visit the Isle of Wight, a visit that is eagerly anticipated by former staff of GKN Westland and the many others on the island who work in the aerospace industry. Can the Secretary of State give some hope to those who still have jobs in the industry that those jobs will be secure in the future, and reassure them that help will be given to attract new jobs to the island for the benefit of the 650 who have lost their jobs at Westland?

Ms Hewitt: I should like to extend my sympathy to the hon. Gentleman's constituents who lost their jobs at Westland and to their families. Talking to a number of business leaders and trade unionists in the aerospace sector, I find that although the sector is going through a very difficult time, exacerbated by the effects of 11 September, the medium-term outlook is very bright as demand recovers in the world economy, and particularly as the impact of the Lockheed joint strike fighter contract is felt. I look forward to my visit to the hon. Gentleman's constituency, and believe that the medium and longer term outlook for workers and companies in the aerospace sector is bright.

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): I thank my right hon. Friend for the support that the Government have given, both directly—and, through Yorkshire Forward, indirectly—to the investment in my constituency for an advanced manufacturing aerospace research and development project between Boeing and Sheffield university. I hope that we can get the same support for the neighbouring manufacturing companies that are working on aerospace projects in my constituency to make sure that we build from research and development into the most advanced aerospace manufacturing base not only in the United Kingdom but potentially in the world.

Ms Hewitt: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. I was delighted to hear Tom Bell, the chief executive of Boeing in the UK, say recently that in order for Boeing to be a world-class company it needed to be in partnership with the United Kingdom's world-class universities. Those partnerships between industry and our science base will ensure that our aerospace companies remain at the forefront of innovation and are thus in the competitive position to take advantage of the upturn in demand that will quite clearly come through in the world economy.

Mr. Richard Page (South-West Hertfordshire): Will the Secretary of State place in the Library details of the support that the Government give to small businesses in the supply chain for this most important industry—particularly for project and development work and enabling them to quote for projects? Will she include comparisons relating to what our European competitor countries do for their small businesses?

Ms Hewitt: I shall be happy to provide a note along those lines. I remind the hon. Gentleman that through

programmes such as the SMART awards, through the research and development tax credits for small and medium-sized companies and through partnerships with the universities, we are already doing a great deal. Over the next year centres of manufacturing excellence will be established in every region of the country, along with programmes like the Centre for Aerospace Innovation in the north-west of England. All that will help to ensure that the smaller companies in the supply chain, in aerospace in particular and in manufacturing in general, have the chance to go on increasing their productivity and sales and continuing to provide good employment.

Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): Companies such as Rolls-Royce, which has a strong base in the east midlands, have suffered badly since 11 September, but in the long term they have the opportunity of a very good future. That will come about only if they are able to compete in research and development for the future against countries like Canada.

In my right hon. Friend's discussions with the Chancellor, will she point out the real need for investment in research and development?

Ms Hewitt: I continue to make the case not only for an increase in our investment in the science base but for an increase in both public sector and private sector investment in research and development and in knowledge and technology transfer. Next month I shall open the centre for manufacturing excellence in the east midlands. That will benefit aerospace and manufacturing companies in the region.

We have, of course, examined the Canadian scheme to which my hon. Friend referred. It is always helpful to see what we can learn from other countries' initiatives. However, it is worth pointing out that, according to the latest figures, business research and development investment is lower in Canada than in the United Kingdom.

Lady Hermon (North Down): As I shall be visiting Shorts-Bombardier Aerospace in Belfast tomorrow afternoon, could the Secretary of State outline what measures are being taken to encourage research and development there?

Ms Hewitt: I have had several discussions with executives and trade unionists at Shorts-Bombardier since I became Secretary of State. That company, like others in the sector, will benefit from the tax credit for R and D from larger companies as well as from the support that we can give, for instance, through the Export Credits Guarantee Department. We shall continue to support the company, and many others across the country, in ensuring that they have the skills, technology and access to export markets that they need to continue to succeed and to provide good jobs in high-technology manufacturing.

Fairness At Work

2. **Rob Marris** (Wolverhampton, South-West): What action she is taking in respect of her policy on fairness at work. [42846]

The Minister for Employment and the Regions (Alan Johnson): Since 1997 the Government have shown their commitment to minimum standards and fairness in the workplace with the introduction of the national minimum wage, paid holidays and many other measures. We are building on that commitment in our second term—for example, by introducing new family-friendly rights such as paid paternity leave and measures to support flexible working, and new protections from discrimination in the areas of age, religion, and sexual orientation. We are about to review key parts of the Employment Relations Act 1999, to revise Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981 protections and to implement the information and consultation directive. That is a substantial agenda to deliver the Government's commitment to fairness at work.

Rob Marris: I am grateful to the Minister for reminding the House of the great steps that the Government have taken in their goal of modernising labour relations in this country and of the welcome steps that they propose to take to further that modernisation, leading to greater protection for employees and a better work-life balance.

Does the Minister agree, however, that this country remains in breach of some of its obligations under some International Labour Organisation and other labour relations conventions to which the United Kingdom is a signatory? If so, by what date do the Government propose to comply with those treaty obligations?

Alan Johnson: No, I do not accept my hon. Friend's point. The UK has ratified all the ILO core conventions. In those and other ratified conventions we work across Government to ensure that we are meeting all the necessary requirements. We report to the ILO accordingly. We also keep all the conventions under review and try to increase ratifications as appropriate. The ILO itself reviews the application of conventions in member states as part of a process of peer review and continuous improvement in which we play a full part.

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): Is the Minister not even mildly embarrassed when such modernising, reform-minded trade unionists as the general secretary of the Trades Union Congress describe the Government's employment policies as "bloody stupid"? More specifically, have Ministers met to reconcile their differences about contracted-out public services in view of the growing concern among not only trade unionists but responsible employers about the way in which training, pensions and holiday pay are being eroded by cowboys in industry?

Alan Johnson: As the Minister responsible for employment relations, I feel that it is a sign of my abject failure that I have made the TUC speak to the Conservative party. That is a terrible thing to force anyone to do. I also wonder whether the hon. Gentleman is mildly embarrassed at having launched for the Liberal Democrat party the policy not of a national minimum wage but of a regional minimum, only to ditch it a year later, describing it as "politically illiterate". No, we are not at all embarrassed.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has said—indeed, I said it as recently as 14 February—that we will protect the pensions of public sector workers transferring under the TUPE regulations.

Mr. David Watts (St. Helens, North): May I draw to the Minister's attention the fact that many British workers still do not receive bank holiday pay? With the Queen's jubilee holiday on the horizon, will he take action to ensure that all employers face up to their responsibilities and pay their workers for all bank holidays?

Alan Johnson: We have introduced the right for every worker to have four weeks paid holiday a year. Bank holidays are a matter for contractual arrangements with individual companies. We are aware that the TUC has recently produced a report and we will look at it, but we do not think that that should detract from the real and tangible benefits that we have introduced since 1997.

Mr. Jonathan Djanogly (Huntingdon): As strike days increased from 235,000 in 1997 to more than 500,000 last year, does the Minister accept that, for all this Government's employment regulations, guidances and so forth, the reality is that industrial relations are getting worse?

Alan Johnson: That is frankly ludicrous. A couple of years ago, under this Government, we had the lowest level of industrial action since records began in 1841.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): The Minister is referring to two years ago.

Alan Johnson: Let us leave aside the Thatcher years when there was an incredible level of industrial action, and consider the Major years, 1990–97, when the average for days lost through such action was 833,857. Since we came to power, the average has been 353,540, which is almost a third of the level that we inherited. Employment relations are good and they are made better by the fact that we have established minimum standards in the workplace. We are pro minimum standards and pro free, independent trade unionism. The Conservative party is anti-worker and anti-union.

Broadband Communications

3. **James Purnell** (Stalybridge and Hyde): What progress is being made towards the Government's targets for broadband communications. [42847]

The Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness (Mr. Douglas Alexander): The UK Online annual report, published in December 2001, detailed progress towards our broadband targets. Broadband services in the UK had continued to develop over the year and 60 to 65 per cent. of the country is now covered by an affordable broadband technology.

Progress is being made by industry and Government. Last year, we announced a £30 million fund to encourage broadband roll-out. This week, I detailed how that money would be spent in each region and, earlier this month, I welcomed BT's announcement that it was looking to reduce wholesale prices for broadband technologies.

James Purnell: I thank the Minister for that answer, which will be particularly welcome to small businesses in my constituency that are trying to use the potential of new technology to widen their markets and customer base. Does he agree that the announcement by BT in particular shows the importance of competition in achieving the goals that the Government have set? Will he also reassure the House that he will help businesses in rural areas to connect to broadband in the same way that businesses in city areas already can?

Mr. Alexander: I would certainly agree with my hon. Friend's comment that we need an extensive and a competitive market in this country, and I know of his long-standing commitment to this area of Government policy. Indeed, the £2.7 million that was recently allocated to the north-west will address the specific concerns of the small businesses that he addressed in his question.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): The Minister boasts that there is 60 to 65 per cent. broadband penetration in this country, but there is broadband and broadband, isn't there? At the great risk of sounding like an anorak and boring the entire House, broadband is 1.5 megabits a second, and the hon. Gentleman is not talking about that sort of bandwidth. The penetration of real broadband is only 25 per cent. We lag at 22nd in the world for broadband penetration. Will the hon. Gentleman stop being complacent and say how we will become No. 1, not No. 22?

Mr. Alexander: I certainly would not wish to bore the House, but the current generation speeds of 384 kilobits, up to 10 megabits, comply with the UK Online target that was set. However, the substantive point that the hon. Gentleman makes in relation to the challenge of meeting our targets is important. I am sure that he will agree that prices are falling, ADSL has reduced to less than £30 a month and take-up is rising—it is up more than 500 per cent. on last year. So we face two challenges: first, how we achieve a more extensive roll-out of broadband services and, secondly, how we drive usage across those networks. We are making real and substantive progress on both those challenges.

Jim Knight (South Dorset): Will the Minister focus on the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (James Purnell) about what progress is being made in broadband roll-out in rural areas? In areas such as Dorset, which I represent, what progress has been made has largely been through the education sector. Bournemouth university is working with a business park and the learning and skills council is working with a group of small businesses. I am particularly interested in what work the Minister is doing with the Department for Education and Skills, so that the regional broadband consortiums and similar bodies link in with small business access to broadband.

Mr. Alexander: I certainly pay tribute to my hon. Friend's concern with this issue. I would make a central point: the public sector's aggregation work is absolutely

key to the roll-out of broadband services in rural areas; it is the fundamental means by which we change the risk and reward balance through which investment decisions are taken in the private sector. I can also assure my hon. Friend that very considerable work is taking place not just in the Department of Trade and Industry, but right across the major spending Departments, anticipating the comprehensive spending review, to address exactly the issue that he raises.

Mr. Philip Hammond (Runnymede and Weybridge): I am sure that the Minister will agree that one of the great potential advantages of broadband is in reducing the significance of geographical location for business, thus supporting the regional rebalancing of the economy. But does he also recognise that the telcos, whose investment will determine the roll-out of broadband in the United Kingdom, are heavily capital constrained and debt burdened and that they will inevitably invest where returns are quickest—principally, in London and the south-east? Will he tell the House what specific proposals the Government have to stimulate investment in other parts of the country, so that broadband's true potential can be achieved?

Mr. Alexander: I am indeed surprised at a Conservative party spokesman advocating balanced regional economic growth throughout the United Kingdom, but, be that as it may, I will take the point that he makes in two parts. First, he is right to identify the need to ensure that the public sector leverages its investment in broadband effectively in a way that affects investment decisions by the private sector. Across Government, we spend approximately £1.7 billion a year on information and communications technology. One of the fundamental challenges that we have set ourselves is to discover how we can leverage that investment more effectively to address exactly the point that the hon. Gentleman raises.

Not only have we detailed this week the money allocated to each of the regions and devolved Administrations of the United Kingdom to try to ensure that regionally balanced economic growth takes place, but we have ensured that the plan that we have devised allows central Government to capture the insights garnered by the pilot projects that that money will facilitate. That is smart policy making to ensure that, in a competitive framework, we achieve the regional economic balance that the Government are certainly sincere in wanting.

Mr. Richard Allan (Sheffield, Hallam): Does the Minister accept that although the recently announced price cuts by BT are welcome, they do nothing to help the third of the population who are not connected to ADSL-enabled exchanges, and that that is not confined to rural areas, but includes suburban areas, such as large parts of Sheffield, where people still cannot connect? Does he have anything positive to offer many of my constituents—including me, because my office is connected to a non-enabled exchange—in terms of a timetable to ensure that all the exchanges will be enabled so that businesses do not suffer this lack of competitiveness?

Mr. Alexander: Obviously, BT faces a number of commercial decisions in taking forward what is a wholly new strategy for the company of focusing on broadband. The present figures are approximately 50 per cent. cable coverage across the United Kingdom and 60 per cent. enabled exchanges. It is an important challenge for BT, if it is sincere in wanting to drive forward further broadband connections, to move higher the number of about 1,010 exchanges which are at present enabled. I have form in this regard, because five months ago I challenged the company to lower its prices. I would be happy to reinforce that today by challenging it to enable more exchanges.

Sub-post Offices

4. **Mr. James Clappison** (Hertsmere): What assessment she has made of the prospects for sub-post offices. [42848]

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Ms Patricia Hewitt): The Government are committed to maintaining a nationwide network of post offices. We have allocated £270 million over three years for modernisation of the network. In January, we announced our support for a compensation package for the urban network restructuring programme to be undertaken by Post Office Ltd. Detailed discussion of this and an investment support package is continuing and a state aids notification will be submitted shortly.

Mr. Clappison: While the Secretary of State may say that she is committed, is it not the case that last year a record 547 sub-post offices closed and that sub-post offices faced a further loss of business through the introduction of automated credit transfer? Can she give an assurance for her Department that the universal bank is on course to be delivered at the same time as the introduction of automated credit transfer—in April 2003? Apparently, it has already been delivered to the wrong address once and had to be redirected. Can she assure us that it will not be lost in the post altogether?

Ms Hewitt: I will not take lectures on post office closures from a member of the Conservative party, given that there were 3,500 post office closures under the Conservatives. In the last nine months we have seen a welcome reduction in the rate of post office closures. As the hon. Gentleman should be aware, we placed a requirement on the company to avoid preventable closures. Discussions are progressing on the universal bank and the project is on track.

Dr. Ashok Kumar (Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East): What steps are being taken to strengthen the management of the network?

Ms Hewitt: As my hon. Friend the Minister for Employment and the Regions said last month, a new chief executive has been appointed for the post office network. David Mills, the new chief executive, has an excellent track record in retailing and will be able to bring that experience to exploit the extraordinary potential of what is our largest retail network. He will take up his job next month and immediately start going round the country to talk to sub-postmasters and their customers. I look forward to the proposals that he will no doubt wish to put to the board and Ministers for further strengthening the post office network.

Brian Cotter (Weston-super-Mare): On 1 March in response to a question I asked, the Secretary of State indicated that 73 post offices are currently under consultation with regard to closure. In the majority of cases nobody is applying to take them over. Does the right hon. Lady agree that that is not in the least surprising, given the uncertainty over the profitability of sub-post offices and the uncertainty that continues, following the answer just given, on the universal bank? Can we have more certainty, particularly about the universal bank, because there is no real commitment that it will be a profitable concern sufficient to make up for the lack of profitability as regards other Government measures?

Ms Hewitt: It is perfectly true that there are some sub-post offices in urban and rural parts where it is not possible to get somebody to come forward and take over. That in part reflects the fact that we have within urban areas alone about two-thirds of the population living within half a mile of two and sometimes up to five sub-post offices. Some of those sub-post offices are struggling to survive commercially. That is why we have agreed with the company and the National Federation of Sub-postmasters a programme both for compensation and investment to ensure that sub-post offices will indeed have a good commercial future. As I said, we have already committed £270 million over three years to implement the recommendations of the comprehensive performance and innovation unit report to ensure that customers and sub-postmasters alike have confidence in the future of the post office network, which is vital to the social fabric of our country.

Steel Imports

5. **Mr. Ian Cawsey** (Brigg and Goole): What action she proposes to take in response to the US Government's decision to impose tariffs on steel imports. [42849]

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Ms Patricia Hewitt): The Government will stand by our steel producers in combating this unjustified and deeply regrettable action. We fully support the action already taken by the European Trade Commissioner in initiating World Trade Organisation action against the United States. We are pressing the Commission to take appropriate and urgent action to safeguard British and European steel producers and workers against a flood of steel imports. We expect a decision on that within a matter of days, and we are working closely with British companies to support their efforts to secure exclusion from the American measures of products that American steel producers cannot supply.

Mr. Cawsey: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply and for her efforts on behalf of the steel industry, which we hope will be successful in persuading Commissioner Lamy to introduce quotas at the pre-1998 level. However, my right hon. Friend will be aware that the problems of the British steel industry did not begin with American tariffs. The relative strength of the pound against the euro has made life very difficult, and although EU defensive mechanisms are appropriate, what unilateral measures will she take to ensure that EU partners with a high dependency on US exports do not merely export those goods to the United Kingdom, further hitting the British steel industry?

Ms Hewitt: We are working closely with our steel companies, trade unions and trade association to ensure that we do everything that is possible within the framework of WTO rules, which we support even if the Americans do not, to protect our companies and workers against the American action. Of course we are all aware of the impact of the weak euro on many of our steel companies, but despite that our steel industry has an excellent productivity record and a range of very high value-added products. We will continue to support the innovation and R and D that will help them to sustain their competitiveness both in Europe and globally.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Bracknell): During the Secretary of State's recent statement to the House, she continually refused to answer questions on when the Prime Minister first became involved in making representations to the President and others in the American Administration. Will she now answer that—otherwise we, like steelworkers and others around the country, will conclude that the right hon. Gentleman's representations were woefully inadequate and made very late in the day?

Ms Hewitt: I find it a little difficult to regard the right hon. Gentleman as a consistent and effective spokesman for our steel industry. I made it clear in that statement that since last July, the British Government—the Prime Minister, myself and other Ministers—and our embassy in Washington have consistently lobbied the American Government to persuade them not to take this deplorable action. We are now doing everything that we can to protect our industry against the consequences.

Helen Jackson (Sheffield, Hillsborough): Does my right hon. Friend accept that the steel industry in the UK is very appreciative of the efforts that she and her Department are making following the imposition of tariffs? Does she recognise the importance of the urgent action that Commissioner Lamy is considering, to which she referred in her reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Goole (Mr. Cawsey)? There must be proper recognition of the time scale within which the European Commission applies the import safeguards. We need to return to the level set five years ago, or at least to take into consideration the fact that 2001 was an exceptional year. If the Commission does not note that, it will not provide the safeguards that the steel industry expects.

Ms Hewitt: My hon. Friend makes an important point about the base of imports from which safeguard action is calculated. That is a matter that we have been discussing both with the steel companies and with the Commission. A decision on safeguard measures is expected within a matter of days, and our target is to ensure that provisional safeguard measures across the European Union are put into effect as close as possible to 1 April.

In the meantime, discussions on compensation have already started, and if they do not lead to agreement by about the middle of April the European Union will then

be free to take retaliatory action against the United States. All those issues are being pursued as quickly as we possibly can.

Adam Price (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): May I press the Secretary of State on this important point? She mentions safeguard measures against imports from outside the European Union, but one of the most urgent threats to the UK steel industry will be the approximately 4 million tonnes of western European steel that will be displaced out of the US market. If that steel is targeted at the UK because of the exchange rate, the effect on the UK steel industry will be devastating. What urgent measures will the Secretary of State take to prevent that from happening?

Ms Hewitt: We are talking to the industry and working with our European partners to minimise the damage that the American action will do to British and to other European steel producers. The hon. Gentleman will be aware, as are the Government, of the damage that the weakness of the euro is doing to many of our exporters in steel and in other parts of manufacturing industry. However, we will not make the mistake that Conservative Governments made in the past of trying to operate both an inflation target and an exchange rate target. Above all, our steel and manufacturing industry requires the framework of economic stability that this Government have delivered and the Conservative Government so signally failed to deliver.

Alan Howarth (Newport, East): I echo the thanks expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Helen Jackson) to my right hon. Friend for her tough championship of the UK steel industry.

Has my right hon. Friend had occasion to make clear to the US Administration how profoundly offensive is their steel protectionism at a time when British troops are mobilised to fight alongside American troops in Afghanistan and the Americans are making big demands of British friendship in international affairs? What sort of behaviour is it deliberately to impose restraints on trade to ensure that British workers lose their jobs to protect American ones?

Ms Hewitt: As I said when I made my statement to the House on the American action, we would be wrong to link the war against terrorism with the trade war on steel that the Americans have unfortunately launched. We stand with our American allies and with the international coalition against terrorism because that is the right thing to do and it is in British interests—just as we stand with our steel producers against the American import tariffs on steel because on this occasion the American Administration are doing the wrong thing. I have expressed very directly to the American Administration our views on this unlawful and wholly unjustified action, and I shall continue to have discussions with members of the Administration to seek to mitigate the worst effects of their action on our British steel producers and workers.

Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): Will the Secretary of State use this as an opportunity to review the effectiveness of the UK's anti-dumping policies? She will be aware that in the past week Raleigh Cycles in Nottingham made the sad announcement of its intention to cease producing bicycles in the United Kingdom. The main reason that it cites is the dumping of bikes from south-east Asia in terms with which it is impossible for the UK economy to compete.

Raleigh has invested money to raise the standards of health and safety in its factory and to reduce waste by a factor 10 times better than that of its competitors from south-east Asia. Is not it a good time to consider the case for environmental tariffs so that we reward those who do not poison the land or the labour that they use in production?

Ms Hewitt: I share my hon. Friend's real disappointment at the announcement made by Raleigh a few days ago. Raleigh is a great British firm that has been manufacturing bicycles in the city of Nottingham for many, many decades.

We are always willing to look at evidence of dumping when it occurs and, where there is that evidence, to take action within World Trade Organisation rules. Environmental standards are of real concern not only to us but to our European partners. We discussed them fully during the Doha negotiations for a new world trade round. I hope that those discussions will proceed—but in the appropriate framework. My hon. Friend is aware that, unfortunately, many developing countries regard Europe's concern for the environment as no more than disguised protectionism.

Mr. John Whittingdale (Maldon and East Chelmsford): As the Secretary of State knows, we support the imposition of safeguard measures by the EU in the form of steel quotas. However, this week, Corus announced losses of £400 million last year and confirmed that another 4,000 British steel workers are to lose their jobs. Is not that further proof of the damage caused by the overcapacity in the global steel industry, which is being sustained by her Government's support for Mr. Mittal's takeover of Corus's foreign competitors, while her Government are destroying the competitiveness of the UK industry through the climate change levy?

Ms Hewitt: The hon. Gentleman makes an absurd proposition. The challenge to him is: does he support enlargement of the European Union, or does he not? Does he support economic reform in the candidate countries, or does he not? Does he support the steps that we are taking to sustain economic stability and to support directly the increasing competitiveness of our steel industry and the rest of our manufacturing industry?

Mr. Whittingdale: It is no good for the Secretary of State to put on her pained expression. The issue will not go away. Does not she understand the feeling of betrayal among steel workers who have the prospect of their market being flooded by steel that previously went to the American market, while the steel produced by the Romanian company that is owned by the Government's crony, Mr. Mittal, will escape tariffs in the United States? Perhaps she will tell us whether her efforts to persuade the United States authorities to exempt British steel from tariffs have been half as successful as Mr. Mittal's efforts to have those tariffs imposed in the first place.

Ms Hewitt: The hon. Gentleman continues to talk nonsense. The steel output from Romania—a tiny, tiny

fraction of European or world steel output—will continue to be exported to the American markets because it has been exempted by the American Government from the tariffs, just as steel produced in other developing countries has been exempted. The issue of the diversion of Romanian steel—or that of developing countries—from the American markets to the British and European markets simply does not arise. The much larger issue is that of world overcapacity in steel and American overcapacity in steel. That is why we have been supporting multilateral talks under the umbrella of the OECD to try and deal with the problem.

Science

6. **Joan Ryan** (Enfield, North): What impact Government investment in the UK's science base is having on British industry. [42851]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Miss Melanie Johnson): The Government are providing a strong framework for scientists and business to work together to drive innovation, and are encouraging collaboration between universities and business to ensure that scientific breakthroughs are turned into commercial success and benefit the UK economy.

There has been rapid progress in generating businesses from the science base, with 199 new companies spun out from universities in 1999-2000, compared with 338 in the previous five years.

Joan Ryan: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer.

The London business innovation centre is based in the Innova science park in my constituency. The centre provides incubator units for developing innovative ideas as well as business advice and support. My hon. Friend is welcome to visit that facility to see its success. However, it demonstrates the need for practical advice on the ground to ensure that "Invented in Britain" becomes "Made in Britain". Will my hon. Friend tell us what further measures the Government will be taking to ensure that higher education institutions that do not currently provide incubator units can do so?

Miss Johnson: I am delighted to hear of the success of the centre in my hon. Friend's constituency, and I should be pleased to try to visit it in the not-too-distant future. The successful exploitation of new ideas is a crucial component for our productivity growth, a topic about which I know my hon. Friend is concerned, as am I. In the knowledge economy it will not be enough for us to generate research—we need to make the most of it too. As my hon. Friend said, we need to ensure that there is a spin-off from the world class research in universities and the private sector, and we need to develop the ability to capitalise on the innovations that research produces.

My hon. Friend will be interested to hear of the success of our policies compared with those in north America. In 1999-2000, UK universities identified one spin-off firm for every £8.6 million of research expenditure; in Canadian universities, the spin-off in 1999 was one firm for every £13.9 million, and in the USA the rate was one firm for every £53 million. That shows the success of UK universities and businesses, and of the support given by the Government.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): I should be delighted to meet the hon. Member for Enfield, North (Joan Ryan) in her constituency to see if her incubators are as good as mine at Porton Down.

Does the Minister agree that we all have a responsibility to encourage a pro-science culture in this country, starting with more and better science education in schools? What regular meetings occur between her or her Department and the Department for Education and Skills to discuss the need to encourage science education?

Miss Johnson: I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman that it is important that we invest in science, including science in schools. Our whole aim has been to commit additional money to investment in the science base; for example, a £1 billion package has been invested in the science and engineering base in partnership with the Wellcome Trust and the funding councils. In addition, we have given a £100 million boost to the science budget to build on universities' potential as drivers of growth in the knowledge economy. There has also been a £252 million boost to research in key areas that will shape life in the 21st century, such as understanding the genome, developing the next generation of e-science and creating new basic technology capabilities. All those things are very important.

I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman that the work that is done with our young people is important too, as is the development of science in the primary and secondary school curriculum. I assure him that my hon. Friends and myself have regular contacts with the DFES to ensure that we make the most of science education and the UK's science potential.

Small Businesses

8. **Gillian Merron** (Lincoln): What assessment she has made of the impact of the Employment Bill on small businesses. [42854]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Nigel Griffiths): The Government consulted extensively on the proposals in the Employment Bill to ensure, among other things, that the impact on small businesses was taken into account.

Gillian Merron: I thank the Minister for his reply. I particularly welcome the measures in the Employment Bill to allow small businesses easily to give paid time off to parents welcoming a new child into the family. However, having heard the continuing concern of my local branch of the Federation of Small Businesses, may I ask my hon. Friend to outline the action that he is taking to relieve the burden of red tape? What steps is he taking to outline to small businesses the implications of the Employment Bill?

Nigel Griffiths: My hon. Friend rightly points out how improved statutory maternity pay provisions from April will aid even more small businesses with 105 per cent. refunds, which will help 60 per cent. of affected small

and medium-sized enterprises, compared with 44 per cent. beforehand. The Government have accepted all but eight of the 294 recommendations from the better regulation taskforce. Our Regulatory Reform Act 2001 is making it easier and quicker to repeal out-of-date legislation. Our Small Business Service is working in partnership with the Federation of Small Businesses, the Forum of Private Business, the chambers of commerce and others to identify the impact of the Employment Bill on SMEs in particular, and how that might be dealt with.

Mr. Mark Prisk (Hertford and Stortford): Is it true, and can the Minister confirm, that the cost of the Employment Bill rose during Committee stage from about £200 million to £500 million, that cost falling on businesses, in particular small businesses? Will he reflect on those costs and listen to and understand the concerns expressed by small business organisations, which believe that what they were originally promised when the Bill was introduced in the House has changed substantially?

Nigel Griffiths: We have listened with care to the representations that we have received from small businesses, but we are firm in our support for proper standards in the workplace. That is why we are for the minimum wage, increased maternity and paternity leave, and the flexible working that is so essential to the 21st-century economy. What is important is that the benefits of the legislation to many millions of workers far outweigh the costs involved.

MINISTER FOR WOMEN

The Minister was asked—

Women's Unit

29. **Mrs. Claire Curtis-Thomas** (Crosby): If she will make a statement on the work of the women's unit within the DTI with specific reference to the promotion of science, engineering and technology. [42880]

The Minister for Women (Ms Patricia Hewitt): The DTI's unit promoting SET for women is doing excellent work on the recruitment and retention of women in science, engineering and technology and ensuring that women contribute to scientific policy making. I recently launched a report commissioned by the unit on maximising returns to science, engineering and technology careers.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: I suspect that my right hon. Friend shared the delight I felt to hear so many questions relating to science today. It is an opportune moment to remind the House that the Government have invested £1.7 billion in academic science provision in this country. Focusing on women in science, I understand that my colleague Susan Greenfield, now Baroness Greenfield, is currently producing a report on women and their opportunities to re-enter science and engineering activities. Is my right hon. Friend in a position to provide an update on that report?

Ms Hewitt: I recently met Baroness Greenfield to discuss the approach she is to take to the issue of how to get more women into science and engineering. I am delighted to say that she has already established three working groups, which will consider the three key stages of a career in technology and science: early stage, mid-career and management, and then going right through to the top. She is to consult women already working in SET, as well as women who would like to return to the field but have not yet done so. I am sure that, like me, my hon. Friend is looking forward to Baroness Greenfield's report, which I expect to receive in June.

Sandra Gidley (Romsey): I am beginning to feel that I am living in a parallel universe—[HON. MEMBERS: "You are."] Part of the problem is women's uptake of science and engineering A-levels and degrees: of those embarking on an engineering degree, only 14.5 per cent. are women. Is not an indictment of the Government's performance provided by the "Women in ITEC Courses and Careers in 2001" report, which shows that the proportion of women employed in ITEC—information technology, electronics and communications—jobs decreased from 16 per cent. in 1999 to 13 per cent. in 2000? That suggests to me that employment of women in science has decreased, not increased as the Minister suggested. Other aspects of the problem have been identified as: problems with part-time working and with—

Mr. Speaker: Order. Will the hon. Lady resume her seat? She has finished.

Ms Hewitt: I am sorry that the hon. Lady finds the Liberal Benches to be a parallel universe. She might be more comfortable on the Government Benches—we would be delighted to welcome her.

The hon. Lady makes an important point: the proportion of women employed in information and communications technology jobs has indeed been falling. The absolute numbers have risen as the total sector has increased, but the proportion of women has been falling. We have a very real problem in that the image of engineering, computing, and science and technology careers is deeply off-putting to many girls and many young women. That is why we are putting such emphasis on getting women role models and women ambassadors, especially into schools, so that we encourage more women to enter the extraordinarily exciting field of science and technology that offers such wonderful and well-paid job opportunities.

Public Life

30. **Mrs. Jackie Lawrence** (Preseli Pembrokeshire): What steps she is taking to increase female representation in public life. [42883]

The Minister for Women (Ms Patricia Hewitt): The Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Act received Royal Assent on 26 February. I hope that all political parties will seize the opportunity that the Act presents to increase the number of women candidates.

Mrs. Lawrence: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. I am sure that she accepts that women from all walks of life can make a valuable contribution to public life and to public bodies. Will she give an outline of what

her Department is doing to encourage a wider range of women to put themselves forward as candidates, not just women from professional and managerial backgrounds?

Ms Hewitt: My hon. Friend makes an important point. My hon. Friend the Minister of State, Cabinet Office, and I have been organising meetings and seminars around the country that are designed to encourage women from a variety of backgrounds to think about possible public appointments for which their skills in the family, in their local neighbourhoods and in voluntary organisations have made them well fitted. I am pleased to say that that programme of seminars has been such a success in attracting women to apply for public appointments that I shall do three more meetings targeted at women from the black and Asian community, women from business and women from trade unions.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): The Minister will know that in 1997 33 per cent. of public appointments were held by women, and that this year the figure is 34 per cent. Does she acknowledge that, at that rate of progress, it will take till 2082 to reach the Government's target of 50 per cent. of public appointments being held by women? What progress does the Minister claim for herself?

Ms Hewitt: We are making faster progress than the Conservative party, which has just gone through Trade and Industry questions with no women present. It is precisely because the rate of progress in the past has not been fast enough that we are taking much stronger measures to improve the recruitment of women and of men and women from ethnic minority communities to public appointments. That is why we have targets across all Departments and public agencies for the appointment of women and people from minority ethnic communities to public appointments. I am glad to say that the majority of Departments are well on track to reach that target of 50 per cent. of public appointments being held by women.

Mothers

31. **Fiona Mactaggart** (Slough): What steps she is taking to promote Government measures to make it easier for those mothers who want to return to work to do so. [42884]

The Minister for Women (Ms Patricia Hewitt): We are promoting a range of measures to tackle this issue, including investment in child care, the working families tax credit, the new deal for lone parents and the new deal for partners, and increased access to adult education. The Employment Bill currently before Parliament includes further measures to enable more mothers who wish to return to work to do so.

Fiona Mactaggart: I welcome the steps that have been taken to help women to return to work, one of the most significant of which is the improvements in child care provision, especially after school child care. May I urge the Secretary of State to do what she can to ensure that, as new opportunities funding runs out for after school child care schemes, support for mothers, especially low-paid mothers, through such schemes continues so that we carry on making the progress that we have started to make in opening up work opportunities for women?

Ms Hewitt: My hon. Friend raises an important point. We have begun to make real progress on child care. We have created additional child care places for almost 880,000 children since 1997, and we are on track to help more than 1.5 million children with child care places by 2004. The specific issue of new opportunities funding in disadvantaged areas and how we sustain and grow provision in those communities is being reviewed by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, and is also the subject of a study by the performance and innovation unit.

Mrs. Caroline Spelman (Meriden): I am sure that the Secretary of State will agree that parents returning to work often prefer informal child care arrangements, and, if possible, leaving their children with a relative. Does she accept that we were right to criticise this gap in the arrangements for the working families tax credit, and that yesterday's announcement that child care tax credits might be extended to grandparents represents a welcome climbdown?

Ms Hewitt: I am delighted that the hon. Lady has told us that she and the Conservative party strongly support the working families tax credit and the child care tax credit that goes with it. When my right hon. Friend the Chancellor first announced the working families tax credit, he made it clear that he would keep its operation under review. It is already enormously popular and it is helping more than three times as many people as the Conservatives' family credit was helping. The issue of whether it can be extended to family carers including grandparents is of real concern, for instance, to some of my constituents in low-income communities. That is why we are looking precisely at that possibility.

Business of the House

12.31 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Will the Leader of the House give the business for next week?

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Robin Cook): The business of the House for next week is as follows:

MONDAY 25 MARCH—Second Reading of the State Pension Credit Bill *[Lords]*.

TUESDAY 26 MARCH—Motion to approve the Sixth Report of the Committee on Standards and Privileges on the registration of interests by Members who have not taken their seat.

Consideration of Lords Amendments to the Football (Disorder) (Amendment) Bill.

Motion on the Easter Recess Adjournment.

The business for the week after Easter will be:

TUESDAY 9 APRIL—Second Reading of the Enterprise Bill.

WEDNESDAY 10 APRIL—Second Reading of the Tobacco Advertising and Promotion Bill *[Lords]*.

THURSDAY 11 APRIL—Debate on armed forces personnel on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

FRIDAY 12 APRIL—Private Members' Bills.

The House will wish to be reminded that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer will deliver his Budget statement on Wednesday 17 April.

I should also like to inform the House that the business in Westminster Hall for April will be:

THURSDAY 11 APRIL—Debate on UK-Japanese relations.

THURSDAY 18 APRIL—Debate on the report from the Social Security Committee on the Social Fund.

THURSDAY 25 APRIL—Debate on the report from the Foreign Affairs Committee on British-US relations.

Mr. Forth: I thank the Leader of the House for telling us the business.

A Second Reading debate on the Enterprise Bill on 9 April has been announced. I am led to believe that that Bill has not yet been published, but it is rumoured that it may contain more than 250 clauses and in excess of 20 schedules. The Leader of the House is putting us in a position whereby a major Bill containing enormously complex material, which, I gather, has had no pre-legislative scrutiny, will not be published until next week when the House goes into recess for two weeks. Immediately on the House's return, it will be asked to conduct its Second Reading debate. Surely that flies completely in the face not only of all parliamentary convention but of the Leader of the House's principles—which he likes to set out frequently—which include a belief in the value of pre-legislative scrutiny and in the necessity for the House to have a proper opportunity not only to debate and to scrutinise but to consult legitimate outside interests before doing so. I ask the Leader of the House to reconsider the matter.

Given that we are not exactly under enormous pressure of time, will the Leader of the House consider delaying, even at this late stage, the Second Reading of the Enterprise Bill? We would thus have more time properly to consider it and properly to consult outside the House before we debate it.

There is an item in a newspaper today headed: "Labour peer quits in job row". Apparently, the peer in question is a nice man called Lord Warner, who is a Labour peer. I gather that, at one time, he was a special adviser to no less a man than the Foreign Secretary. Lord Warner lists law and order as his special interests in "Dod's Parliamentary Companion", so he is obviously a good chap. I am really inviting the Leader of the House to tell me that the story is completely wrong. It is reported that this nice man was going to be offered the job of head of the Audit Commission, and that that was endorsed by No. 10, no less. However, it is alleged that another nice man, the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions—to whom the House has had to get used, as he comes here so often to grovel—for some reason vetoed the appointment of the nice Lord Warner.

We really must get to the bottom of this. If that Secretary of State is messing things up again, defying No. 10 and disappointing one of his colleagues so much that a Labour peer has resigned from his party and joined the Cross Benches, we need to know more about it. Moreover, if that nice man has seen fit to resign, what has happened to the Labour Chief Whip in the Lords? Some very serious allegations were made last week—

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): Another very nice man.

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) says that the Labour Chief Whip in the Lords is a nice man, but that is not how he came across on Sky Television last weekend, when he made some very serious allegations. Why has he not stepped aside until his name is cleared—if it is going to cleared? Why is he still in his job, when Lord Warner has left the Labour party? I think that we need to know.

I genuinely regret to say this, but the Prime Minister's contempt for Parliament is becoming more and more obvious. We must not forget that, according to the House of Commons Library, the Prime Minister has a voting record of 3 per cent. That means that he bothers to turn up to this House to vote on only 3 per cent. of occasions. What the people of Sedgefield think about that I do not know as, apart from anything else, the right hon. Gentleman is supposed to represent them in the House of Commons.

However, the problem is even worse. The Prime Minister was not present for the debate on our military involvement in Afghanistan, even though the Secretary of State for Defence has said that our military personnel may be putting their lives on the line. The Prime Minister was not here to support the Secretary of State, or our young men and women in uniform. I have heard, although I can scarce believe it, that, at the material time, the Prime Minister was talking to Labour MPs about foxes. I hope that the Leader of the House can confirm or deny that.

If the Prime Minister seriously believes that foxes are more important than the lives of our young men and women in uniform, he should be ashamed of himself. He should come to the House to make an apology. I hope that the Leader of the House will urge him to do so.

Mr. Cook: First, I thank the right hon. Gentleman for drawing our attention to the Enterprise Bill. It is a very important Bill—

Mr. Forth *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Cook: It is indeed an important Bill, and we understood that the principle on which it is based was supported by the Conservative party, just as it is extensively supported throughout industry and business. I am happy to confirm that the Bill will be published next week. By my reckoning, that will allow a clear two weeks before the Second Reading debate. The hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale) is one of the more able and intellectual of Opposition Front-Bench Members, and I am sure that it is within his wit to prepare a 25-minute speech over the two-week period of the recess.

Mr. Forth *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Cook: Apparently, the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) does not have faith in the hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford, or believe that he can prepare a 25-minute speech in that time. It is very important that the Government respond to the strong wish in industry, commerce and business to improve the competition regulations. We must make sure that those regulations promote competition and break up cartels, and that they are more independent of political control. I totally support the Bill. I hope that the hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford will be able to say the same when he returns after the recess, when he will have had plenty of leisure to consider these matters in full.

I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his observation that Lord Warner is a very nice man. He used another term to describe Lord Warner that is not one normally used by Labour Members, but I am happy to accept his word that he is also "a good chap"—I hope that I have got the phrase right. I shall not dispute either of those points with the right hon. Gentleman, and no Labour Member would suggest that Lord Warner was not a nice man or a good chap.

However, I have been sitting here wondering what the right hon. Gentleman would have said if Lord Warner had been appointed to chair the Audit Commission. I know exactly what he would have said. He would have said, "Another of Steve's cronies gets an appointment . . . a Labour special adviser to Labour Ministers . . . it is disgraceful that such a man should have a very important position of independence." The right hon. Gentleman should spare us the humbug. He hits us over the left ear and, when we react in a different way, he tries to hit us over the right ear.

Lord Carter has issued a full statement through his lawyers fully rebutting the allegations mentioned by the right hon. Gentleman. It was available to Sky Television before it went ahead with the programme. I very much regret that the current standards of journalism are such that Sky proceeded with the piece, paying no attention to the rebuttal and making no mention of the denial. I invite the right hon. Gentleman to show a greater sense of integrity and honesty than Sky by studying the rebuttal with great care.

I am happy to assure the right hon. Gentleman, as he appears worried about it, that the electors of Sedgefield have full confidence in their Member of Parliament. I would be prepared to bet, fairly confidently, that they will demonstrate that again at the next general election. As for where the Prime Minister was, I was at the meeting that he is alleged to have attended. The Prime Minister left the meeting before the discussion about foxhunting, in order to attend a meeting with the Prime Minister of Australia. I consider that to be an entirely legitimate activity for the Prime Minister of Britain, and personally I am rather glad that Britain has a Prime Minister who has the respect of other Heads of Government around the globe.

The right hon. Gentleman alluded to a general matter that has been raised in the press. I had understood—perhaps I was wrong, and perhaps Conservative Members will correct me—that the Opposition had tabled their emergency motion to demonstrate their support for our action in rounding up al-Qaeda terrorists and standing shoulder to shoulder with our United States allies. We are, of course, grateful for that support. I am sorry if Opposition Members feel hurt by the fact that we did not turn up in sufficient numbers to convince them of our gratitude for their loyal support, but if they really want to show support of a bipartisan character for our action in Afghanistan and the work of our troops there, they ought to say so clearly and unequivocally, and stop scoring cheap party political points.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): May I draw the Leader of the House's attention to early-day motion 1041, which concerns military action against Iraq?

[That this House calls upon Her Majesty's Government to ensure that there is a debate and substantive motion in the House before any further British forces are deployed in any military action beyond present commitments against Iraq by land, sea or air, and if necessary to recall Parliament during any recess for that purpose.]

Can the right hon. Gentleman give us a specific undertaking that there will be no deployment of any British troops on any exercise involving Iraq until there has been a debate in the House?

Also, will the right hon. Gentleman again consider the need for clarity and an early statement on the Government's intentions in relation to House of Lords reform? As he will recall, on Tuesday, in answer to our questions, he himself said:

"I also welcome the Public Administration Committee's thoughtful contribution to the debate, which has proved that it is possible to find a centre of gravity on the composition of reform".—[*Official Report*, 19 March 2002; Vol. 382, c. 163.]

It would seem that the Prime Minister had not read the right hon. Gentleman's words when he said yesterday, on the very same subject:

"There are many different voices."—[*Official Report*, 20 March 2002; Vol. 382, c. 304.]

I am a great admirer of the dexterity and ingenuity of the Leader of the House, but how can he possibly reconcile those two entirely different statements?

Mr. Cook: As I have said on two previous Thursdays and am happy to say on a third, no decision has been taken on Iraq, and no decision may be taken. As for a debate in the House, I think that Ministers can refer with credit and with honour to what we did in relation to the

[Mr. Cook]

action in Afghanistan. There were five full debates on the subject, at least two of which preceded any military action. I am confident that should any decision be made—I am not prejudging whether it ever will—there will be a full debate in the House before any such action.

As for reform of the House of Lords, I am tempted to say that no decision has yet been taken, although I am confident in this instance that one will be taken. I am distressed that the hon. Gentleman should imagine that the Prime Minister does not read my words and those of every other Member who speaks in the Chamber, and I do not see the gulf that the hon. Gentleman sees. There are a multitude of views on this matter—indeed, we have received more than 1,000 responses to the consultation—but as the Public Administration Committee has shown, it is not impossible to find a centre of gravity among the voices in favour of reform. I hope that we will continue to search for it, and will succeed in that search.

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington): My right hon. Friend will know that eight weeks ago there was a breach of security at Heathrow airport and that more than £3 million was stolen. The Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions and the Home Secretary then announced a review of security at Heathrow. Two days ago, there was another breach of security and £2 million was stolen. Will the respective Secretaries of State make statements in the House on the progress of the review? The issue is important, as money has been stolen and lives could be put at risk. We need to reassure the travelling public and restore their confidence in security at our airports.

Mr. Cook: I understand the importance of this issue to my hon. Friend and his constituents; indeed, it is also of acute interest to Members of this House who, like me, regularly pass through Heathrow and want to have confidence in security there. The particular incident to which he refers is being pursued by the police, who are questioning those involved. Of course, it must also be a factor in the review on security at Heathrow, which is already under way. I shall ask my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions to write to my hon. Friend advising him when we expect the review to be concluded.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): Although today's statement on Zimbabwe is obviously welcome, does the Leader of the House agree that, in the light of the atrocious way in which Mugabe stole the election and the appalling recriminations against that country's Opposition, the time is right to have a full day's debate—in Government time—on this important issue? Surely it would have been better to debate that rather than hunting, for example, last Monday. Does he agree that more targeted sanctions are needed, such as banning all flights by Zimbabwean airlines?

Mr. Cook: We have already adopted a battery of measures against Zimbabwe. First, we established an arms freeze; secondly, we have ensured that we provide no economic aid to its Government; thirdly, action is being taken, through European Union measures, to prevent President Mugabe and his cronies from flying to this country, and against any assets that they hold.

We have taken great care to ensure that we do not adopt measures that would hit the ordinary people of Zimbabwe, who already suffer enough as a result of President Mugabe, without our adding to it. The hon. Gentleman will doubtless be aware that there are some 40,000 British passport holders in Zimbabwe, who want to visit Britain regularly. We would want to reflect very carefully before adopting a measure that might hit them harder than anybody else.

David Wright (Telford): Does my right hon. Friend agree that hospital trust mergers need to be considered carefully? Several of my constituents are concerned that the proposed merger of Telford's Princess Royal hospital and the Royal Shrewsbury hospital will prove disadvantageous. Can we have a debate in the House on hospital trust mergers?

Mr. Cook: I am well aware of the enormous local sensitivity to hospital mergers and the great affection that communities have for their local hospital, which underlines their faith in the national health service. I fully understand why my hon. Friend wants to raise this issue and put it on the record, and I shall invite my colleagues at the Department of Health to write to him. Obviously, I cannot promise a debate on the topic to which he refers, but I can assure him that these matters are followed closely at ministerial level.

Pete Wishart (North Tayside): We hear weekly of the Government's intention to change the drugs laws, most notably through the reclassification of certain soft drugs, but no legislation or statutory instruments to that effect have so far been proposed. How will the process be pursued? Will a Bill be introduced, and will hon. Members be given the opportunity to debate the Government's proposals? Most important, given that we are talking about the most fundamental change to drugs laws since the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, will we be allowed to vote on the Government's proposals?

Mr. Cook: As the hon. Gentleman will be aware, the Government have already made a number of statements on this issue, and some local initiatives are under way. I am sure that the entire House followed with close interest the results of the policing experiment in south London, which has actually increased the number of arrests of those who peddle hard drugs. That is particularly welcome.

As the hon. Gentleman suggests, no decision has been announced by the Home Secretary, so it would be premature for me to say how we would implement such a decision. However, the House has not been short of opportunities to debate the matter; indeed, a full debate took place only two or three months ago, if I recall rightly. I am sure that we will return to the matter again.

Margaret Moran (Luton, South): Is my right hon. Friend aware that today marks the end of car manufacturing in Luton? After almost 100 years, Vauxhall is closing, resulting in the loss of 5,000 jobs in the region. He will doubtless want to join me in thanking the workers, unions and local authority members who tried so hard to retain car manufacturing in my constituency. Will he agree to an early debate on how to ensure that companies such as General Motors undertake

to consult employees and the Government on an ongoing basis before such major decisions are taken, and that they take full responsibility in ensuring that compensation and assistance is provided to regenerate local economies, which are devastated by such decisions?

Mr. Cook: The whole House will sympathise with my hon. Friend on the loss of employment in Luton and wish to raise its concern about the loss of employment for several thousand people across Europe within Vauxhall production. I agree with my hon. Friend that if a work force and local community have given their loyalty and contribution to a company in the way that her constituents have done for Vauxhall, they are entitled to look to the company to help them to adjust to the process of change. My hon. Friend will be aware that the Government are assisting in all the ways that they can to ensure that those who were employed by Vauxhall have the opportunity of fresh work and Luton has the opportunity of a fresh start for its economy.

Sir George Young (North-West Hampshire): When the House returns after the Easter recess, may we have a debate—this time in Government time—on the progress of action in Afghanistan?

Mr. Cook: I shall keep all those issues under review. The right hon. Gentleman will be aware that I have just announced the business for the first week after the recess and that will include a day's debate on armed forces personnel, when I am sure that many references to Afghanistan will be made. I am also sure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence will wish to speak further about those of our personnel in action in Afghanistan.

Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Could we have a debate on small businesses so that the House could congratulate my constituent, Mr. Shelim Hussain, who was named the young Asian business man of the year? In a short time, he has gone from being a waiter in a restaurant to the owner of a business with a turnover of £50 million, under the benign influence of an enterprise-friendly Labour Government. Could we also congratulate Mr. Hussein on his statement that however big his business grows he will still have it firmly located in the brand new city of Newport?

Mr. Cook: I am happy to say that my hon. Friend has relieved me of the obligation to have a debate in order that he may congratulate his constituent, as he has just done so eloquently and convincingly. I welcome the fact that he has mentioned the success of the young Asian business man of the year, because it underlines the theme that I have often mentioned to the House of the enormous asset to this country of those who have come here and made their home here and the strength to Britain of being a multicultural, multiracial society.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): May I draw to the attention of the House early-day motion 910?

[That this House calls upon the Parliamentary Ombudsman to initiate an immediate independent inquiry into the Equitable Life affair and the gross dereliction of duty of the regulators appointed by the Government to monitor Equitable Life policies.]

The motion has now attracted 147 signatures from Members on both sides of the House. Will the Leader of the House use his influence to persuade the parliamentary ombudsman to address the issue, to give us an independent inquiry and to achieve a satisfactory conclusion for more than 1 million policy holders, past and present, who believe that they have been disadvantaged?

Mr. Cook: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on having pursued an issue of immense and real concern to thousands of United Kingdom citizens. It is an important principle that the ombudsman is independent of Government and not subject to pressure from Ministers, but the hon. Gentleman will be aware that the ombudsman has the matter before him. He has, sensibly, concluded that it would not be proper for him to take action pending the outcome of the inquiry by Penrose, which has already been appointed by the Government, but I am sure that he will return to the matter and consider what action he can take once we have received the report.

Mr. Kelvin Hopkins (Luton, North): My right hon. Friend will be well aware of the ongoing crisis in the railway industry—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I do not know why Opposition Members laugh, because they are the cause of it. That crisis covers not only Railtrack but the train operating companies, two of which have recently had subventions from Government to dig them out of financial difficulties. It is alleged that another four are in serious financial difficulties. Maintenance is an ongoing problem and train delays are getting worse. More than half of the delays are due to train operating companies, not Railtrack. Does my right hon. Friend agree that only a Labour Government can sort out the mess in the rail industry and that it is time for a full debate in which all the options can be considered, including wholesale renationalisation of the rail industry?

Mr. Cook: I fully share my hon. Friend's sentiment, but I could have drafted his question slightly differently.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield): Tell him about your philosophy.

Mr. Cook: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that helpful idea. I might take refuge in it if my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, North (Mr. Hopkins) presses me too far.

I and my colleagues believe that we were right to take action and end the competition for Railtrack's resources between the travelling public and the private shareholder. That is why I hope that what results from administration will be a company that can devote itself single-mindedly to serving the travelling public without having to serve the master of private shareholders. We shall continue to ensure that investment goes into the rail industry. Those who travel on the continent are well aware of the distances involved and of the enormous gulf between the performance of our railways and that of the better continental railways, resulting from the long period of neglect under the previous Administration.

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): May we have an early debate on the operation of the Data Protection Act 1998, particularly in the light of concerns

[Mr. Graham Brady]

raised by hospital chaplains against whom the Act is being used to stop them receiving information about the religious affiliation of patients in hospitals? My constituent, Rev. Graham Skinner, wrote that his chaplaincy team had found the new legislation to be a millstone for their ministry. That was not intended when the legislation was enacted. It is now affecting many vulnerable people. May we have a debate so that those concerns can be brought out into the open?

Mr. Cook: I am well aware of some hon. Members' concerns about how the Data Protection Act is impinging on their constituency work. I am actively pursuing that matter and hope to bring any findings before the House. The Data Protection Act was plainly correct in principle and in its objective—to protect the rights of our citizens and constituents—but it must be applied with common sense. It should not become a means of denying our citizens and constituents their rights.

I shall happily look further into the matter that the hon. Gentleman raised. He may have encountered an over-official interpretation of the Act. I am not aware of a parallel case, but it is important that a law that was intended to protect our people benefits them rather than detracts from their quality of life.

Dr. Howard Stoate (Dartford): Can my right hon. Friend find time for a debate on the state of the transport network in Kent Thameside? I ask because it is an area with massive inward investment and is of huge strategic importance to the whole nation. Several outstanding transport issues remain, particularly the state of the railway network, the channel tunnel rail link, Ebbsfleet station and now the possibility of an airport at Cliffe in north Kent. Those strategic issues impact on the whole nation, so will my right hon. Friend find time for a full debate on the subject?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend raises some strategic and profound issues affecting the region that he represents. It is right for him to put his constituents' concerns before the House. I encourage him to examine further ways to ventilate them, perhaps in Westminster Hall. In the meantime, he will share our pleasure that section one of the channel tunnel link is on schedule and should be completed this year.

Angela Watkinson (Upminster): Can the Leader of the House inform us how many additional cannabis users and dealers have been attracted to the streets of Lambeth from other areas during the recent experiment?

Mr. Cook: I cannot answer the hon. Lady's question and I might be regarded with some suspicion if I could. I advise her to examine the results of the experiment carefully. I would personally applaud the police in that area if, as a result of the experiment, they were bringing to book more of those who peddle hard drugs—the ones that we should focus on.

Gillian Merron (Lincoln): May I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to the public interest report drawn up by external auditors KPMG, who have investigated serious allegations of political and financial mismanagement by Lincolnshire county councillors? The report is not yet in the public domain. Can my right hon. Friend find time for a debate on improving the public availability of public interest reports, which is vital to restoring my constituents' confidence in local democracy?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend has just put some of the material of that report in the public domain, and I congratulate her on her vigilance. As I said last week when the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst raised a similar issue, I fully deprecate any failure of probity, integrity or financial honesty in public life, whether it is in the House or local authorities. The best weapon against such corruption is transparency. The best remedy that we have is letting in daylight and making sure that the constituents themselves know what is going on.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield): Will the Leader of the House, who is always so reasonable and affable on these occasions, consider arranging for a debate ahead of the Chancellor's statement on his Budget on public spending, as we now learn that since the Government were elected in 1997, taxation receipts have increased by about 50 per cent? As the Leader of the House will know, in the west midlands the transport infrastructure is close to collapse, hospital waiting lists are rising, beds are blocked through lack of resources and crime on our streets is almost completely out of control. We need an urgent debate on when we will get value for money for all that extra taxation.

Mr. Cook: I take it that the hon. Gentleman is seeking to be flattering in describing me as affable and I will not take offence at the description. In order to preserve that mood of affability in these exchanges, may I try to encourage him to take a more cheerful perspective on the public services that he has described? In the west midlands, as elsewhere, there are more doctors, more nurses and now more hospital beds than ever before. He will no doubt wish to congratulate the Government on the fact that we are on target to achieve by the end of this month the 20 per cent. reduction in bed blocking that we promised.

John Barrett (Edinburgh, West): The Leader of the House will be aware of the ongoing crisis in the Scottish rail industry following the 24-hour strike last Tuesday.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): That was not a proper strike; it was only one day.

John Barrett: The Leader of the House will also be aware that a further two strikes planned by ASLEF have been cancelled, but there are reports in today's paper that the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions has actively blocked a resolution of the Scottish rail dispute. Can the Leader of the House find time for the Secretary of State to come to the House to explain exactly what has been going on between the Minister for Transport and Planning in Scotland and the Secretary of State's Department? He should be part of the solution, not part of the problem.

Mr. Skinner: No sooner started than it finished.

Mr. Cook: I think that my hon. Friend has said quite enough.

I am very sceptical about the allegation to which the hon. Member for Edinburgh, West (John Barrett) refers, and I advise him not to believe everything that he reads in the newspapers; indeed, he would possibly be wise not to believe most of the things he reads in the newspapers. We are clear that these are primarily matters for the train operators themselves to resolve. They are not primarily in the first instance a matter for Government. We have always encouraged both sides to seek independent conciliation and arbitration to find a resolution, and we continue to do so.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): Sadly, James Tobin died last week. He was best known for the tax that bore his name, an international tax on currency speculation to be used for developments in the third world, yet he had no sympathy for anti-globalisation rebels who took up the tax. Would he not have been pleased to see early-day motion 885?

[That this House notes that international currency transactions total more than $1 trillion a day and that the vast majority of this is unrelated to the real economy of tangible trade goods and services; believes that such enormous speculative flows have contributed to serious economic damage to countries and regions such as Mexico (1994), Southeast Asia (1997), Russia (1998), Brazil (1999) and Argentina (2001); further believes that a small levy on such currency speculation, the Tobin tax, named after the Nobel Laureate who originated the concept, could both dampen down the scale and scope of speculation and raise substantial revenues, potentially in excess of $50 billion each year, for projects targeted towards ending global poverty; is pleased that this initiative now enjoys the backing of a number of governments and parliaments across the world, including France? whose parliament recently passed a law authorising its implementation; is heartened by the words of the Chancellor that innovative ways need to be urgently found, including currency taxes, to finance development; wishes the Chancellor a successful mission to the UN 'Financing for development' conference in Monterrey, Mexico; urges him to take steps towards the introduction of a internationally co-ordinated currency transactions tax, with the proceeds ring-fenced for international substantial development objectives; and further urges the Chancellor to ensure that these proceeds do not replace either existing international aid disbursements or agreed commitments to increase international aid.]

It has been signed by 115 hon. Members, a wide range of respectable people from different parties. Would not James Tobin also have been pleased to see the ten-minute Bill that was introduced last week by the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Allan)? Can we not, therefore, now have a debate in Government time on what is seen increasingly internationally as a very important issue?

Mr. Cook: I am glad that my hon. Friend has had the opportunity to pay tribute to James Tobin, whose work has provided an important contribution to the debate on international financial movements. I am sure that James Tobin would have been gratified to see the support that my hon. Friend and his colleagues have secured for their early-day motion.

The Tobin tax is a perfect, wonderful and impressive construct but it requires everyone in the world to participate in it in order for it to work. If just one held out against the tax, it would be very difficult to make it succeed in practice. It is essential that we find ways of increasing the resources that go into third world development; James Tobin had intended his tax to provide the funds. There will very shortly be just such a conference in Monterrey, where the British delegation will be promoting the commitment that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development has just made to continue the improvements that we are making in the British overseas aid budget, and to continue to ensure that we make steady progress towards the agreed international targets.

Mr. Tony McWalter (Hemel Hempstead): Is my right hon. Friend aware of the widespread disquiet in the House and outside about President Bush's remarks about an axis of evil, which suggest that we want to go to war on many fronts? There is also disquiet at the Government's rather quiescent attitude to those remarks. I was going to ask my right hon. Friend whether he would bring the Foreign Secretary to the House to make a statement on the matter, but I see that he is here already. Perhaps the Leader of the House would give him a nudge and ask him to disavow George Bush's remarks.

Mr. Cook: I am delighted to have delivered on my hon. Friend's request even before he made it. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has addressed the House on the issue on several occasions.

The action that we took in Afghanistan was absolutely correct and plainly in defence of our national interest. It was not in the service of United States interests alone. We, too, lost citizens in the attack on the twin towers and are exposed to the complex, sophisticated and expensive terrorism mounted by al-Qaeda. It is important that we act whenever necessary to ensure that our people can live and travel the world in safety. We must continue to consider carefully the British national interest and act on it.

Mr. Nick Gibb (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton): The Leader of the House may be aware that the TV Licensing recently changed its procedures. People who do not have a television set and give the authority that information are being visited by officials, who request admission to their home. That is causing enormous stress to several of my elderly constituents who have no television and feel harassed. Following the first visit, they are liable to receive more visits every couple of years thereafter. That is a gross intrusion into the privacy of people who do not receive BBC services. The change of policy is a result not of a debate in the House but Executive action. Might we have a debate, followed by a vote, to assess hon. Members' views?

Mr. Cook: I shall happily look into whether there has been a change of policy, but in my long constituency experience it has been the practice of inspectors to call on people who do not have a licence to investigate whether they have a television. There is nothing new in that: it is, after all, the role for which they have been appointed. If the hon. Gentleman wants to challenge that role, it is open to him to draft a Bill or table a motion in the House, but we need a system to ensure that people who have a

[Mr. Cook]

television have paid for a licence and are not having a free ride on the back of the millions of law-abiding people in Britain who have done so.

Mr. Greg Knight (East Yorkshire): I refer the right hon. Gentleman to the point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) about the Enterprise Bill. I raise the matter as a House point, not a party political one. The timetable that the Leader of the House announced is indecent, unjust and unreasonable, and I hope that he will reflect on his answer. I understand that if the Opposition want to table a reasoned amendment to the Second Reading of the Bill, they will need to do so by next Tuesday. That means that we shall have only a few hours in which to draft and table such an amendment.

The Leader of the House often claims to be a champion of proper parliamentary scrutiny of legislation. The timetable that he announced today makes those words ring rather hollow. If he is not prepared to announce a change of business, in future we shall have to judge him on his actions, not his words. I hope that he will be prepared to think again.

Mr. Cook: I am suitably intimidated by the right hon. Gentleman's closing remarks. I shall reflect on his comments and consider whether an adjustment would be appropriate. On preparation for the debate, it is not unreasonable to announce a debate that is a clear two and a half weeks away and will still be two weeks away when the Bill is published. That seems an entirely reasonable time for those taking part in the debate—

Mr. Knight: The House will not be sitting.

Mr. Cook: I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman does not want to suggest that hon. Members do not work when the House is not sitting. Whenever there is a recess, someone, somewhere, is preparing for the first debate to be held on the day that we return. I do not take seriously the idea that Opposition Members are unwilling to work at any time during the fortnight's recess.

Zimbabwe

1.10 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): With permission, I should like to make a statement on Zimbabwe's suspension from the Commonwealth.

As the House will be aware, a Commonwealth troika consisting of Presidents Mbeki of South Africa and Obasanjo of Nigeria and Prime Minister John Howard of Australia was authorised by the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting to review the outcome of the Zimbabwe elections in the light of the Commonwealth observers' report, and to decide on any action.

The troika met in London on Tuesday. It had before it the final report of the Commonwealth observers group. That confirmed the findings of the preliminary report that I put before the House in my statement last Thursday. The group concluded that

"the conditions in Zimbabwe did not adequately allow for a free expression of will by the electors".

The troika accepted the conclusions in full and decided as a result to suspend Zimbabwe from the councils of the Commonwealth for one year with immediate effect. The issue will be revisited in twelve months' time having regard to progress in Zimbabwe, based on the Commonwealth Harare principles and reports from the Commonwealth Secretary-General. I am sure that the whole House will join me in expressing our appreciation to Presidents Mbeki and Obasanjo and Prime Minister Howard and in expressing our full support for their conclusions.

Three months ago, on 20 December, the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group, of which I was a member, concluded that Zimbabwe was in "serious and persistent violation" of the Harare principles. It was my view at that stage that Zimbabwe should then and there be suspended from the councils of the Commonwealth: I made that case again at CMAG at the end of January, as did my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in early March. As the situation in Zimbabwe has deteriorated day by day since December, it follows that we believe that suspension now is fully justified.

The Commonwealth depends above all on its moral authority and the force of the principles that it codified in Harare in 1991. That is why the decision was so important for the Commonwealth as a whole, as well as—of course—for Zimbabwe. That moral authority is what gives this decision its force. I am in no doubt, from the way in which the Government of Zimbabwe sought actively to divide the Commonwealth and to prevent it from taking decisions about suspension, that they were and are profoundly concerned about the international isolation that suspension signals.

Tuesday's decision was significant in many respects and above all for the fact that leaders of two key African nations have taken a clear and definitive stand in defence of the Commonwealth's fundamental principles. They have also underlined Africa's commitment to the universal and indivisible principles of democracy and human rights.

Suspension is one of the strongest measures that the Commonwealth can impose. In the past, countries have been suspended only after the violent overthrow of their

elected Government. Zimbabwe's suspension is therefore a new departure. Moreover, the Commonwealth's decision is in addition to the targeted sanctions that the European Union, the United States and now Switzerland have imposed against the leaders of ZANU-PF. European Union Heads of Government also decided, at the European Council in Barcelona last weekend, to ask Foreign Ministers to consider options for further measures.

What has happened in Zimbabwe is a tragedy, imposed on that once prosperous land by Robert Mugabe. Our commitment and that of the Commonwealth to the people of Zimbabwe remains as strong as ever. We have made it clear since 1997 that the case for land reform in Zimbabwe is very strong and that we were willing to provide considerable financial support for a land reform process that would be transparent and lawful and that would give priority to the needs of Zimbabweans in overcrowded communal lands. That position was supported by the international community as a whole, but rejected by the Mugabe regime.

At Abuja in early September last year we agreed a pathway for Zimbabwe that would have allowed for a resumption of international aid, including from the UK, for a programme of sustainable land reform implemented in accordance with the rule of law.

Respect for the rule of law and a return to democratic principles and sensible economic policies are the only way back for Zimbabwe. We remain ready to do all that we can to achieve that. We will continue our programme of assistance for humanitarian and HIV/AIDS projects.

In the short term, the prospects in Zimbabwe look bleak, which is underlined by the murders since the election of Movement for Democratic Change activists and a commercial farmer and the fact that the Opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai has formally been charged with treason. Today, it is all the more urgent that the Government of Zimbabwe commit themselves to healing the divisions in the country and taking the path of genuine reform and national reconciliation, as the leaders of the Commonwealth have called for. In that context, we shall do everything that we can to support Presidents Mbeki and Obasanjo and other African partners in their efforts to bring stability back to Zimbabwe.

That is what the people of Zimbabwe desperately need and today I believe that the whole of the democratic world supports them in that goal.

Mr. Michael Ancram (Devizes): I thank the Foreign Secretary for his statement on Zimbabwe and for, as usual, doing me the courtesy of giving me advance sight of it.

I remind the right hon. Gentleman that last Thursday, on a similar occasion when he made a statement to the House, he told us:

"I thought that I had made it palpably obvious that we do not recognise the result or its legitimacy."—[*Official Report*, 14 March 2002; Vol. 381, c. 1035.]

Would he tell the House what action the Government have taken in respect of diplomatic relations and other protocols with Zimbabwe as a result of that non-recognition of the result and its legitimacy? That is an important question in light of the recent Commonwealth troika decision to suspend Zimbabwe from the councils of the Commonwealth.

I also pay tribute to the outstanding leadership of Prime Minister John Howard of Australia. I suspect that many people feared that the Commonwealth would not be able to be decisive. Prime Minister Howard has succeeded where many thought that he would fail. The Opposition warmly congratulate him and his two colleagues on the troika.

The Commonwealth has taken action. The House wants to know what action the Government will now take. Once again there is little sign of any new or real initiative in the right hon. Gentleman's statement. May I press him? What discussions has he had in the past two days with President Mbeki of South Africa? I ask that question as South Africa has just announced that it recognises Robert Mugabe as President of Zimbabwe. That mixed signal is damaging not only to the Commonwealth and its democratic principles, but to the people of Zimbabwe, who are looking to the international community for assistance. How can it be that the troika accepted the Commonwealth observers' report but at the same time South Africa accepted its own observer report that the election process was acceptable?

I agree with the Foreign Secretary that the outlook seems bleak. I am not as sure as he is that what has been done has been persuasive for Mr. Mugabe. Has the Foreign Secretary called in the Zimbabwe high commissioner about the fact that Morgan Tsvangirai was charged with treason yesterday? Will the right hon. Gentleman take the opportunity today to make it clear that any action taken against Morgan Tsvangirai will be unacceptable and an affront to democracy?

We have been calling for some time for an international coalition to confront Robert Mugabe. Is it not time to act on that? The Commonwealth and members of the South African Development Community and the New Partnership for Africa's Development, as well as the United States and the European Union, must all now put down a marker. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that a clear marker is available: that any action against Morgan Tsvangirai that goes beyond the bounds of acceptable democratic behaviour will be seen as a hostile action against all those who believe in democracy and action will be taken accordingly?

Will the Foreign Secretary now start working towards bringing together that international coalition to work with the countries of southern Africa to bring about a rerun of this month's presidential election, but this time on an independently monitored and clearly free and fair basis and within months rather than years? Will he also agree that if the democratic void in Zimbabwe is not overcome, it will destroy all prospects of success for the region's most promising recent initiative, NEPAD? As one of Zimbabwe's foremost economists, John Robertson, has concluded:

"The far-reaching vision of NEPAD would not be enough to overcome the fears of political interference among investors."

Will the Foreign Secretary make it clear today that the threat that Zimbabwe poses to NEPAD is a threat not only to that country, but to the well-being of the whole continent? What pressure will he bring to bear on President Gaddafi of Libya, who is apparently currently bankrolling Robert Mugabe? Libya needs its trade links with the European Union, and now is a good opportunity for the EU to act. On this occasion, will the Foreign Secretary take the lead on that issue?

[Mr. Michael Ancram]

I also seek clarification of the Government's stance on Zimbabwe's participation at the Commonwealth games. The Foreign Office has briefed the press that that is a matter for the Commonwealth Games Federation. The Foreign Secretary cannot duck this one; the United Kingdom has to make it clear that Zimbabwe is not welcome at the games. To allow its attendance would make a mockery of the decision to suspend to Zimbabwe from the Councils of the Commonwealth, and he must make his position clear today.

I have asked many questions, and the House expects answers to them, but I remind the House that, for several years now, we have been calling on the Government to act. They failed to act over the illegal farm occupations; they failed to act over the dubious elections in 2000; they failed to act after Abuja, despite the Foreign Secretary's protestations at that time; and Robert Mugabe had the last laugh at Abuja. All that time we called for the assets of Mugabe and his henchmen to be frozen; we called for travel bans; we called for suspension from the Commonwealth; and the Government told us that we were irresponsible.

We were told that all was well because the Government had an ethical foreign policy. Well, let me tell the House that history will record that this Government got it wrong, and it is about time that they admitted it. They now have time, belatedly, to get it right by following the suggestions that I have outlined. I repeat the call that I made in the House last Thursday: the time has come for the Government to stop talking and to start doing.

Mr. Straw: Let me run through the right hon. Gentleman's specific questions. First, he asked whether we recognise the legitimacy of the result—we do not—and what action we would take. Well, the action that we have taken is to call for Zimbabwe's suspension from the Commonwealth and to achieve that. He also asked what other action the Government will take now. I shall underline the point that I made to him last week: this is not an issue on which there is serious division between either side of the House. That became evident during the course of those exchanges given the very constructive contributions made by virtually all the Conservative Back Benchers who spoke, some of whom were more willing than others to recognise that the previous Conservative Government's record was not one that was covered in glory. For example, the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) spoke, rather eloquently, about the preceding Government's failure to take any effective action in the 1980s.

The right hon. Gentleman asks what action will be taken. We have taken the action that it has been necessary to take because of the illegitimacy of the Mugabe regime. That includes the sanctions to which I was able to get the EU to agree on 18 February.

The right hon. Gentleman asks about an international coalition. I have to say that that is exactly what we have been seeking to put together and have, indeed, put together. Again, I say gently to him that it would have been much more difficult for him to have achieved that action in the Commonwealth and almost impossible for him to have achieved that result in the EU, given the other approach that he and his Front-Bench colleagues take to international relations.

The right hon. Gentleman asks me about diplomatic and other action, and he came close to asking whether we should break off diplomatic relations with Zimbabwe. Let me make the position clear. In 1979, the Government whom he supported decided—Lord Carrington announced this at the time in the other place and the announcement was repeated here—that in future Her Majesty's Government would recognise states, not particular Governments. We have followed that policy since then; it seemed sensible at the time, and it still is.

We have diplomatic relations with Zimbabwe because of our concerns about the citizens of Zimbabwe and those of other countries and—I say this very specifically—well over 40,000 British citizens and dependants. I have received no representations whatever from the opposition, representatives of British citizens or from anybody else who cares about the future of Zimbabwe that we should either break off or reduce diplomatic relations. I judge that it would not be helpful to the people whom we care about or to democracy, were we to do so. If I receive representations from those quarters, of course I shall consider them and make their position known to the House.

The right hon. Gentleman also asked about the Commonwealth games. The decision formally is for the Commonwealth Games Federation. That is my view and the Government's view. Throughout we have sought to impose sanctions with adverse consequences on the people responsible for bringing Zimbabwe to this sorry pass. I have received no representations which suggest that the young people who are involved in sport in Zimbabwe are responsible for stuffing ballot boxes and murdering opposition opponents. If I receive such representations, of course we shall take full notice of them. Meanwhile, it is entirely right that the Commonwealth Games Federation should follow the examples of countries that have been suspended from the Commonwealth, previously or currently, namely Pakistan and Fiji. It should draw a clear distinction between the sanctions that we are taking against the undemocratic and, in the case of Zimbabwe, violent forces and target those people and their actions, while making it crystal clear that we are on the side of people of democracy who want to celebrate the best in their country, which in this case includes sport.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (North-East Fife): Does the Foreign Secretary understand that welcome though the suspension is, for many of us it is overshadowed by an acute sense of disappointment that it became necessary and that Robert Mugabe would not respond to the moral authority of the Commonwealth and draw back from the actions that have ultimately precipitated the suspension? For many of us, welcome for the suspension is overshadowed by a profound anxiety for the ordinary people of Zimbabwe, both urban and rural, who now face the prospect of six years of ignominy and isolation, of corrupt military adventurism in the Congo, of economic mismanagement and even of food and energy shortages.

Does the Foreign Secretary agree that the decision taken by the troika establishes a new precedent for the Commonwealth and that it would be right now to consider the extent to which mechanisms of the Commonwealth should be adjusted so as to allow for suspension more easily if such circumstances were to arise in future? Some have considered that the proposals made by the high level

review group in this regard were rather lacklustre. Is it not time for much more responsive mechanisms to be established?

On the Commonwealth games, in which I should declare an historical interest if nothing else, may I remind the Foreign Secretary that on two occasions during the Conservative Government there was a mixture between sport and politics? The consequence for the 1986 Commonwealth games was a substantial boycott and the success of the games hung in the balance. That was because a view was taken of the political attitudes of the then Government. An even more salutary example was the effort of Mrs. Thatcher to persuade British competitors not to compete in the Moscow Olympic games. It is fair to say that her efforts received rather mixed results.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Denis MacShane): Seb Coe won his gold.

Mr. Straw: As my hon. Friend says, Seb Coe won a gold, so those efforts did not permeate even the Conservative party, still less the country.

I am grateful to the right hon. and learned Gentleman for his remarks. I share his view that the decision of the Commonwealth troika and therefore of the Commonwealth, although welcome in itself, in context casts an acute sense of disappointment at the fact that the sanctions are necessary.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman talked about profound anxiety, and I should have responded to the point made by the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) about Morgan Tsvangirai. We have not had to call in the high commissioner from Zimbabwe to explain what we think about the arrest and subsequent charging of Morgan Tsvangirai with treason. One deals with opponents in a democracy by argument, not by arrest and pursuit of them on trumped-up charges. If those charges are pursued by Robert Mugabe, the international consequences for his Government in terms of isolation and, I suspect, greater sanctions, will be considerable. We remain very concerned about the position of Morgan Tsvangirai and other members of the opposition, but above all about those who are suffering daily the most acute violence in that country.

The right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) asked whether I agree that there should be a new precedent to widen the circumstances in which the Commonwealth could take such action. Personally, I think that that should happen. To those who think that Zimbabwe was not bothered about the result, I say that for a very long time, Dr. Stan Mudenge, the Foreign Minister of Zimbabwe, used to chair the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group. That is one reason why no action could be taken against Zimbabwe for such a long time, and would not have been taken even if the skills of the right hon. Member for Devizes had been brought into play.

Once Dr. Mudenge had vacated the chair, he argued for years, like the good barrack-room lawyer that he is, that CMAG and the Commonwealth had no right to suspend any country from the Councils of the Commonwealth except where a democratic regime had been overthrown in a violent coup d'etat. We managed to overcome that, but it is one reason why he refused the use of CMAG to sort out a land deal, and why President Obasanjo had to create an equivalent of CMAG, which met in Abuja. It is also why the decision is in itself historic. We must ensure that better structures are put in place so that everyone who signed up to the ironically named Harare principles understands that they are not just words, but require commitment by Governments and Heads of Governments, and that action will follow if they are broken.

Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): My right hon. Friend has taken a consistent, firm and principled attitude throughout and, with the troika, deserves congratulations on a result that helps to salvage and maintain the credibility of the Commonwealth. Will he say a little more about the one-year suspension? It sounds a little difficult because, after all, it would be reviewed in any event, and it is extremely unlikely that there would be a rerun of the election during that period. Indeed, the actions of the Mugabe Government since the election have been very negative.

As the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) mentioned, part of the tragedy is that all the grand declarations of President Mbeki and other leaders on African renaissance and NEPAD are undermined by a picture of ill-governance and maltreatment of the opposition. That means that it will be increasingly difficult for private investors in a highly competitive world to look to Africa and provide the renaissance, through NEPAD, which we support.

Mr. Straw: I thank my right hon. Friend for his initial comments, and I agree that Zimbabwe has already had a terrible effect on not just its own economy but that of all countries in southern Africa, and investor confidence throughout the continent. That is one more reason why I believe that the decision taken on Tuesday by the leaders of two of the most important countries in Africa is so important. It draws a line between those who subscribe to principles of democracy, as the leaders of South Africa and Nigeria of course do, and those who follow a different, violent and undemocratic path. I very much hope that, notwithstanding that, NEPAD and the determination by democratic Africa and the international community to help Africa to rebuild its prosperity will continue. No one should be in any doubt about the damage that President Mugabe has already done and could continue to do.

My right hon. Friend asked about the time period. The Committee stated in paragraph 8 of its conclusions that the suspension will be for one year with immediate effect and that the issue will be revisited in 12 months' time, having regard to progress in Zimbabwe based on the Commonwealth Harare principles and reports from the Commonwealth Secretary-General. I take that to mean that the suspension will continue unless the Harare principles have meanwhile started to be properly observed and there has been a positive report from the Commonwealth Secretary-General.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): Although I of course welcome the suspension of Zimbabwe from the Commonwealth, that cannot be the end of the matter. Does the Secretary of State accept that we have a special interest as there are 40,000 UK passport holders in Zimbabwe? Does he agree that the time has come for us to explore with other Commonwealth states

[Mr. Douglas Hogg]

how we can make Mr. Mugabe and his lieutenants personally accountable for the crimes that are being committed in Zimbabwe either by himself directly or by his lieutenants in his name?

Does the Secretary of State agree that, although the scale is different, Mr. Mugabe's policies of murder, arson, ethnic cleansing, intimidation and vote rigging have a great deal in common with those of Mr. Milosevic? Should we not explore ways in which Mr. Mugabe could be brought before a competent criminal court, so that if he is convicted, he spends his declining years not in Government house, to which he has no entitlement, but in premises that are equally secure but rather less accommodating?

Mr. Straw: I agree with the entirety of what the right hon. and learned Gentleman said. This is not the end of the matter, and we have a direct interest in what happens in Zimbabwe because at least 40,000 British citizens and their dependants are there. However, I am sure that I speak for the whole House when I say that even were those 40,000 British citizens not there, our concern about the humanitarian and economic disaster would be exactly the same, because it is a concern without regard to race, colour or citizenship.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman is right that we must be indivisible and universal in applying principles of human rights and international crimes. There is a difference between what Milosevic did and what has happened in Zimbabwe under the ZANU-PF regime, but it is only a matter of degree. One reason why I am profoundly committed to the establishment of the International Criminal Court is that if we are to avoid a repetition of what has happened in Zimbabwe, as well as other disasters, it is hugely important that leaders do not get themselves into a position whereby they believe that they are wholly immune from any possibility of real sanction against their person, as well as their property, for their actions.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his approach in leaving open matters such as humanitarian aid in connection with HIV projects and the position that he has taken on sport. There is clearly a distinction between the people of Zimbabwe and the regime that has forced itself upon them. We need to target the regime as strongly as possible while doing whatever we can to assist the people. I commend that general approach to my right hon. Friend in respect of some of his other briefs.

Mr. Straw: I cannot think what my hon. Friend is talking about.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his comments. All along, President Mugabe set a trap into which he wanted the United Kingdom to fall—namely, that we would target black Zimbabweans on a blunderbuss basis so that he would be able credibly to claim that it was a case of white versus black. So far, we have avoided that trap, and we must continue to do so.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): Although I warmly welcome the decision of the troika, acting on behalf of the Commonwealth, to suspend ZANU-PF and the Government of Zimbabwe from the Commonwealth's counsels for 12 months, does the Secretary of State accept that the recognition of President Mugabe by President Mbeki of South Africa undermines the influence of that decision and sends out quite the wrong messages?

Will the right hon. Gentleman take on board the deep concern of member states throughout the Commonwealth and hon. Members on both sides of House about the safety of Morgan Tsvangirai, the leader of the Movement for Democratic Change, and other opponents of President Mugabe, against whom he is taking brutal action in complete disregard of the views of the world?

Bearing in mind that on 6 March the Prime Minister expressed concern and said that he would consider the entry of Zimbabwe into the Commonwealth games in light of the outcome of the elections, does the Foreign Secretary accept that if Zimbabwe competes in the Commonwealth games, the impact of the decision on the people of Zimbabwe will be lessened? I am visiting all the sites of the Commonwealth games tomorrow.

Mr. Straw: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his support, and the House needs to be grateful to him for the consistent position that he has adopted on Zimbabwe and for his interest in the country over many years.

I will put more details before the House as soon as I receive them, but I do not think that more should be read into the South African Government's decision on recognition than could be read into the fact that, for reasons that I have explained, we recognise states that still have diplomatic relations with Zimbabwe. We cannot take away from President Mbeki the fact that as a member of the troika that met on Tuesday, he, with the other two members, decided on behalf of the 54 members of the Commonwealth to take the action, which is unprecedented in the circumstances, to suspend Zimbabwe from the Commonwealth. For that, President Mbeki, President Obasanjo and Prime Minister Howard ought to be applauded.

On the Commonwealth games, the hon. Gentleman put his point rather gently, but I say to him that that is a matter for the Commonwealth Games Federation, not for me. I have given my opinion to the House. Earlier examples in which people have sought to make Government decisions and impose them on games federations have not been particularly successful because such decisions appear to be punitive to innocent people, namely sports people, rather than to the Government concerned.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Bracknell): The Foreign Secretary must be right to state that the welcome suspension of Zimbabwe from the Commonwealth is not the end of the matter. May I urge him to give us an undertaking that he will regularly return to the Dispatch Box in the next few months to make statements and initiate debates? The House can then show, first, that it is totally united against the Mugabe regime; secondly, that we will not stand idly by if opposition leaders are persecuted by a flawed judiciary; and thirdly, that we in no way recognise the corrupt election that has just taken place.

Mr. Straw: I apologise to the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) for my failure to answer his

question about Morgan Tsvangirai. We will do everything that we can in difficult circumstances to help ensure the safety of all those who have been unjustifiably accused of crimes, including Mr. Tsvangirai, although the hon. Gentleman will understand the limitations of what we can do in practice because of the nature of the Mugabe regime.

I say to the right hon. Member for Bracknell (Mr. MacKay) that I have sought to keep the House fully informed at every stage, and I will continue to do so.

John Barrett (Edinburgh, West): Does the Foreign Secretary agree that the responsible decision by Nigeria and South Africa will give a welcome boost to the New Partnership for Africa's Development? Will he, the Chancellor and the Prime Minister be championing NEPAD at the G8 and in other forums?

Mr. Straw: I agree that the decision is a welcome boost to NEPAD, and it would have been have really serious for NEPAD if the decision had gone the other way. No two people are more committed to NEPAD's success than my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Chancellor. The Prime Minister has been in the lead on the matter throughout all the discussions in the G8, and I know that he is utterly determined to pursue NEPAD to the benefit of the whole of Africa when the G8 meets later this year.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): Does the Foreign Secretary accept that the tactics employed by Mr. Mugabe before, during and after the election campaign resemble nothing so closely as the tactics employed by fascists in the 1920s in Italy, and by the Nazis in the 1930s in Germany? Given that some Opposition Members have been consistent supporters of the International Criminal Court, will he give an undertaking that the fate that befalls Mr. Mugabe when that court is up and running will be analogous to the fate that befell the Nazis in 1945 at Nuremberg? Will he give a specific undertaking that the Government will initiate the appropriate proceedings?

Finally, may I gently and without rancour say to the right hon. Gentleman that it ill-behoves a Labour Foreign Secretary and a Liberal Democrat foreign affairs spokesman to lecture the Conservatives on the importance of keeping sport and politics separate when—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. The hon. Gentleman has made his point.

Mr. Straw: On the substance of the hon. Gentleman's question, we have to be careful about the direct comparisons we make, for the reasons cited by the right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg). It is a question of degree. Do I believe that Mugabe and his people are probably guilty of crimes that should come before the International Criminal Court? Yes. Should they be taken before the court? Yes. Should they be punished appropriately? Yes.

Mr. Charles Hendry (Wealden): Will the Foreign Secretary be more specific about his objectives regarding Mugabe himself? Is it an objective that he be removed from office, that he resign, or that there be new, free and fair elections in which Mugabe would either be free to take part, or not be allowed to take part? Will he give us some idea of the time scale of his policy? He has made it clear that we are in for a long haul, but he will understand the House's desire to be able to judge the effectiveness of his policy. Does he believe that that will be possible in six months, 12 months, two years—or when?

Mr. Straw: I think that I speak for the whole House when I say that if I had the means, I would want to ensure that President Mugabe resigns and accepts that he stole the election, and that free and fair, non-violent elections, properly monitored and observed, take place. However, as long as Mugabe is where he is, that will not happen, which is why we have to resort to the measures I have announced, which are necessary in the circumstances, but unwelcome given the context.

As for the time scale, it is important that the House neither underestimates nor overestimates what we as a country and a Government can do. I cannot say with any certainty how long it will take to remove Mugabe and his ZANU-PF henchmen from power. That is ultimately in the hands, not of us or the international community, but of the people of Zimbabwe, influenced by the circumstances there.

Of one thing I am certain, knowing about all the other awful regimes around the world. Regimes that are undemocratic, violent and based on stolen elections are inherently unstable, and therefore only temporary. Although a difficult and dark period lies immediately ahead, I believe that ultimately the future of the people of Zimbabwe will be far better.

Hunting with Dogs

1.49 pm

The Minister for Rural Affairs (Alun Michael): Our manifesto gave a commitment on hunting with hounds, stating that:

"we will give the new House of Commons an early opportunity to express its view.

We will then enable Parliament to reach a conclusion on this issue."

I have been given the responsibility of leading that enabling process. In reaching my decision on how to proceed, I have listened carefully to what has been said in the debates. The votes this week leave the two Houses diametrically opposed—indeed, I have rarely seen an issue on which the divisions have been greater. It is precisely for that reason that it is right to see how it can be resolved with as much agreement as possible.

We want to respect all views, but that must start with respect for the strength with which the Commons made its views clear on Monday. I promise to engage with everyone who has an interest in this issue to make the legislation practical and robust. I promise to bring to the House of Commons a Bill that will deal with this issue effectively once and for all, and that will make good law. I earnestly hope that we can achieve that by finding as much common ground as possible. I propose a process of consultation on the practical issues of detail with a wide variety of interested parties. That consultation period will last no more than six months, including work on drafting a new Bill.

We promised in our manifesto that this issue would be resolved. Should there be no way through, and should the new Bill be frustrated in its passage rather than scrutinised and improved, the Government could not properly stand in the way of the application of the Parliament Act, which of course would be a matter for this House. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order.

Alun Michael: I ask Conservative Members to listen carefully to what is being said. The Government would prefer the Bill to proceed by debate and through a search for common ground wherever possible, with conflict tempered by tolerance.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): Where is the tolerance?

Alun Michael: The hon. Gentleman obviously does not understand the word "tolerance". I suggest that he listen.

If that process is frustrated and the Bill rejected, we would reintroduce the Bill as quickly as possible to this House. It would then be for this House and its procedures and for Mr. Speaker to determine whether the Parliament Act should apply. However, the reason for re-engaging in a process to try to achieve wider agreement is precisely that we recognise that there are legitimate concerns in the countryside about pest control, land management and other practicalities, and we want to address those issues in the Bill. Those concerns were raised both in this House and in the other place.

I reiterate our manifesto commitment that

"we have no intention whatsoever of placing restrictions on the sports of angling and shooting."

I also want to stress to everyone in the countryside that hunting is at the margins of the real debate about the priorities that we set out in the rural White Paper, which are to ensure that people in the countryside get access to good public services, proper investment, sound environmental policies and sustainable development.

On the content of the Bill itself, I believe that some common ground can best be found by focusing on two general principles. The report by Lord Burns on hunting with dogs examined in great detail the principles of cruelty and utility. We propose to frame legislation that prohibits activity based on those two principles rather than simply setting out a list of activities to be banned.

The Burns report did not provide a route map, however. That is why further thought should be given in applying these principles, and that is what I shall be doing over the next few weeks.

I am sure that the House will have noted the very clear assurances that I have given today about timing and outcome, and about the engagement of those campaigning for a ban on hunting, of Members of this House, and of those involved in land management. I recognise that this is a difficult issue, especially as we all know that there are other pressing matters, such as legislation on crime, health and education, that also demand our attention. We must deliver on our central promises on reform and investment in our public services.

I ask the House to trust me to deliver, and to join me in a process that is guaranteed to achieve an outcome as soon as possible. I look forward to engaging with colleagues on both sides of the House and in the other place. The process that I am setting out today will ensure that we deliver on our manifesto commitment to resolve this issue during the lifetime of this Parliament.

Mrs. Ann Winterton (Congleton): I thank the Minister for letting me have sight of his statement this afternoon. I had tremendous difficulties with my computer at the weekend, and I understand that he had similar difficulties today. I received the statement hot off the press only a few minutes ago, therefore. However, I am grateful at least for the attempt to get it to me in good time. The proposals that the Minister has announced today, which will be introduced in the next Session of Parliament by the use of the Parliament Act if necessary, say very little and shed very little light on how the Government see the way forward, especially after two full days of debate this week.

The proposals are most certainly not a middle way. However, in their small print, they show the way in which the Minister proposes to curtail the freedoms enjoyed by generations of British people. Can the Minister take powers, on a whim, to make regulations under the new "necessity" test, in the Burns report, of "cruelty and utility"—"vermin control"—which will, at a stroke, maim hunting as we have known it, except for a few foot packs in some upland areas? Hunting would then only be tolerated under licence, with rights of appeal given to anti-hunt organisations if a licence were granted.

The devil will, as ever, be in the detail. When will we see precisely what regulatory powers are planned? How will they be implemented, and by what means? With whom will the Minister consult? How will he reassure the

countryside that he is not just buying time? Many believe that the decisions are already taken, as *The Times* today makes clear. Will he confirm that, in addition to the list of consultees on page 3, he will fully consult those who support field and country sports and foxhunting in particular? How will he ensure that the consultation focuses on other real issues such as species management, conservation and employment?

It is obvious to one and all in the House and elsewhere that the Government are caught between a rock and a hard place of their own making. They are caught by their own Back Benchers, who are deeply unhappy about the failure of Government policy, and by the fear of a countryside march of up to 1 million people joining together in comradeship and common purpose, as they did before. The issue is not animal cruelty; it never was. It is about the settling of old scores.

The message must go out the length and breadth of this land: we must fight for our country traditions and values. That fight for freedom and liberty begins today.

Alun Michael: It is very disappointing that the Conservative response has been so narrow and petty. It is clear that Opposition Front-Bench Members are determined to create division and not to help a process that will create good legislation. It is the process of creating good legislation that is important—*[Interruption.]* I invite Opposition Members to stop gnashing their teeth, and to listen to what I am saying in response to serious points made by the hon. Lady—her contribution included serious points among its scattering of prejudice.

We seek to introduce legislation based on principles. Legislation often bans things—frequently, it involves a curtailment of liberty—and the House must ensure that that is done carefully, judiciously and appropriately. Surely that is the purpose of writing good legislation. It is ludicrous of the hon. Lady to suggest, in her words, that I intend to take powers "on a whim". The House will decide exactly what legislation is passed. My responsibility is to help that process and to enable us to have good law.

The hon. Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton) is right to say that the devil is in the detail, which is why I have announced a process in which the detail and the practicalities will be discussed. She asked for the sort of information appropriate to a Second Reading debate, after the publication of a Bill. As I indicated, we are starting a process. I assure the hon. Lady that consultation will be open to anyone.

I am not sure what it says on page 3 of *The Times*, as I have not read it today—

Mrs. Winterton: I was referring to page 3 of the statement.

Alun Michael: I beg the hon. Lady's pardon. She was speaking about *The Times*, so I thought that that was the organ to which her pagination applied. I know what is in my statement; it is *The Times* that I have not read.

I can tell the hon. Member for Congleton that the consultation process will be very open. Certainly, people who engage in hunting will be part of the process, and they will be fully involved. Indeed, I met representatives from the campaign for hunting yesterday. My door has been kept open to that organisation, as it has to other bodies with an interest in the matter. I had friendly and useful exchanges with them, because I am engaged in a process of dialogue.

The hon. Member for Congleton spoke about marches. I do not recall any Conservative Government being swayed by marches of any sort, whereas this Government do take notice of strong opinion, regardless of whether it is expressed by demonstration or by the process of consultation. We respect people's freedom to protest, but I ask those who consider protesting about the issues involved in this matter to recognise that they are being invited to take part in a process. They will be listened to and they will have an opportunity to influence the legislative proposals that come before the House. That seems to be the biggest difference between Government and Opposition.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Many hon. Members are trying to catch my eye. It would be extremely helpful, therefore, if hon. Members raised only one point with the Minister.

Mr. Michael Foster (Worcester): I thank my right hon. Friend for his statement today. My question will no doubt be put to him by people outside the House. If, after the process outlined today, the House of Commons once again votes to ban cruel and unnecessary sports such as lowland fox hunting, and if the House of Lords rejects that view, will my right hon. Friend ensure that the Government use the Parliament Act to allow this House to have its say?

Alun Michael: I thank my hon. Friend for his welcome for my statement. In essence, he asks whether the Government would apply the Parliament Act. However, use of the Parliament Act is a matter for the House. As I made clear, that process would be enabled by the Government if it became necessary, but we very much hope that the process will be one of engagement, and of improvement of any legislation that is brought forward. Our preference is that the Parliament Act will not be needed. I hope that that will be the case, but my hon. Friend is right to understand that the Government would enable use of the Parliament Act, if necessary. In that way, the House of Commons will be able to decide the matter.

Norman Baker (Lewes): I welcome the fact that the Minister has made an early statement to the House, following the debates in both Houses earlier this week. Since 1997, Parliament has spent more than 130 hours discussing hunting. The Minister is therefore right to say that we need to reach a conclusion "once and for all", to use the words in his statement. However, I notice that the process that he has set out will take another 12 months to complete.

Does not the Minister's statement take us back to square one, in that all options are open again? The Minister has changed the way in which matters will be dealt with. Rightly, he has moved away from discussing particular bans, and has proposed that we look at questions of cruelty and utility. Will he accept, however, that the definition of cruelty is subjective, and that

[Norman Baker]

hon. Members of all parties will reach different conclusions about it? How does he intend to reconcile subjective views of that nature?

Will the Minister accept that his statement could be interpreted by some as code for a sort of middle way solution, with hare coursing but allow some foxhunting to continue? It would be in line with the briefings that senior people in Government gave to the press last weekend.

Finally, it may be admirable to try to bridge the unbridgeable—and I applaud the Minister's attempt—but I hope that he will clarify his intentions, in light of the question from the hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Foster). Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that the Bill will be subject to a free vote? Will he also ensure that, if the House of Commons votes for a form of legislation that bans all foxhunting and hunting with dogs, he will enable the Parliament Act to be used, and that the will of the Commons will triumph?

Alun Michael: I thank the hon. Gentleman for a series of interesting questions. The Government are promoting discussion and debate. We are taking a little time to try to seek agreement and to achieve as much common ground as possible.

I do not think that the hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) is right to say that my statement takes us back to the beginning. I explained the process that will be undertaken, and the principles on which it is based, and I suggested that what we need to discuss are the practicalities. For those reasons, therefore, my statement moves matters forward.

The hon. Member for Lewes said that the definition of cruelty is subjective. I am sure that there will be much discussion of that when we come to scrutinise the legislation, but the law is already clear that cruelty is defined as that which causes unnecessary suffering. In practice, the concept is used in the courts in a variety of ways, so I do not think that there is the uncertainty about meaning that the hon. Gentleman suggests.

The hon. Gentleman asked whether the proposals did not look a little like the middle way. I assure him that this is not the middle way. He also referred to briefings from elsewhere in Government, but I know of no such briefings. I assure him that the only authoritative briefings on this issue come from me. If he has any doubts about anything that he hears and which is ascribed to someone else in Government, the hon. Gentleman should give me a call and I will put him right.

The hon. Gentleman asked whether the question of hunting will continue to be dealt with on a free vote. I can confirm that it will. His final question referred to the nature of the Bill. The Government have made it clear that the Parliament Act is enabled to allow the House of Commons to come to decisions. The use of the Parliament Act is a matter for the House of Commons. We will not stand in the way of that. We will enable the process if it is needed, but I again make it clear that I am dealing with that point now so that we can put it to one side and ensure that we do not spend ages discussing whether the Parliament Act will be used. We should prefer it if the Parliament Act were not used, as we want to deal with the matter by seeking common ground, through debate and through the normal processes of this House and the other place.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): Is my right hon. Friend aware that I had hoped to receive from him today a precise statement that Monday's decision by the House of Commons that a full ban on all forms of hunting with dogs would be introduced as a substantive Bill as soon as possible? However, that is not what we heard.

My right hon. Friend asks us to trust him. I certainly trust him, as I have a high personal regard for him. In the end, however, the only thing that I will trust is a Bill. I hope that my right hon. Friend will give a very clear answer to the question that I am about to ask him. His answer will govern my approach to this matter and—for what it is worth—to other matters that arise in this House for the remainder of this Parliament.

Let us assume that, after the consultation period, the Government introduce a Bill that contains some exceptions, and that the House of Commons on a free vote decides to remove all those exceptions and to impose a complete ban on all forms of hunting with dogs. In those circumstances, will my right hon. Friend give me the clear assurance that that would be the Bill for which the Parliament Act would be invoked?

Alun Michael: First, I am aware of my right hon. Friend's preference. No one who has heard him speak on the matter could be in the slightest doubt about what he wants to happen. However, I hope that the promise that what he called a substantive Bill would be introduced as soon as possible will encourage him. I have suggested a specific time scale for that, and again I hope that he will accept that the intention is to provide certainty, for him and for the rest of the House.

I am absolutely clear that if the Government introduce a Bill that is amended in the House of Commons, our promise in relation to allowing the Parliament Act to obtain will apply. It would be a matter for the Commons. I think I cannot underline enough the important words "This would be a matter for the House of Commons".

Mr. John Maples (Stratford-on-Avon): I am sure that when the Minister first entered the House he, like me, considered protecting the rights and freedoms of minorities one of its most important functions. On that basis, we in the House have for many years continued to tolerate things of which, individually or collectively, we disapprove. Is it not a very sad day for the Minister and the House when he invites us to abandon that long-established principle?

Alun Michael: There are many minorities whose freedom of action is curtailed in a variety of ways because the House has decided through history that a particular thing should be banned. That applies whether the hon. Gentleman is referring to bear-baiting, cockfighting or similar activities relating to animals, or to various other activities that are regarded as offences because one person's ability to exercise his or her freedom of action impinges on the rights and obligations of others. I am afraid that, by simply referring to the freedom of the individual, the hon. Gentleman is not helping us to arrive at appropriate and robust legislation.

Yes, I believe entirely that it is the responsibility of a majority to protect the rights and freedoms of individuals; but it must be done in a manner that also ensures that where there is a principle that should not be offended against, that principle is upheld.

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): My right hon. Friend is a very reasonable man. He has talked a good deal about the need for discussion and debate. May I express the hope that there will not be too much discussion and debate? After all, we have had rather a lot of that already. What we seek is a watertight Bill, and what I seek from the Minister today is an assurance that what will result at the end of this is not a Bill leading to years of litigation, with judges driving a coach and horses through the various definitions in the Bill, followed by demands for yet another Bill. We must bring this matter to an end; the will of Parliament must prevail.

Alun Michael: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that it is important to produce a Bill that is effective and watertight, and will not lead to a mass of litigation. I assure him that I am not in the business of increasing the incomes of lawyers, or the amount of activity in the courts. I will seek to apply the principle that he has put to us to the drafting of the legislation.

My hon. Friend says that there has been enough discussion and debate. I suspect that in embarking on this process the person I am condemning to the greatest quantity of discussion and debate is myself, in listening mode but also in discussion mode, trying to tease out the best way of implementing the legislation. I shall try to live up to the term that my hon. Friend used in his vicious attack, and continue to be a reasonable man.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex): Does the Minister accept that by himself voting against the middle way the other night, he demonstrated that he was not prepared to listen? Does he also accept that to millions in the country at large, and to all who love hunting and the countryside, the Government's sense of priorities is astonishing and impossible to understand? Finally, let me tell him this: the countryside will fight for liberty, livelihood and freedom. What he proposes does indeed mark a black day for freedom in this country.

Alun Michael: The hon. Gentleman makes a rather populist point. Most people whom I meet in the countryside would set as priorities for action by the Government the very actions to which we have given priority—the revival of the economy in rural areas, encouraging communities in rural areas, looking at the future of food and farming and promoting tourism in rural areas. They would expect us to give priority to issues that affect people's everyday lives in rural areas, such as education, health and transport, in which we have invested massively more than the Conservative Government.

The hon. Gentleman asked whether the way in which I voted on Monday had somehow compromised my role. This issue has been before the House on a free vote on numerous occasions. It would be a very odd Member of Parliament who had not reached a conclusion on questions such as those that were before us on Monday; it would be a very odd Member of Parliament who failed to vote on them.

I have always been absolutely straight and honest with people I have met—including members of the campaign for hunting—to ensure that they know which way I have voted on the matter over the years. I have also made it absolutely clear to them, and to every group, that I have been given a separate role by the Prime Minister, which is to enable Parliament to reach a conclusion. I shall do the job as objectively as I can: having personal opinions takes away none of my responsibility for enabling that process.

Mr. Mike O'Brien (North Warwickshire): I welcome the preparedness to invoke the Parliament Act, should that be needed, but will my right hon. Friend confirm that it could not be invoked in the next Session with a new Bill, and that the process would therefore probably take a further year? Will he also confirm that the Government have moved from a position of neutrality—of merely facilitating Parliament's arrival at a conclusion based on one of the three options—to the undertaking of a new process to secure a Bill based on common ground? Has he any idea what that common ground would be?

Alun Michael: My hon. Friend is right: the process will take a little longer by the means I have proposed today than by the means of applying the Parliament Act to the previous Bill. That, however, is a price that we consider worth paying to try to avoid the continuing danger of a stalemate between the two Houses, and to find as much common ground as possible between us and those who feel strongly about these issues, both in this House and outside.

My hon. Friend asked whether the Government had moved. The Government have not moved from being neutral on the issue, but we have accepted a responsibility that we gave ourselves in our manifesto before the general election—a responsibility for enabling Parliament to reach a conclusion. That is the responsibility I have taken on in trying to find the best possible legislation in order to reach the best possible conclusion. I see that as a role for enabling Parliament.

Miss Ann Widdecombe (Maidstone and The Weald): Does the right hon. Gentleman share my regret that discussions on this important issue should be couched in terms of class warfare? Does he accept that many of us who have been involved in this and other campaigns have a long record of fighting for the welfare of animals? Does he find it remotely likely that when the hon. Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks) mounted a campaign to protect tortured bears in China, he was declaring class warfare on the communist regime there?

In every free vote since 1987, has it not been standard practice for the Minister and the Opposition spokesman to give their personal views and then to make clear that they nevertheless have a duty to the House? Finally, is not the method of resolving the problem that the right hon. Gentleman has announced just a recipe for yet more delay, and for allowing the issue to run up and down the parliamentary system when we should be discussing other issues? Should the matter not now be brought to a firm conclusion? The House has shown its view; we are the democratically elected body.

Alun Michael: I can agree with a great deal of what the right hon. Lady said. I certainly share her regret that

[Alun Michael]

the issue should be debated in terms of class warfare, and I am sure that members of her own Front Bench will have heard her injunction. I will leave it to her to debate issues with my hon. Friend the Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks), but I am sure that any debate of that kind would be worth listening to, given two such robust participants.

I endorse the right hon. Lady's point about the difference between a personal view and a Minister's responsibility to the House. As a shadow Minister, I always took the view that a similar need exists to distinguish between personal responsibilities and one's responsibility to the House in trying to enable good legislation. On several occasions when I was in opposition, contributions and discussions—sometimes in the House, sometimes outside it—helped the Government to improve legislation. I hope that the hon. Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton) has listened to this exchange.

Kate Hoey (Vauxhall): May I welcome the fact that the Minister has not introduced a Bill today to ban hunting with dogs? That shows that the many people in the countryside who think that we should not spend huge amounts of time on this issue are being listened to, and that a way exists to satisfy most sensible people. Do the Government have a view on cruelty, and does the Minister have a view on what Lord Burns himself said in the House of Lords? He said:

"Naturally, people ask whether we were implying"—

in the Burns report—

"that hunting is cruel . . . The short answer to that question is no."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 12 March 2001; Vol. 623, c. 533.]

What is the Government's view on the Burns report?

Alun Michael: My hon. Friend refers to comments made in another place, rather than to the report itself. One problem is that many people pick out a particular paragraph from the Burns report and use it to justify the position that they adopted before reading it. I take the view that it is important for this House to be able to deal with cruelty in respect of hunting with dogs—that is what the issue is all about. We should do so by referring to the useful work undertaken by Lord Burns, and to the practicalities that I referred to in my statement. That is the subject for consultation in the next few weeks, and that process will certainly be interesting. However, it will be informed by the contents of the Burns report.

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): Was not the Parliament Act designed to allow the House of Commons to get its way only when the House of Lords thwarts a specific and detailed legislative commitment in a general election manifesto? The Labour party's last manifesto makes no such specific commitment to a ban; instead, deliberately chosen, mealy-mouthed, ambiguous words are used. Is it not a complete abuse of the Parliament Act, therefore, to try to invoke it in this case, or can the Minister cite a precedent for its being used for a non-manifesto or non-budgetary issue?

Alun Michael: The hon. Gentleman hangs together several errors and imprecisions. The point is that, should the two Houses reach an impasse, we will enable the Commons to have its way, but I have made it clear time and again that we hope that the process will avoid that outcome. A very precise manifesto commitment was made to enable Parliament to reach a conclusion on the legislation. The hon. Gentleman should examine that precise commitment and recognise that it is on that authority that the House of Commons is able to proceed. However, if possible we want to achieve maximum common ground for all who engage in the debate. That is as much an offer—as it were—to the House of Lords as an illustration of what would happen should such an impasse arise.

Mr. Tony Banks (West Ham): The comments of the hon. Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton) have already made clear to my right hon. Friend the impossibility of securing consensus in any form. He pointed out in his statement that the two Houses are diametrically opposed. Where can common ground be found? There is no common ground. I do not know why he wants to spend six months chasing shadows. A clash is obviously coming between this House and the House of Lords, so he ought to face up to that fact. To use some of the hon. Lady's rhetoric, he might as well cry havoc and let loose the dogs of war.

Alun Michael: I am not sure that I should take much notice of that encouragement. As my hon. Friend knows, by nature I am an optimist. He will also know that I am a Labour and Co-operative MP, so I seek wherever possible to co-operate and work with others. I am even open to co-operating with Opposition Front Benchers and other Conservative Members—if they will engage in the process, rather than simply writing it off at the outset. Similarly, many in the other place—some of whom disagree passionately with the views of people such as my hon. Friend—nevertheless say, "Let us talk. Jaw-jaw is better than war-war, so let us examine the options and see where they take us. Let us discuss the practicalities." I very much hope that matters will proceed in that way.

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): May I give a cautious welcome to what the Minister said today, particularly on the process and the new twin principles of utility and cruelty? I hope that he will introduce a Bill that is genuinely based on those twin principles and will not approach countryside activities in a prejudiced way. Does he acknowledge that the difference in votes cast in this House and in the other place reflects a wider disagreement in society about the way in which the issue needs to be addressed? Within the six-month period he has granted himself, he needs to engage in that wider public debate. We are not the only people who have something to say on hunting and cruelty.

In that context, he will have received a letter from Glyn Davies, Chairman of the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee in the National Assembly for Wales. It asks him specifically to take into account more than 900 submissions to the committee on hunting in Wales, and further to take into account in the legislative process the Committee's deliberations on the best way forward for hunting in Wales, which is characterised by upland areas. Will he undertake to do that?

Alun Michael: I am happy to respond positively to each of those three points. First, the hon. Gentleman is right to say that we are seeking to legislate through the

application of principles. I have outlined those principles, it is clear that he understood my comments, and that is the way forward. Secondly, he is also right to say it is not just a question of views in this House and the other place. There is wider disagreement in society—and in the countryside—and it is right that we engage with people outside this House. He will know that I have met a wide variety of groups in England and Wales that wish to make representations on the issue, and I shall continue to do so. Thirdly, it is certainly right to take into account views from Wales, including views expressed by the National Assembly for Wales and its Members. I have not seen the letter to which he refers, but I would expect to be able to respond positively to it.

Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): My right hon. Friend is right to establish a short period of consultation, but he is fundamentally wrong if he believes that consensus can be achieved for a Bill with a framework of utility and cruelty. Will he stick to a closely defined timetable, so that those of us who live in, and represent, rural areas can get on with the real issues that affect the countryside?

Alun Michael: My hon. Friend says that I would be wrong to believe that consensus can be achieved, but I have not used that word—I used the term "common ground". We want to achieve as much common ground as possible, and in that regard I am being realistic. I am not hoping that somebody will suddenly wave a magic wand and achieve consensus across the piece on this difficult issue.

As I said, the timetable for consultation on the practical matters to which I referred, and for the drafting of legislation, will be very tight. The answer to his question is therefore a simple yes.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): The Minister properly suggests that there should be a six-month period of consultation, and he tells us that he is a co-operative person and Member of Parliament. In the interests of informing himself over the next six months, will he come to Harborough in Leicestershire, where five hunts operate, the better to learn about the utility of hunting and the absence of cruelty? I appreciate that he takes a different view, but will he please take the opportunity to meet the people in Leicestershire with an interest in the subject? I invite him to come and stay with me. In Committee, I invited the hon. Member for Basildon (Angela Smith) to do so, and she would be very welcome. The right hon. Gentleman could bring his wife and his private office staff, but I urge him to come to hear at first hand the worries of my constituents. He could then come back to Parliament after the six-month consultation period better informed for that visit.

Alun Michael: I am grateful to the hon. and learned Gentleman for his invitation. I referred to a period of six months of consulting and drafting in order to get the legislation right, and we want to stay within that time scale. He generously invites me to Leicestershire—I am very popular; I am being invited to visit many parts of the country—but his underlying question is whether I will listen to people involved in hunting, consider the practicalities and listen to their experience. Yes I will, which is why I visited a hunt a few weeks ago at the invitation of the campaign for hunting and devoted as much time as I could to listening to people's views. I did so partly to hear those views and partly to engage with the practicalities, which is one of the reasons why it is important to have the process that I have introduced today. I make no specific promise about where I will spend my time in the next few months.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): I trust my right hon. Friend and we all know of his deep personal commitment to an outright ban. The House will know my view that this is a wasted opportunity and that, even with this timetable, we might still be discussing the issue right up to 2004. Who wants that? The Minister talked about consultation—endless consultation. What will we learn from six months of consultation that we do not already know?

Alun Michael: If one does not take part in a discussion, one does not discover what one would learn by having the discussion. My hon. Friend asks me to jump ahead of a process that, I suggest, makes sense. I have proposed not endless consultation but a limited period of consultation and drafting—the serious work of enabling the process of bringing legislation before the House at the earliest possible date.

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): Will the Minister accept that the two principles of cruelty and utility offer a serious chance for discussion of the best alternative means of adhering to those principles? An unwillingness to engage by those who take an extreme view can be interpreted only as an unwillingness to listen to alternative ways to achieve those two principles. Does he agree that if the Middle Way Group, Countdown to the Ban and the Countryside Alliance wish to be involved in the process, the best thing that he can do is to ensure that they listen without prejudice to the reasons why they have reached different views? The best legislation will be achieved by listening generously, even to views that one does not hold at the beginning, in the hope that we will find something better than anything on the table at the moment, in the interests of animal welfare.

Alun Michael: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's comments and for his underlining the issue of animal welfare. I assure him that all three groups will be welcome to take part in the process of considering the practicalities, as will a variety of other organisations that have an interest, such as the farming organisations and others that are not part of the three groups. I underline the point that this will be an open process, not a closed one. An unwillingness to engage in discussion looks not like strength but like weakness.

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): I commend the Minister for his patience in renegotiation, but may I remind him that in 1994, when the House passed my anti-fox hunting Bill—the Wild Mammals (Protection) Bill—by a majority of 253 to zero, I engaged for six months with those in the other place but not one inch was given on foxhunting? Let us face the fact that this is no longer about foxhunting but is now a constitutional

[Mr. John McFall]

issue. *[Interruption.]* If the will of the House prevails, as expressed year after year in massive majorities—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Let the hon. Gentleman put his question.

Mr. McFall: Will the House's will prevail, and within a year will foxhunting be totally and utterly banned?

Alun Michael: My hon. Friend refers to his own history in these matters, and I remember the frustration that he experienced in being unable to enact a Bill that had been passed by this House. Above all, we do not want this issue to become a constitutional issue. If there is a will in the House of Lords and this place to avoid that, it can be avoided. However, I have made it clear—and my remarks are intended to assist this House and the other place in terms of the confidence that they may have in the process—that were the other place to frustrate legislation, the Government would not stand in the way of the Parliament Act being used as the result of the reintroduction of a Bill. I hope that I have been clear—not because I wish to provoke confrontation with the House of Lords but because I wish to avoid it.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): Will the right hon. Gentleman take time to reflect on the fact that in a democracy majorities—even elected majorities—can be as tyrannical as individual dictators? When he frames the legislation, will he bear it in mind that his fellow citizens should be as free to go foxhunting as they are to go fishing and shooting—as do many Labour Members? If he does not allow those principles, he will have to accept that his legislation will be perceived to be but a form of mob rule.

Alun Michael: I take it that the right hon. and learned Gentleman says that majorities can be tyrannical in the light of personal experience during his political career. We certainly saw many tyrannical actions during the years of Conservative government that damaged people's lives and communities up and down the country. I welcome his conversion to generosity towards those who are not in the majority, but I would have thought that he would understand what I am doing today. He might have said that we were being tyrannical if we had reintroduced the previous Bill and pushed it through by allowing the application of the Parliament Act; instead, we have invited all concerned to enter into a process. We are showing the generosity of a majority that is confident rather than one that is being tyrannical.

Mr. Colin Pickthall (West Lancashire): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the Conservatives' reactions to his statement—with the notable exception of the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe)—are reassuring to many of us, because they make us think that he is closer to getting it right than we had feared? Does he agree that the crucial issue is the timing? Other hon. Friends have made the point, but can he state categorically that six months from today the consultation will have ended and the Bill will be drafted? Is he worried that any slippage in the timetable that lengthens the process will create more cynicism outside the House, especially among those who support what he is trying to do, and that the Government could end up pleasing no one?

Alun Michael: I certainly accept what my hon. Friend says about the need to stick to a timetable once it has been given as an indication of the period within which we intend to complete the job. I shall do everything I can to ensure that there will be no such damage to the reputation of Government, and no delay.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

Points of Order

2.40 pm

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Robin Cook): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Following today's business statement, I consulted further on the Second Reading of the Enterprise Bill. I remain convinced that two weeks from publication of the Bill to its debate is an adequate period for preparation, but I accept the force of the point made by the right hon. Member for East Yorkshire (Mr. Knight) about the desirability of allowing time for the tabling of a reasoned amendment. I therefore wish to announce the following re-ordering of business for the week after the Easter recess.

TUESDAY 9 APRIL—Second Reading of the Tobacco Advertising and Promotion Bill *[Lords]*.

WEDNESDAY 10 APRIL—Second Reading of the Enterprise Bill.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I thank the Leader of the House for listening carefully to what my right hon. Friend the Member for East Yorkshire (Mr. Knight) said during business questions, and for coming back to the House so promptly with a change in the order of business, which will at least allow for the possibility of the tabling of a reasoned amendment, for example.

I do not want to sound churlish, but I hope that the Leader of the House will reflect further, perhaps over the recess, on whether this is a proper way to conduct what is a very substantial Bill. I thank him for what he has done, but I ask him to give further, perhaps long-term, thought to whether a Bill of this magnitude should be conducted in this way. However, I am grateful for what he said just now.

Mr. Gregory Barker (Bexhill and Battle): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Are you aware that as a Back Bencher I am greatly troubled by the fact that my constituents, who stand to lose their jobs and livelihoods as a result of the potentially momentous legislation on hunting, which will have a devastating impact, have been denied a voice through their Member of Parliament? Despite sitting through the debate on Monday and through the statement and questions today, I have been unable to speak. I feel that my constituents have been denied a voice.

Mr. David Cameron (Witney): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): May I deal first with the point of order raised by the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Barker)? I must inform him that the statement ran for 50 minutes, we had a statement on Zimbabwe earlier, and I also have a duty to protect the business of the House.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Should it not also be borne in mind that some of those who are in favour of ending this barbaric practice once and for all were not called because of the number of people who were trying to catch your eye? The hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Barker) and some of his colleagues are disappointed, but I have argued for a ban for a long time and am no less disappointed.

Madam Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order for the Chair; it is a point of debate.

Mr. Cameron: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I, too, raise this point of order as someone who sat for five hours during the debate and was not called, but the purpose of my point of order is to ask whether the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs asked, before the statement it made this afternoon, whether it could withdraw its White Paper entitled "Working for the Essentials of Life", as it says that its key objective is to tackle social exclusion. As someone who represents a constituency with five hunts and many people employed in hunting, I cannot understand how throwing them out of work will aid social exclusion.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I repeat what I said earlier: that is not a point of order for the Chair.

Mr. Forth: On a different point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. You may be aware that, in business questions, all those on the Government side who were seeking to catch Mr. Speaker's eye were called, but that Mr. Speaker then finished business questions while a number of colleagues on the Opposition Benches were still standing and seeking to catch his eye. May I ask you to have a very quiet and gentle word with Mr. Speaker and satisfy yourself that that will not be a precedent? If it were, obviously, the number of Labour Members standing would be a mechanism to curtail participation by my right hon. and hon. Friends. I am sure that that was not the intention, but I ask you to draw Mr. Speaker's attention to that and express to him the hope that, whatever the reason was today, it will not be repeated.

Madam Deputy Speaker: The right hon. Gentleman is quite right. Mr. Speaker is normally very generous, but he too has a responsibility to protect the business of the House, as the right hon. Gentleman will I am sure agree.

Education

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Heppell.]*

2.44 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Mr. Ivan Lewis): I am delighted to have this opportunity to speak about the proposals in the Green Paper entitled, "14-19: extending opportunities, raising standards", which the Government published on 12 February. Unfortunately, due to a prior long-standing engagement in my constituency, I will not be able to stay for the whole of the debate, and I offer the House my apologies for that. I will, of course, read the report of the debate with great interest.

It is also appropriate to say at this stage that I am aware that the spokesperson leading for Her Majesty's official Opposition is the hon. Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt), which strengthens the Bury connection. This is probably the only kind thing I will say about the Opposition during my speech; the hon. Gentleman is still spoken of very highly in the Bury, North constituency that he used to represent. I am sure that he will agree that the priority for us all at the moment is to save Bury football club from extinction.

I hope that hon. Members on both sides of the House will use this opportunity to make constructive contributions. The Green Paper offers all those with a genuine commitment to education the opportunity to contribute their ideas, experience and to express their concerns. It poses as many questions as it prescribes solutions. Political knockabout and serious scrutiny have their place in the proceedings of the House but we are sincere in our desire to achieve maximum consensus as we seek to transfer an exciting vision into effective reforms which transform the life choices and life chances of all our young people.

I am proud of the fact that last week we published probably the first ever young people's version of a Green Paper, demonstrating our commitment across government to consult young people on policy developments that impact on their lives. For too long we have treated young people as passive recipients of reform. As the Minister with responsibility for young people and learning, I am determined that their status as users and consumers of the education system should be recognised and acted upon.

I want to put our 14 to 19 proposals in the context of our overall vision for high-quality education and training. As hon. Members will know, the past five years have seen dramatic improvements in education. Spending on education has risen from 4.7 per cent. to 5 per cent. of gross domestic product—an increase of £13.6 billion. The exam results of those aged between 14 and 19 continue to improve, and Ofsted recently confirmed that the quality of teaching found to be "good or better" has never been higher.

Mr. Mark Hoban (Fareham): Given the improvement in exam standards to which the Minister refers, can he explain why the gap between the best and worst performing schools has widened, not narrowed, as is outlined in the Ofsted report?

Mr. Lewis: Twenty years of under-investment and neglect of the most socially excluded communities and the most disadvantaged young people have probably led to that situation. This Government have introduced a number of specific measures to tackle that very problem. Literacy and numeracy strategies in primary schools are proving to work. A new key stage 3 strategy aims to tackle the fact that too many young people stagnate at that stage in their education or at worst go backwards. We have floor targets that are specifically focused on those schools and local education authorities that are not performing as well as they should; we are focusing resources and attention on those individual schools and LEAs. Therefore, it is not accurate or reasonable to suggest that the gap has grown in recent years. There is clear evidence that the Government's policies are designed to ensure that every individual young person, whatever their social background, whatever community they live in, gets the opportunity to achieve their potential.

Mr. Kelvin Hopkins (Luton, North): Of course, educational standards are improving under this Government, but does my hon. Friend not agree that the widening gap between schools is more a result of effective selection that is gradually taking hold following the policies of the previous Government, moving away from the comprehensive ideal?

Mr. Lewis: I agree with my hon. Friend that that has not helped the position. It created a two-tier system of education in this country. During those years—and prior to them—we concentrated our efforts on educating a small elite. That was not sensible if we were trying to create either a socially inclusive or economically successful society.

Although 14 to 19 education and training is improving, much more remains to be done. Too many young people still leave learning at 16 with few or no qualifications, and too many still drop out at 16, which often leads to negative consequences—unemployment, low-paid work or, even worse, a drift into a world of drugs, antisocial behaviour and crime.

Similarly, only six out of 10 in the 15 to 24 age range attain level 3 qualifications in the UK—compared, for example, with nearly nine out of 10 in Germany. Only three out of four 16 to 18-year-olds in England were in education and training at the end of 2000—well below European and OECD averages, so there is an urgent and clear case for reform.

If we want to be a successful nation with an effective high-skills economy, there is no alternative: more people need to be better educated than ever before, and we must end the culture of leaving learning at 16. We believe that we have already made a good start.

At primary school level we have focused on embedding the basic skills of numeracy and literacy. That has produced the largest and most sustained improvement ever seen in primary school results. We have also put in place measures to improve education between the ages of 11 and 14. Through the key stage 3 strategy, we aim to build on the successes achieved at primary school, to ensure continuous progression from primary school to the early years of secondary education and to improve the quality of teaching by investing in teachers' professional development.

We have put other initiatives in place to address particular problems in the secondary education sector: for example, various strategies to close the gap between the

highest and lowest performing schools. I have already referred to the expansion of the excellence in cities programme and to increasing the number of beacon and specialist schools. We are also supporting teachers and pupils in tackling bad behaviour, through formal behaviour management training, learning mentors, learning support units and the creation of the new Connexions service.

We are committed to increasing and broadening participation in higher education so that by 2010, 50 per cent. of those aged between 18 and 30 will participate.

The challenge at 14 to 19 is to build on that good work. We want to achieve several objectives: raising the participation of young people in post-16 education; supporting the retention of young people in that sector; improving their attainment; and encouraging their progression onwards into higher education and skilled jobs. At the same time, we want to address the fact that educational underperformance disproportionately affects those from lower socio-economic groups.

We know of various current barriers to achieving those objectives. One is the fact that some young people are clearly turned off by the options currently open to them. Speaking to educationists and others around the country in consultation on the Green Paper, there is no doubt about that. Many teachers and head teachers welcome this debate because they know that the current system is not working for a core of young people within their schools. The system is undoubtedly turning them off learning.

Many young people are, of course, happy to pursue a traditional academic GCSE/A-level route, but many others would benefit from a different mix of styles and types of learning. In recognition, we want to put in place new pathways of learning, so that from age 14 young people will be able to follow learning programmes more tailored to their individual aptitudes and aspirations. We want to build an educational learning experience around individuals' strengths, needs and aspirations rather than offer an inflexible range of opportunities that often leads to a cycle of failure, exclusion and social problems.

We believe that our capacity to raise the status of vocational learning will be crucial. We have already introduced vocational A-levels and from this September we are introducing GCSEs in vocational subjects, so that any young person who wants to pursue a vocational career can have access to high-quality learning options that they will find demanding and rewarding.

Mr. Phil Willis (Harrogate and Knaresborough): Will the Minister explain how introducing vocational A-levels, which by definition will not offer access to at least 50 per cent. of our youngsters, will improve access to the training and vocational enterprise that he claims the Green Paper is intended to promote?

Mr. Lewis: The hon. Gentleman argues that vocational A-levels are somehow outside the reach of many of our young people. He is right that we must ensure that all young people have a clear pathway to success. We believe that if vocational education is to succeed, it must be viewed as a high-status, high-esteem option. One of the historical problems with vocational education is that is has been perceived as a second-rate easy option.

The introduction of vocational A-levels is at its early stages and we are willing to acknowledge that they may be inappropriate for some students. In the wider context, we are willing to engage in a genuine debate about how best to create educational qualifications and experiences that are as high status and stretching as academic options, but which are not the same and do not have the same assessment processes. It is our responsibility to get those reforms right, and further examination of vocational routes and qualifications will be part of finalising our response when the consultation is over. If vocational courses become the same as their academic alternatives, it will defeat the object.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): I welcome the Government's re-evaluation of the importance of vocational education. The Minister may know of some interesting developments in Stroud, where a consortium has been set up between three 11 to 18 schools and the local further education college. I hope that my hon. Friend will be able to pay a visit in future. One problem that the project has encountered is the differential in pay between staff in schools and those working in the further education sector. Until those pay and conditions are sorted out, it will be difficult to realign the sectors. Will my hon. Friend comment on that?

Mr. Lewis: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. If 14 to 19 reforms are to achieve their full potential, it is important to raise the status of further education in this country. We must demand higher standards, a clearer focus, a much closer partnership between schools and the FE sector; but we must also invest in that sector to ensure that it becomes the high-status option for young people that it deserves to be. The Government understand that success and investment in FE is central to our capacity to deliver our objectives.

In providing individually tailored learning programmes, it is important to ensure that young people are stimulated and motivated to learn. If we do not achieve that, we will not achieve any of our objectives. Crucially, young people must acquire skills relevant for today's world. The local economic needs of communities, as well as today's competitive global economy, are important, and we must secure a better match between the worlds of education and of work.

Providing a range of options is only one piece of the jigsaw. For students to benefit from increased choice, there must be more flexibility in the national curriculum between the ages of 14 and 16. We therefore propose to narrow the core of compulsory subjects to English, maths, science and information and communications technology—the subjects that we believe are vital for progression in learning.

Young people should also study some other essential subjects that are key to personal development: religious, careers and sex education and physical exercise. Similarly, from this August, citizenship is to become a statutory part of the national curriculum. We are also proposing that all young people undertake some work-related learning.

We remain committed to the principle that all young people should be entitled to a broad and balanced learning experience. With this in mind, we also propose a statutory entitlement to access a subject in modern foreign languages, design and technology and the arts and humanities. Young people would not be obliged to study those subjects, but schools would be obliged to make

[Mr. Lewis]

them available. That is consistent with the message that we hear repeatedly from head teachers and teachers who are trying to teach young people subjects in which they do not want to participate.

The pace at which pupils move through the system is also important. Traditionally, all young people have done that at pretty much the same pace and have passed or failed whether they were ready or not. The system has not taken sufficient account of the different ways in which people learn. We propose that more young people should experience, where appropriate, accelerated or slower paced learning, so that they can take courses at the time that is right for them. It is unlikely that accelerated or slower paced learning will be taken up by the majority of students, but it will certainly be of benefit to the highest achievers and those who need more time to achieve.

As I have said, we want to raise attainment for all young people, but we also want to help the high achievers to fly. Accelerated learning is one way of doing that; another way is by increasing the challenge at A-level. The Green Paper proposes introducing more demanding questions into the A2 papers that are taken at the end of an A-level course. In this way, they will give some students the opportunity to show their greater depth of knowledge, skill and understanding, without the need for a separate examination paper. We propose to introduce a higher "A distinction" grade to recognise this greater depth. Of course, we will continue to set the existing A to E grades at their present levels to ensure that A-level standards are maintained.

The Green Paper contains other proposals for 16 to 19 learning within a more coherent 14 to 19 phase. For example, we are committed to raising the status of modern apprenticeships to meet today's skills needs. Modern apprenticeships provide high-quality work-based learning. They are a key rung in the vocational ladder, enabling young people to progress from GCSEs towards their chosen profession and, if they so choose, foundation degrees. The modern apprenticeship provides practical benefits in terms of gaining high-status employment and young people who opt for that high-status route also have the opportunity to go on to a degree course. It is not necessarily either a vocational or higher education route.

We are upgrading modern apprenticeships by introducing technical certificates to deliver broader knowledge and understanding, alongside the national vocational qualification and key skills. We will also take forward the main recommendations of the modern apprenticeship advisory committee, chaired by Sir John Cassels.

Honourable Members may have seen the national television advertising that began on 4 March, which is the first stage of a three-year marketing campaign to promote modern apprenticeships and boost participation. How many hon. Members are told by employers and parents that it is a pity that we no longer have the old apprenticeship system? We do have an apprenticeship system—it is called the modern apprenticeship system. It is important that we raise the profile and status of modern apprenticeships and make employers and young people far more aware of the opportunities that they present.

We have begun work to establish a national framework for apprenticeship. By 2004, we aim to increase by 35,000 the number of young people entering modern apprenticeships before they are 22. Also in 2004, we aim to fulfil our manifesto commitment of an entitlement to a modern apprenticeship place for all 16 and 17-year-olds with the necessary qualifications.

The Green Paper also proposes a new award to mark the completion of the 14 to 19 phase. An overarching award should be available to young people to recognise breadth and depth of achievement by the age of 19. It could be called the matriculation diploma, but if hon. Members have a better idea, I would be delighted to hear from them. We believe that the matriculation diploma would be a common outcome, achievable by any of the available 14 to 19 pathways. That is important in terms of parity of status. Young people will be able to gain the overarching certificate by going down an academic route, a mixed academic and vocational route or an exclusively vocational route.

Such an award would have the benefits of, among other things, focusing young people on outcomes at 19 rather than at 16 and giving them something to aim for over the whole 14 to 19 phase. It would widen young people's horizons beyond individual formal qualifications, encourage the development of the whole person and would convey valuable information to employers and higher education.

The Green Paper asks for views on whether there should be such an award and, if so, what its precise content and structure should be. It offers for discussion a model that would allow young people to achieve the diploma at three levels—intermediate, advanced and higher. It suggests that those who do not achieve the award at any level by age 19 but have remained in learning and made a sustained effort should be given a record of progress setting out their achievements. It also suggests that an alternative to that model could be a certificate that simply sets out attainment available to all young people on leaving learning at 19.

For the first time in our education system, it is proposed that young people should be encouraged to participate in voluntary work, active citizenship activities, wider activities such as art, music and sport as well as work-related learning and to receive recognition for doing so. That responds to the concerns increasingly expressed by employers that young people progressing from the world of education to the world of work often lack communication, interpersonal, teamwork and leadership skills, all of which we regard as essential to successful businesses and high-quality public services in a modern world.

Some other things have to be done to make the new structure and reforms work. Under the proposals, the age of 14 would become a more significant decision point than it is now. A flexible, more individualised, 14 to 19 programme of learning would involve wider choices, made earlier. It is therefore essential that young people receive the support, information and guidance to choose wisely. We have set out various proposals, including the effective use of the Connexions service, to ensure that that occurs.

It will also be important to engage parents, in a way that we have not done previously, at this crucial time. We should remember that when we talk about giving young people a variety of options and greater flexibility, parents continue to be the most significant influence on the choices that they make.

Our proposals also have significant implications for the institutional structures by which education is provided. To make a reality of the 14 to 19 phase, we must develop the kind of institutional structures that can deliver the full range of opportunities.

We do not expect every school, college or workplace to deliver the whole variety of a 14 to 19 curriculum on its own. However, if an institution offers only part of a young person's programme of learning, access to complementary facilities should be available elsewhere. In other words, a range of institutions in every area should be able to contribute to a comprehensive and diverse pattern of local provision. This means that area-wide planning of provision—bringing together providers from various sectors and backgrounds—will need to feature much more prominently in our ways of working. We need schools, colleges, training providers, small and medium-sized enterprises and universities to work far more closely together in the future.

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): The Minister says that we need area planning to co-ordinate the whole of the 14 to 19 phase. Is he saying that learning and skills councils will in due course take over the funding and the planning of that phase?

Mr. Lewis: No.

To succeed, in terms of the new relationships between institutions that focus on the individual learner, we believe that there will need to be a new commitment from all those involved. We also acknowledge our responsibility to encourage collaboration by removing barriers to co-operation, rewarding good practice and providing some financial assistance.

We also intend to use pathfinders to assess different models of collaborative working and to develop best practice that will inform the full national development of the 14 to 19 phase. This innovative work is already taking place in institutions in a number of areas; because of their experience of the limited way in which they can allow all young people between 14 and 19 to achieve their potential, those institutions are collaborating and working together. We want to use pathfinders to focus attention on that good practice so that, in areas where it has not been the norm, we can bring institutions together and support closer working relationships.

The reforms will give us a more coherent 14 to 19 phase of learning, providing balanced programmes of learning that meet the individual's needs, interests and aspirations, offering flexible progression from age 14 to post-16 learning. That will lead to an education system in which young people want to keep learning throughout the 14 to 19 phase and beyond, and which directly improves young people's employability.

The solutions that we offer in the Green Paper are not set in stone. We are consulting widely on them, and for longer than usual—until the end of May.

Mr. Robert Syms (Poole): Will the Minister undertake to publish the consultation when it ends in May? It would be useful to hear what trade unions and others have to say about the implications for teachers and lecturers.

Mr. Lewis: We will publish the results of the consultation. Hon. Members will not expect to receive a copy of every letter and submission, but a representative summary will be published. [Hon. Members: "Oh!"] It will be an accurate and representative summary. We are committed to consultation. The Green Paper could have been prescriptive on areas in which we have asked open-ended questions. In that respect, it is an important document. We want to hear from the widest possible variety of individuals, educationists and politicians on how we can raise the status of vocational education—something that no Government have ever achieved. There are no easy answers or quick-fix solutions. We want to listen to people who have practical experience of trying to make the system work day to day. I am sure that the Opposition will want to rescind their cynicism about our commitment to consultation.

The solutions in the Green Paper are not set in stone. Reform must be introduced over a reasonable period. We accept that that will require significant change to the status quo. It is important to introduce change in a measured way over a number of years and to get those changes right.

Dr. Ian Gibson (Norwich, North): Will my hon. Friend consult with young people who are in education and listen to them more carefully than any politician has ever done before?

Mr. Lewis: I entirely agree with the sentiment behind my hon. Friend's comment. Last week, for what I suspect was the first time ever, we launched a Green Paper specifically for the young people who will be most affected by the changes that we propose. Before the end of May, we shall hold several consultation events to ascertain the views of young people. We should also ask young people who have gone beyond the 14 to 19 phase what worked and what did not, and how the system could be better.

We are committed to consultation and engagement with young people. That is not easy—it could be done tokenistically or superficially, but we want to do it in a genuine way. We want to reach not only articulate young people who are already well served by the system, but those who are disengaged so that we can find out their reasons for their disaffection and to see how our reforms respond directly to their concerns.

Mr. Chris Mole (Ipswich): Will the Minister share with the House his experience in front of several hundred young people at the UGC cinema in Ipswich when the Suffolk Connexions service was launched? There was a lively direct engagement between the Minister and those young people.

Mr. Lewis: It was a memorable occasion. The first speaker was the young and impressive leader of the local authority—little did I know that he would soon join us in the House of Commons. He was pelted with aeroplanes by the young people in the audience. The next speaker was hissed and jeered. I was due to speak next, and I can assure the House that I made probably the shortest speech ever given from a public platform. The young people then asked me whether I would meet a juggler who was performing elsewhere in the exhibition centre. He in turn asked me to lie on the floor, and when I did, he swapped his juggling sticks for knives. The face of the civil servant accompanying me was well worth seeing.

[Mr. Lewis]

During the few months in which I have had the privilege of being the first Minister for young people, that and many other experiences have told me that they are amazingly sophisticated and articulate, able to tell us exactly where the system is working or failing. In the past, we have ignored them at our peril. We have treated young people as passive recipients of services rather than seeing them as users and consumers. The Government are absolutely committed to changing that, as am I.

Mr. Willis: The Minister makes a powerful point. Does he accept that one of the things that young people find most disillusioning is being asked for their views, then having them totally disregarded? That may be why he was pelted in Ipswich. Does the Minister agree that the largest recent survey to be carried out with young people was the one on the future of faith schools? Young people gave expansion of faith schools a total thumbs-down, but the Government simply ignored them.

Mr. Lewis: No, I do not agree with that. When I asked the people who claimed to have undertaken extensive consultation how many young people had been consulted, the number turned out to be so small that the evaluation evidence was entirely meaningless. The hon. Gentleman should not make such a spurious point in support of an argument that he usually articulates in a way that I respect but do not agree with.

When one speaks to audiences of young people, it is important not to make promises that cannot be kept. We must be honest about the resource limitations within which politicians must work, although that would make it difficult for the Liberal Democrats ever to engage in constructive discussion with young people.

Alistair Burt (North-East Bedfordshire): Does the Minister agree that anyone who has experienced opinion polls run by the Liberal Democrats during by-elections would do well to be jaundiced about anything that arose from that method of gauging people's opinions?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. May I remind the House that we are debating education for 14 to 19-year-olds?

Mr. Lewis: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am delighted that the Bury consensus continues so far into the debate.

The credibility of our engagement and consultation with young people is important. Frankly, they expect us to fail to deliver and to let them down. Politicians in general—whatever their party—are not held in high regard by young people. Our work of engaging day after day in debate with young people is essential if we are to restore the integrity of democracy and do something about the low turnouts—particularly among young people—that are the biggest threat to that democracy. All Members of Parliament have a special responsibility to do something about the breakdown of the relationship between the political process and young people. I urge every hon. Member to make an effort in his or her constituency to engage with that by consulting young people on the 14 to 19 Green Paper. We shall receive favourably the results of any such consultation.

Our reforms are important and we must take time to get them right. It is absolutely essential that we ensure that more young people achieve their potential. We are committed to seeing them attain good qualifications and to giving them the education that they need if they are to be successful in today's high-skilled economy. The Government are committed to rebuilding our country on the dual foundations of social justice and economic success. We want a fair society in which every young person has the chance to fulfil his or her potential and in which we no longer tolerate having far too many young people being consigned to the margins of society. We are committed to a successful society, with the skilled work force who are so essential in an increasingly competitive global economy and in which we bridge the competitiveness gap, which continues to hold our country back.

Our proposals for the reform of 14 to 19 education and training are an integral part of the society that we seek to build. I commend them to the House.

3.20 pm

Alistair Burt (North-East Bedfordshire): I welcome the opportunity to join in this debate to discuss the 14 to 19 curriculum and the Green Paper that the Under-Secretary outlined. I thank the hon. Gentleman for his speech and for his courtesy in informing the House that a constituency engagement will take him away from us. I can only hope and assume that that engagement is a fund raiser for the Shakers, in which case the whole House will join in wishing him well. Contributions may be sent to Bury football club, either through its website or directly to the club at Gigg lane, Bury. I urge all hon. Members who have not already added themselves to the roll of honour on the website to do so as soon as possible. It is a pleasure to see the hon. Gentleman in his place. The Bury connection is very strong. I appreciate his kind words and wish him well in his ministerial career.

I will have some nice things to say about the Green Paper and some of the aims and aspirations behind it. The Conservative party is concerned to ensure that our criticism of education policy comes from the same general base as the hon. Gentleman would expect, which is with an understanding of the aims of education in this country, but with the sharp edge that is necessary to turn decent aspirations into reality.

As always, the devil is in the detail. Parties of all colours realise when in government that good aspirations can sometimes flounder. It is therefore the job of the Opposition to point to some of the matters in the Green Paper that need a little more consideration if they are not to spoil the aims and aspirations in the way that I shall outline.

Before I consider the Green Paper in detail, I must deal with three vital areas that must be addressed if the curriculum is to be delivered satisfactorily. First, I pay tribute to the hard work that is going on in all our schools. From my county of Bedfordshire to Yorkshire, teachers, their support staff, governors, pupils and parents are working extremely hard to make education work. As the Secretary of State has said more than once, we are asking more of them every day. That is why some discrimination in the documents that the Government are continually sending them is necessary as those documents are getting in the way of the staff doing their jobs.

As the shadow Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Mr. Green), made clear in the debate on Tuesday, the paperwork that the Department produces for schools is reaching mammoth proportions, which is preventing heads from doing their jobs. If we add together all the documents sent out between April 2001 and February 2002, they total 4,333 pages for head teachers to plough through. In April 2001, documents with a total of 853 pages were issued to primary schools. Assuming that each page takes two minutes to read, those documents would have taken more than 28 hours just to read, which is equal to three and a half working days.

No matter how diverting or interesting it is to knock up some new idea or develop policies such as the 14 to 19 curriculum, doing so must not deter the Government from tackling the problems that are undermining schools: the specialist teacher shortage, the burden of paperwork, and behavioural issues with pupils. The hon. Gentleman mentioned the work that is being done to improve behaviour and the like, but that comes on the back of the Government's failed exclusion policy, which they have now changed.

I visited Orpington college yesterday and talked to a newly qualified teacher who had just started in his job. I asked him why he was in the college rather than the schools sector and he said that it was because of behaviour—he wanted to be in a place where children wanted to learn. That is a message for all hon. Members, not only for the Minister. All teachers want to be in places where children want to learn. Behaviour problems are causing a major crisis for schools. While we are concentrating on one policy, let us not take our eyes off the other ball.

Secondly, I stress the crucial importance of the further education sector in making the post-16 curriculum work. The quality and purpose in further education is extraordinary. I have been delighted in the past few months to visit a variety of different colleges: Barnet, Bedford, Dunstable, Thurrock and Orpington. I was most impressed by the commitment and the close connection between staff and their students, which might be due to the intimate connection with the local community and the need to be closely involved with employers. I found genuine esteem for the students and the courses that they are doing. I will return later to the difficult issue of vocational education. People in those colleges have real concerns, however, and unless they are tackled, the hopes of delivering some of the 14 to 19 curriculum through further education will be damaged.

The hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew), who has just left the Chamber, made a point about pay and recruitment, and he is right. It is my impression from talking to principals that the FE sector is worried about core funding, which continues to go down because the new money coming into FE is always tied to initiatives. Colleges must bid for all the money and there is a sense that new money is centrally directed, which has led to a lack of trust in the sector.

David Wright (Telford): Given the aspirations of the Leader of the Opposition to reduce public expenditure to 35 per cent. of gross domestic product and the funding issue that the hon. Gentleman is raising, where would the cuts fall in further education if the Conservative party were in power?

Alistair Burt: I will knock that argument on the head before it consumes every debate. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition has said clearly that the public services will be the first call on the Exchequer when we return to office. We have made that clear in all our actions in the past few months. I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman will care to get to his feet on the day of the Budget when the Chancellor may have some rather different things to say about the public services than he has hitherto said.

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Will the hon. Gentleman help the House by explaining the proportion of Government expenditure that is not spent on public services?

Alistair Burt: About 60 per cent. is not spent on public services. We commonly talk of education and the health service as such services. I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman is including social security. I was drawing that distinction, but perhaps he was not.

People in further education are concerned that they are not quite trusted to handle their budgets. The core funding issue and the efficiency drive are causing them real problems. Academic pay and recruitment have reached acute levels. Those teaching in FE do not have some of the advantages of teachers in schools, such as housing allowances, golden hellos and laptops. Consequently, there is now a drift from further education into schools, which is affecting the ability of the FE sector to deliver.

Despite that fact, performance in the FE sector is exceptionally strong. Accordingly, the way in which the Minister for Lifelong Learning is treating the sector is unwarranted and it is causing completely unnecessary anger and concern. All Ministers sometimes have difficult things to say to those in their Department or in the area of their expertise and work. However, one must get people on one's side at some stage, particularly if one wants to give any sense that one understands the problems that they are facing. When the Minister wrote in *The Independent* on 7 March,

> "Students have a 50-50 chance of coming away from post-16 learning having achieved what they set out to do . . . Further education serves too many learners to be a lottery for success",

she must have been unaware of the degree of anger that she has caused in the sector.

As the Association of Colleges pointed out, FE colleges receive 20 per cent. less funding for every individual who goes through an A-level programme than schools get for their A-level students.

According to the Further Education Funding Council inspection report of 2000–01:

> "The amount of good or outstanding provision in programme areas increased significantly between 1999–2000 and 2000–2001. Overall, in 2000–2001, 97 per cent. of lessons were judged to be satisfactory or better. The proportion judged good or outstanding was 62 per cent."

How does that square in any way with the hon. Lady's unwarranted attack?

Gillian Merron (Lincoln): I was interested in the fact that the hon. Gentleman referred to his visits to various

[Gillian Merron]

colleges and in his subsequent comments. Is not the Green Paper all about how we work with that sector to extend opportunities to young people and improve them? In his travels around the sector, did he not find an overwhelming welcome for the Green Paper?

Alistair Burt: I am awfully sorry, but no. The hon. Lady is absolutely right in her first contention: the whole point of working together is to build up a partnership. However, I put it to her—she should put this to her hon. Friends—that the Minister for Lifelong Learning's idea of creating a partnership may be to go around saying the sort of stuff that she has been saying, but it is just not working. Today, she will find that the chief executive of the Association of Colleges has made that clear in a very strong speech. The point is to build a partnership, but to improve it the Minister has to get people on the Government's side in the first place, and she is patently not doing that.

It is too early to get a sense of how much all the colleges welcome the Green Paper. They do welcome some things, as I shall go on to say, but they have not given an unequivocal welcome—that would never happen. At the moment, for them to be willing to listen to the Government, they must have some sense that the Government care about them and their sector, and the remarks made by the Minister for Lifelong Learning are not helping in that regard.

Yesterday I met John Harwood, the chief executive of the Learning and Skills Council. We wish the council well in its role, into which it is now settling. It has a variety of issues to resolve, from teething troubles to the fact the performance will be patchy from area to area. We would want it to stand up for the further education sector.

I shall take the Minister back to a remark that he made following an intervention from my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) in relation to the 14 to 19 curriculum and its funding. The Minister said that there were no plans for the LSC to take over funding for 14 to 19-year-olds. I assume that that is absolutely right. Is he prepared to reiterate that that will not happen? If not, perhaps the Minister for School Standards would like to revisit that point in responding to the debate.

My third point on the other things that need to be considered before the curriculum can be adequately delivered relates to the concerns about the budget. The hon. Member for Telford (David Wright) may have some more concerns about public expenditure when we get to Budget day. Where has education slipped to in the pecking order? We have had two hints. The first is the continued delay in the review of student finance. Again, some of the remarks made by the Minister for Lifelong Learning have been designed to suggest that there will not be very much new money for students or universities.

While we are about it, can we finally have a definition of higher education? Again, the Under-Secretary said that the target was that 50 per cent. of 18 to 30-year-olds should have had some form of higher education experience by 2010. Is he aware that, since 25 October last year, we have been asking his colleagues to define the term "higher education experience"? Six months later, we still do not have one. People cannot have a target unless they know what it relates to.

Mr. Willis: Perhaps I can help the hon. Gentleman by saying that the answer to that question, which I have also asked, was published in *Hansard* today.

Alistair Burt: Ah, well. I think that that was helpful—thanks. Was the answer the result of an opinion poll taken by the hon. Gentleman's colleagues? We can rely on it, can we?

Mr. Willis: May I help the hon. Gentleman? The response is not helpful, but it is interesting.

Alistair Burt: The confusion among those on the Opposition Benches is an indication of the confusion caused by the Government in not providing an adequate answer to that question for six months. There are 190 specialists in the Department for Education and Skills dedicated to higher education. Since 25 October last year, we have not yet had a definitive answer. Even the answer published today has confused the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Willis: I do not understand it.

Alistair Burt: The hon. Gentleman does not understand it, and he understands education very well. So, it is back to the drawing board for all 190 of those educational specialists, and perhaps in six months' time we will have an answer.

The other sign that education is slipping down the agenda is perhaps the attack on further education, lowering expectations in that sector. If education, education, education has slipped down the list of the Chancellor's priorities, it will be enormously disappointing to people in that sector, and perhaps we should be prepared for bad times just around the corner.

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Alistair Burt: Of course; a comment on the Budget would be welcome.

Mr. Lewis: The hon. Gentleman would welcome such a comment, but the Treasury certainly would not welcome it if I were to make it. Is he aware of the recent statement made by the former chief inspector of schools to the effect that the problem with the previous Conservative Government's education policies was that they did not give them early enough the importance that they deserved? Does not that contrast sharply with the massive amounts of extra investment that this Government have already put into education and skills during our first five years in office?

Alistair Burt: I am thrilled that the hon. Gentleman has read Chris Woodhead's book and is now prepared to quote it extensively. If he has been converted to what the former chief executive of Ofsted says, we would be delighted. Perhaps he will also comment on the remarks made by Chris Woodhead on page 85 of his book:

"These are problems that could be solved. In fact, as everyone knows the Government has chosen to make them worse."

The hon. Gentleman may want to quote selectively from Chris Woodhead's book, but we have probably got rather more in our armoury than he has.

I should like to consider the Green Paper in detail, having put on record the things that need to be done to ensure that the curriculum is properly delivered. None of us would seek to quibble with the vision and aims expressed in the Green Paper. It states that the

"first challenge is to build an education system in which every young person and every parent has confidence."

That is perfectly proper. It also states:

"Secondly, we must ensure that no young person is denied the chance of a decent education.

Thirdly, we must reap the skills benefits of an education system that matches the needs of the knowledge economy.

And fourthly, we must promote education with character."

That is absolutely right. There is no reason why any hon. Member should take issue with that, but the difficulty is how to translate things into practical answers.

I welcome the attention that is being paid to flexibility. I also certainly welcome the effort being made to ensure that proper support, advice and guidance is given to young people, especially at the age of 14. When youngsters become that bit older and enter higher education, a key factor for those who do not complete their courses is that they have not had adequate information or preparation before they start them. So anything that can be done to help at an early stage is good, especially for those from non-traditional higher education backgrounds whom we all seek to encourage most.

The three main proposals in the Green Paper are, first, a more flexible curriculum that is more responsive to students' individual needs; secondly, to promote world-class technical and vocational education, which offers a positive choice and high standards and is not a second-class fallback; and, thirdly, the new matriculation diploma, to which all young people can aspire at the age of 19. All those are useful aspirations, but, alas, too many questions go begging.

The GCSE will be downgraded for academic pupils, but upgraded for less academic ones. Is it therefore a useful exam, or not? Languages will be upgraded in primary schools, but downgraded in secondary schools. Are foreign languages essential, or not? The curriculum is supposed to be more flexible to enable every child to achieve, but more exams are loaded on to 18-year-olds. Therefore, what should have been a set of radical proposals to reform vocational education and ensure that the brightest pupils are stretched, alas turns out to be too much of a hotch-potch of half-baked ideas.

First, let us consider the flexible curriculum. The Green Paper states that young people should be able to develop at a pace consistent with their abilities. In particular, it advocates greater flexibility to accelerate learning in key stage 3 and give able students the opportunity to take their GCSEs early or to drop them altogether in some subjects and begin the AS programmes early. The problem is that most of the flexibility comes from taking away the need to carry on with a language post-14. Languages will therefore not be compulsory.

The problem with that is that we already lag way behind our European competitors on language skills. Barely 25 per cent. of people in this country can speak a foreign language. I suspect that that is a self-assessment that we would all make with our pidgin O-level French, and it shows that the depth of difficulties in relation to foreign languages is rather greater. Most of our European competitors have compulsory language teaching until the age of 18. Why should we not?

Charlotte Atkins (Staffordshire, Moorlands): If the hon. Gentleman had ever tried to teach an unwilling 14 or 15-year-old a language when they were struggling with a range of other subjects, he would understand that it is vital not to force languages on them, but to ensure that they are enthused and excited by languages in primary school at seven or, indeed, earlier.

Alistair Burt: Two points come to mind. Does the hon. Lady apply that criterion to those who are unwilling to do maths, English or the like? Secondly, if youngsters are to be encouraged in primary school to feel that languages are appropriate, but suddenly find aged 14 that the Government do not consider them to be appropriate, where are the Government setting their sights?

Plenty of others have commented with great concern about languages being dropped. On 15 February, the Nuffield languages inquiry said:

"The Government has sent out the message loud and clear to young people—and to those who run their schools and teach in them—that language learning is a frill, an optional extra to education."

It believes that the plan

"would have a seriously damaging effect on national competitiveness and on the overall education levels of our children."

The Association of Colleges, in its submission on the curriculum, said:

"The removing of modern languages from the core is a retrograde step in relation to the future employability of young people in the global economy of the 21st century. Industry is already reporting losing business because there are insufficient employees able to communicate with foreign buyers. It is arguable whether introducing modern languages into Primary School will engender the motivation to pursue languages beyond the age of 14."

That does not even consider where the teachers are to come from. Accordingly, this may well not close a skills gap, but create a new one.

To rub salt into this particular wound, there are far too many life skills that are no longer compulsory components of the curriculum. Employers do not complain that their candidates do not have a clear enough vision of their future career path or that their health education is poor; they complain that the candidates do not have good enough key skills and basic general knowledge. This element of the Green Paper, therefore, would see valuable skills dropped for non-key skills that should be learned elsewhere in the family and the community.

The Under-Secretary said that there would be an entitlement for students to take a foreign language if they wished and that schools would be obliged to provide the teaching. What happens if one pupil in the whole school wants to take French?

Mr. Ivan Lewis *indicated dissent.*

Alistair Burt: Is the Under-Secretary suggesting that a school would not be obliged to teach that pupil but that somewhere in the local area someone would be found to do it? Is it the latter?

Mr. Lewis: It is quite straightforward. The concept of collaboration between schools, colleges and training

[Mr. Lewis]

providers within an area would mean that the school had responsibility to ensure that that young person would have access to the teaching of a modern foreign language, whether in that institution or a neighbouring one.

Alistair Burt: I take the hon. Gentleman's point, but again my response is that if collaboration is to be the order of the day and he is looking for collaboration with the further education sector, he had better make sure that things are levelled up in that sector. Otherwise, he will not find the collaboration that he is looking for.

The proposals for dropping GCSEs are vague. It is not clear which topics students could drop and which they could take early. It is clear that the proposals will downgrade the GCSE. If the brightest pupils are no longer taking the same exams as their less bright contemporaries, the latter will not feel that their qualifications are as valuable as when all students took GCSEs as their main key stage 4 examination. It removes the gold standard status from the GCSE and is an admission that GCSEs are now too easy. If that is the case, let us reform the GCSE.

Consequently these proposals are likely to create a form of exam apartheid, especially as in practice it is likely to be difficult to move between the two streams. The decision, therefore, to take all GCSEs or some GCSEs and AS-levels at the age of 14 will have a huge effect on future life chances. This may encourage some pupils to take AS-levels when it is inappropriate to do so and may encourage some schools to push their pupils to do AS-levels so that they move higher up the league table.

There is also a question mark over the overall appropriateness of the AS-level for GCSE students. Contrary to common belief, AS-levels are not a lower standard than A-levels; they are intended to be half an A-level course at A-level standard. Therefore, it is important to ask whether even a very bright 14-year-old would be able to take a course and an exam designed to be taken by a 17-year-old. It seems that the AS-level is being used by the Government to plug a gap in their policy, but it is not an appropriate plug.

I now come to modern apprenticeships and vocational training. The debate on vocational training is an important one for the country now, as it has been for almost 100 years. We perpetually seem to get this wrong in terms of attitude and the like. When we visit those involved in teaching a vocational subject, we do not get any sense from them that their pupils have less self-esteem or that there is less esteem attached to the course. This is something that we struggle with. I sometimes feel that those with an academic background fall over themselves to create or perpetuate the gap for some reason. The way they go on talking about the divide and the problems of esteem in vocational education sometimes adds to the difficulties.

There is no difference in the worth of an individual, no matter what course they take. The demand that is made of us is to do the very best with all our talents to the best of our ability. Those talents may best be fulfilled in academic or vocational courses, and now increasingly in hybrids between the two—that is what it is all about. We will do all we can to assist the Under-Secretary in this. I remember coming to the House many years ago and talking to employers who said that they were sick of the fact that they could not get enough young people with basic skills and craft skills. They felt then that there was a problem in Britain in relation to that issue. It has been clouded by class and terminology for far too long. We will give every assistance we can to help deal with that, but whether these proposals are necessarily the right ones is another matter. On the general issue, we want to be very supportive.

I am pleased that the Under-Secretary paid tribute to the scheme for modern apprenticeships which we introduced. Although the Green Paper does not give a great deal of detail on this, the idea is that pupils who intend to pursue a modern apprenticeship will be able to study predominantly vocational courses until they are 16. The Green Paper says that the Department for Education and Skills will be working with the Learning and Skills Council to ensure that modern apprenticeships are of a high enough standard and will provide students with employable skills.

There is already in the proposals a compulsory work-related learning component, and the Green Paper reaffirms its existence for all pupils in the future. I draw the Under-Secretary's attention to the Association of Learning Providers, which wrote to me shortly after the Green Paper was published, and wished to participate. It says that the key to making sure that modern apprenticeships and relationships with the workplace go well is to give sufficient choice to employers and learners to make sure that the schemes are the right ones. It goes on:

"The new national framework should be sufficiently flexible to allow employers and learners choice. It should also permit innovation on the part of private and voluntary learning providers in devising programmes that meet the needs of different industry sectors and approaches to learning."

I will send the letter to the hon. Gentleman and I hope that he will find it helpful.

The problems are as follows. There is a danger that businesses will not be adequately consulted either on the content of the vocational qualifications or during the creation of modern apprenticeships. The Under-Secretary must make sure that this does not happen. It is not clear how the Learning and Skills Council will interact with the vocational training that is available for the under-16s. That is a real problem if under-16s go to further education colleges in order to take some of their vocational GCSE courses.

The general idea on work-related learning is fine, but there is no structural or compulsory element to the proposals. The Under-Secretary has said that this would happen and would be a must. That must be firmed up in the Paper because unless there is structural change, it is unlikely that this will work.

I share with the Under-Secretary a sense that perhaps the matriculation diploma will not necessarily go into the Oxford English Dictionary with as much ease as a "Delia" did. It will not trip off all our tongues, so we should find some other name, perhaps one relating to graduation. The whole concept of graduating from high school has become popular with youngsters who see it portrayed in films from the United States where it is part of the culture. Perhaps some sort of graduation diploma, providing that it is not confused with anything further up the education scale, might be right. Let us have a think about it.

There is a problem, however. The proposals for the diploma are vague. For example, they do not state whether other activities, such as citizenship education and sport,

will definitely be included in the assessment. The diploma will over-simplify the current examinations system. The suggestion is that employers, further education colleges and universities cannot tell the difference between pupils' achievements. For example, students with five A* grades at GCSE will get the same intermediate grade as those with five C grades, yet employers and further education colleges will not view them in the same way. John Bangs, the head of the National Union of Teachers education department, summed it up best when he said:

"It is difficult to see why a separate certificate is needed for those with higher grades. It is not beyond the wit of the universities to develop their own means of distinguishing between highfliers without undermining A levels for other pupils."

The diploma also attempts falsely to compare different skills, such as an achievement in English with an aptitude for woodwork with being a good football player. Including other non-academic/vocational subjects in the assessment creates problems. How will we assess non-academic and vocational achievements? How will we deal with the fact that a student who has one A and two B grades at A-level, an AS-level at any grade and a qualification in citizenship will be awarded the top higher diploma, while a student with just four A grades at A-level will get only the lower advanced diploma? That does not make sense.

The Green Paper sets out many good intentions. However, the main aspects on which the Minister will concentrate to deliver the aims are seriously flawed. Unless those are dealt with, the aims will not be achieved. We draw the Government's attention to those difficulties. There is much devil in the detail, but we, too, want the central aims delivered. The fundamentals are in place. However, unless the difficulties in teaching and schools, the disparity in further education and the budgetary problems are properly dealt with by the Secretary of State and her team, none of those aspirations will be delivered. We give full notice that as much as we support some of the principles behind the aims, we will also examine the flaws carefully in order to ensure that the delivery matches some of the words that the Government use, at least at some stage in their term in office.

3.52 pm

Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt). I know him best from his days as MP for Bury, North and, as my hon. Friend the Minister said, that is how we still think of him. On that basis, I am sure that we all join him in wishing Bury football club well in its current difficulties. I am not sure whether it does either of us any good when I say that the last football match I saw him at was a Bolton Wanderers game. The match was good, so it was obviously not last week.

The hon. Gentleman said that the Conservatives want the central aims of the Green Paper delivered. However, I doubted that when I listened to him. It will always be the case that the devil is in the detail, but we are debating a Green Paper, not the details of legislation. It is important to concentrate on the general direction in which we want education to go for this age group. I welcome the debate and the fact that we are concentrating more attention on 14 to 19-year-olds.

As my hon. Friend the Minister said, the Government have delivered a great deal in terms of educational improvement in the past few years. Much of that is reflected in the improved performances in many schools. The schools achievement awards are out tomorrow, and I look forward to writing to the successful schools in my constituency. There have been many successful initiatives, and many of them are interrelated. We should not forget that.

At the beginning of the week, I read some comments by right-wing so-called researchers who said that we should dump pre-school education because it does not do children any good. The Government's work on pre-school education has laid the foundation for the teenagers of the future so that they get far more out of education and achieve even more than they do now. It is important to realise that those facts are related so that we have an overall approach to education.

It is right to focus on this group of teenagers, partly because the Government have done much to move in the right direction in so many other aspects of education, and partly because there are difficulties with the education of those young people. In addition to issues covered by the Green Paper, the Minister should bear it in mind that those parts of the country with a middle-school system still experience some difficulties. In that system, young people of 14 take key stage 3 exams when they have only been in the school for a short time. That problem has not been mentioned so far, and it complicates an already complicated situation. It will have to be taken on board when further details of our approach for the age group are worked out.

The Green Paper says:

"We must build a flexible system around the needs and aspirations of individual pupils".

No one could disagree with that. However, it is important that that aspiration on the part of the Government is put in the right context. We need a flexible system, but we do not want a fragmented system. We have to get away from the categorisation that has given sound opportunities to some in the age group, but not to others. There have been so many tiers and layers that it has often been difficult for those advising young people, as well as the young people themselves, to know which route to take. Should they go for intermediate GNVQs, GCSEs, AS-levels or modern apprenticeships? Should they go to a sixth form college, an FE college or stay in their own college? The choices are almost bewildering. In some geographical areas, that makes it difficult for everyone involved.

We are lacking the framework to encompass all that we offer. Although I absolutely believe that we need flexibility, it needs to be within a coherent structure. It must offer all young people—not just the academic few or those who are deemed suitable for vocational education—more choice than they have at present. However, it must also give value to those opportunities that are not properly valued now.

The Green Paper refers to meeting the needs of young people, but who decides what those needs are? How do we inform young people and ensure that they get advice and support? The situation on the ground is patchy. In some areas, it is very good; in others, it is not. The same is true of aspirations. We have to improve young people's aspirations and stretch all pupils, but are we sure that we have the right mechanisms in place?

I do not want to go through the whole Green Paper, but not enough has been made of one critical consideration. The document refers to girls' achievements and records.

[Ann Taylor]

It also mentions motivation. However, the lack of motivation on the part of young people is one of the key problems in education. We need to place an even greater emphasis on that and probably carry out more research. More people need to be interested in motivation, especially what makes it tail off.

There is academic work on that. A few years ago, the department of education at Keele university charted the dips in performance, in interest and in attendance—the critical points in the education of girls and boys. The dips were not parallel, but the elementary work of examining what is happening and then considering why, can help to improve our knowledge of how to motivate young people and how to keep them interested in education. There are some very good teachers around, many of whom are good individual motivators, but we still have to do more to understand what triggers motivation and what keeps people in the system and interested. Flexibility in the system will help, but there are other steps that we must take.

I want to discuss another matter that the Green Paper touched on, but not sufficiently—ensuring that young people, especially this age group, learn how to learn. They need to become individual learners, as opposed to being taught a skill or how to pass an exam, which, although critically important, is not the be all and end all for this age group. All young people need to develop that skill because they will have to change direction throughout their lives, and if they can crack learning as a process at that age it will stay with them for ever.

My hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson), who is not in the Chamber at the moment, wondered what young people might think about the Green Paper. I commend the Minister for producing a separate document, including a questionnaire, that is aimed at young people. It is a simple guide, but none the worse for that. There is always the danger that such documents may sound patronising, and we can always find examples of the odd phrase that is not quite right. As the hon. Member for North-East Bedfordshire said, young people will not be queueing up to discuss the matriculation diploma—although some might come up with other names that would be unmentionable in the House—but they may have ideas about it.

It is worth the Minister giving some time, thought and effort to ensuring that young people respond to the guide. He should particularly target this year's A-level takers, because they are the cohort that first had to do key stage 1 exams and tests, key stage 2, AS-level, and so on. Those young people have had experience of just about every change that has been introduced in education, so it is important to seek their views. I know that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary knows one 18-year-old from whom he can expect to hear about the matter.

I want to say a word about AS-levels, partly as the parent of someone who took them. There was much criticism of AS-levels, including talk about overload. In fact, if young people are interested in the subjects that they are taking, they do not necessarily regard the work as overload. It is important to motivate young people and to ensure that courses are tailored to those who take them. We should aim for the broader-based education that many people have talked about for a long time, but has not often been delivered.

The Green Paper makes proposals on GCSEs and the curriculum for 14 to 16-year-olds. It suggests that the curriculum should include core subjects—English, maths, science and information and communications technology—and, within those, citizenship, religious education, sex and health education, physical education and work-related learning. The hon. Member for North-East Bedfordshire questioned whether the proposals were right and were what employers wanted. It would be hard to think of dropping subjects such as physical education or work-related learning from the list, because they are key ingredients in the education that all young people need.

I have some sympathy with the hon. Gentleman's concern about foreign languages being no longer compulsory post-14, however—although that may be wishful thinking on my part. I can easily imagine the situation described by my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, Moorlands (Charlotte Atkins)—the difficulty of teaching youngsters who are not wholly motivated towards education. If such youngsters have to study yet another subject that they find tedious, boring and not especially relevant, that could turn some of them off education.

Perhaps the answer is that there should be a presumption that people will study foreign languages without making it compulsory although that, too, could give rise to difficulties. If we introduced foreign languages at an earlier stage, young people might be less inclined to be turned off in the way that has been suggested.

Mr. Hopkins: Does my right hon. Friend agree that one of the problems of learning foreign languages is that so many young people have not mastered our own language very well? Improving young people's literacy in our own language would be of tremendous assistance when they learn a foreign language.

Ann Taylor: I am sure that is the case. I am also sure that the money that we are investing in pre-school education—helping young children to articulate their feelings, getting them interested in more than watching television by encouraging them to play with other children and become aware of books through reading or having stories read to them—will better prepare children for primary education. The literacy hour is already having an impact. The benefits are cumulative and will give us the scope—if we can find the teachers—to teach foreign languages at an earlier stage.

My main concern about the suggested subjects relates to a point made on page 5 of the guide where young people are advised that they would be able to follow

"other courses including some linked directly to the skills and knowledge needed for specific jobs or careers".

That is fine, but we need to consider the status of the "other courses" or we shall be in danger of creating yet another divide of the type that has dogged British education for far too long.

I have two questions for my ministerial colleagues on vocational GCSEs, which we have already discussed. The guide includes quite a lot of material about them and is encouraging as to their introduction and success. It lists a range of vocational subjects that will be available from September 2002: applied art and design, applied business,

engineering, health and social care and so on. Some other relevant subjects could and should have been included. I do not understand why subjects such as plumbing, electrical work or car maintenance were excluded. Many of the young people whom we are trying to target already have an interest in those subjects, so studying them would be extremely relevant and might actually switch those young people back on to education and motivate them in future.

Ministers may reply that individual schools cannot cover all those subjects. However, schools cover all the conventional subjects so perhaps they should consider including other subjects. If they cannot, we could and should—and will soon have to—encourage greater co-operation between groups of local secondary schools. That is something of a hobby horse of mine. Co-operation could be undertaken through a consortium or a looser co-operative. There is great scope for that, especially given the specialist schools status that many schools are achieving. Such a partnership approach could offer a wider range of subjects. That is one way of making sure that specialist schools do not have a divisive impact on their locality. If they are knitted into working with other schools in the area, they can offer more collectively than they could individually.

Charlotte Atkins: My right hon. Friend spoke about co-operation between schools. Does she think that such co-operation should extend to further education and sixth form colleges?

Ann Taylor: Absolutely. I make no distinction there. Fourteen-year-olds who want to study certain courses, such as car maintenance, need to be able to go wherever those courses are on offer. Networking and collaboration is bound to strengthen the totality of the education provision in any one area.

My second question for the Minister about vocational GCSEs is very simple. Why are we so intent on giving them a different label? Why are we so intent on calling them vocational GCSEs? Why cannot we simply call them GCSEs? That point may seem very trivial.

Mr. Ivan Lewis: I reassure my right hon. Friend that what were known as vocational GCSEs have become GCSEs in vocational subjects. Ministers have insisted that we will be introducing new GCSEs from September. They will not be labelled "vocational", as we regard that as unnecessary.

Ann Taylor: I hope that that is the case. We should not say that we are offering GCSEs in vocational subjects because we do not say that we are offering GCSEs in academic subjects. We should just say that we are offering GCSEs in various subjects which are all of equal worth. It is critical that they are all of equal worth.

Will the Minister consider reinforcing the point about equal worth by introducing a credit accumulation system, so that the matriculation diploma to which he referred can be given, at its different levels, for whatever combination of points, subjects and experiences is deemed necessary? If we ensured that every subject at GCSE—whether it was history, health and social care, geography or car maintenance—was worth the same number of points in a credit accumulation system that formed part of matriculation, we would reinforce parity of esteem, which has so often been lacking in the past. That is important if we are to motivate young people.

In the FE sector, and in education more generally, there are problems concerning who will teach all the extra subjects. The Minister and the hon. Member for North–East Bedfordshire touched on that problem when they mentioned pay and conditions in the FE sector. A more important problem is the fact that when the FE sector was incorporated and it underwent the changes introduced by the previous Conservative Government, many valuable courses were dropped because they were expensive to run. Many colleges dropped the same courses, so we lost the talents of certain categories of lecturers and teachers. We may have to make an effort to bring some of them back and to ensure that they can make a contribution. If we are to have new courses, it is important that the curriculum and the quality of teaching are right from the start. If we do not get that right, the new GCSEs will be off to a poor start, and it may be difficult to recover from that.

I support the concept of a matriculation diploma, although I suggest that we offer a prize for whoever comes up with the best name for it because none of us wants to call it that. I am not sure, however, whether a matriculation diploma is the entire answer. The document says that Ministers are considering an alternative to it, presumably for the youngsters who do not reach the threshold. At the moment, many people would be excluded from having a matriculation diploma because they do not get five A to C grades. We can expect more youngsters to hit that target in future, but some will not. The existing record of achievement could be developed so that we do not need to invent yet another diploma.

I hope that the Minister will bear it in mind that, at the moment, some of the youngsters who do not meet the threshold of five A to C grades never get the opportunity to catch up: once they are a failure, they are always a failure. Some are able to pick up another grade when they go on to other types of education, but some are not. If we are to have partnership arrangements, I hope that the Minister will consider making provision for those youngsters who might repeat year 11 successfully with a tailored course.

In a town such as Dewsbury, young people could, without suffering any stigma, take their GCSEs in the same school, a neighbouring institution or an FE college, where they would be supported and brought up to the threshold. There is scope for action there. The document concentrates on fast tracking, but we must consider those who need a bit of help, not least because of the variation in the maturity of people at that age.

On fast tracking to stretch the brightest pupils, I do not think that this is the major problem for this age group, although it is bad if children get bored at school at any level. I have no objections to giving an A* grade for a mark of 90 or higher at A-level, when an A is given for 80 or above, but I do not think that it is a big deal. I ask the Minister whether it is right to put even more pressure on young people. I am not sure why fast tracking is being proposed. I have read that it is because universities want more help in sorting out the highest of the high-fliers. I think that universities should be happy with people who achieve A grades, rather than trying to tweak every point out of them. University interviews and attitudes towards students also come into it. However, I could talk about that at length, so I had better not start.

[Ann Taylor]

I know that some schools encourage youngsters not to take GCSEs. I am not sure that that is always a good idea. It is good that youngsters know what level they have reached, and very often they do not want to be excluded from what their peer group is doing. There are other ways of ensuring that we stretch them without the risk of isolating them from the majority of their year group.

Mr. Brady: The right hon. Lady is making a very good speech and I am listening with great interest. Is she concerned, as I am, that if we take the brightest, most able children out of GCSEs, we may not achieve the parity of esteem for the vocational subjects that we would all like to see?

Ann Taylor: Yes, that is part of the problem, but not the primary part. Whether or not a child takes a GCSE early very much depends on the maturity of the child and the subject. It is much easier for 14-year-olds to take GCSE maths than it is for them to take GCSE English. They can accelerate more easily in a narrow subject such as maths; they need a degree of maturity to do themselves justice in an English course.

The hon. Gentleman makes a fair point about getting brighter children to do GCSEs. I was not going to make this point, but most of the schools that miss out GCSEs are private schools. Their pupils have the confidence to see them through, but most young people want to work with their peer group. Some want to be stretched, and some will not be able to stand the pace, so flexibility is required. Time pressures might not be so severe under a system of credit accumulation in which credits are picked up as a student goes along, and credits achieved early are just as valuable as those achieved late.

I have been speaking for a long time, but I want to make a couple more points, the first of which relates to support networks. It is important that every institution, be it school, sixth form or further education college, has in place the right network to support and advise young people. The Green Paper mentions the presence of the careers service and Connexions in schools and colleges, but although that is important, it is not enough. The document appears to expect too much from the Connexions service; perhaps more attention should be given to helping schools and colleges to advise and mentor young people and help them to make decisions about their future.

Finally, let me say a few words about the institutions in which young people are taught and how we measure their success. The way in which exams are used to measure success should be revisited. Many youngsters from my constituency go to a sixth form college in Huddersfield, Greenhead college, which I know well. Its former head, Dr. Kevin Conway, and his colleagues devised a system of assessment of the college and of individual courses that I believe points the way forward for the assessment of educational institutions. Many sixth form colleges evidently agree, because most now use the system of value-added assessment for internal purposes and when considering how to improve what they offer young people.

The system does not merely take into account raw scores, but considers the ability of the intake based on GCSE grades at 16 then assesses the value added by the time that final results are in. That is done college by college and subject by subject, but it can be done pupil by pupil to determine whether a pupil is being well served or is missing out, whether it is worth taking an additional exam after AS-level, and whether it is worth resitting an exam if the pupil does not do well at 18.

I commend that work, which is supported by the local learning and skills council, to Ministers. I am sure that they are aware of that more sophisticated technique, which I believe is far better than comparing colleges and schools using simple league tables based on raw examination results. I hope that it will become the way forward for all education institutions.

The Green Paper gives a good start to the debate that must now take place on the future of 14 to 19 education. I am sorry that the Conservative spokesman got sidetracked into political points, because we should discuss the issue constructively. There is much meat in the Green Paper, which points the way forward; we can discuss the details later. I believe that the document offers more opportunities to our young people—opportunities for which they are ready and which they deserve—and I commend it to the House.

4.24 pm

Mr. Phil Willis (Harrogate and Knaresborough): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Dewsbury (Ann Taylor), whose comments were thoughtful and careful. I wish I had a Bury connection—I have been desperately trying to think of a way to draw together with the hon. Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt) and the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills, the hon. Member for Bury, South (Mr. Lewis). Alas, I can think of no connection other than the fact that as a youngster I played at Gigg lane against Bury schoolboys and against the Bury team that played against Burnley in one of the junior leagues. I hope that that connection is sufficient to enable me to join the Bury club. I thought that the first diploma to be offered might be the Bury diploma, which would receive a lot of support—albeit not among those who live in Manchester.

I apologise for slightly misleading the House earlier. A question was asked about the definition of higher education—here I apologise to the hon. Member for North-East Bedfordshire. It was originally asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) on behalf of the Liberal Democrat education team, and the answer was published this week. I shall read it out for the benefit of those hon. Members who are interested. It says:

"The purposes of higher education are: to provide high quality teaching to a widening body of students; to undertake research and scholarship which competes with the best in the world; to transfer knowledge and understanding to the economy and the wider community for the benefit of all; and to sustain a culture which underpins our democracy and encourages critical thinking."—[*Official Report*, 18 March 2002; Vol. 382, c. 112W.]

So there we have it.

Alistair Burt: Does the hon. Gentleman share my bemusement at the fact that after six months the question, "What is the definition of higher education for the purposes of the Government's target of 50 per cent. of 18 to 30-year-olds being in higher education or having had the higher education experience by 2010?" has still not been answered?

Mr. Willis: I recognise—*[Interruption.]* That is a new definition coming in, which is somewhat confusing.

The fact that it took six months for the combined talents in the Department to come up with it is slightly worrying, but we have it now and the House can rest easy in the knowledge.

I applaud the Under-Secretary and the Secretary of State for allowing this debate on the Green Paper "14-19: extending opportunities, raising standards" to go ahead. It is the first time since I became a Member of Parliament in 1997 that an education Green Paper has been debated. If this is a new way of working, it is to be commended, and I congratulate Ministers on it.

Like the right hon. Member for Dewsbury, I support the idea of engaging young people in the debate. Although we could all criticise the publication that is to be distributed among young people, it is a commendable effort by the Department and reveals an approach that I urge all Departments to adopt. The more we engage young people in broader social policy, the more chance we have of engaging them in the major political debates and in the community.

The Minister might well correct me on this point, but it strikes me as sad that the document does not fully address one of the greatest problems of exclusion among young people—the fact that black, Afro-Caribbean, Bangladeshi and Pakistani youngsters are far more likely not to continue their education, far more likely to be excluded, and far more likely not to engage in the education process. It is interesting that many members of those communities make a real effort to return to education later in life. When considering the responses to the Green Paper, I urge the Under-Secretary to think about those communities in particular and to engage them in the debate.

My party will respond positively to the Secretary of State's challenge. We urge all those with influence in the education world, be it political or otherwise, to engage appropriately. Hon. Members on both sides of the House have made it clear that we have failed in this area in the past, and this is a good opportunity for us to succeed.

I assure the Minister that, although some of my comments may be critical, they are meant to be helpful. I am sure that he and the Minister for School Standards will take them as such.

There can be little dissent in the House about supporting the challenges laid down by the Secretary of State in her introduction to the Green Paper or the aims set out in chapter 1.4. The outcomes in chapter 1.29—higher levels of participation; a commitment by all to lifelong learning; increased employability; more rounded students; a reduction in truancy; and a greatly improved system of 14 to 19 education and training—are all worthy. Indeed, they are so worthy that I expected motherhood and apple pie and an acceptance of creationism to complete the list. However, I shall not go into that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because that is for another day.

I can say in all sincerity that I applaud the vision of a coherent 14 to 19 key stage, but it is sad that, as the hon. Member for North-East Bedfordshire rightly said, the report has missed some of the hard issues that were so courageously identified in "Bridging the Gap", in the Moser report, in the national skills taskforce reports and in successive annual reports from the Office for Standards in Education and the Further Education Funding Council about our schools and colleges.

The Green Paper is ultra cautious and the proposals it contains are far from coherent. To be blunt, I believe that since 1944 our education system has served the majority of young people aged 14 to 19 pretty well under Governments of any political persuasion. The raising of the school leaving age, the post-Robbins expansion in higher education, the advent of comprehensive education and the reforms of the late 1980s, including the introduction of the national curriculum and local management of schools, have considerably enhanced the life chances of many of our young people.

However, that is not what the Green Paper is principally trying to address. It is supposed to be addressing the life chances of the 5 per cent. of our young people who gain no GCSEs, the 50 per cent. who do not achieve five good GCSEs and the 15 per cent. who are not in any form of education or training by the age of 18. I want to concentrate on those areas.

Throughout the Green Paper, mention is made of the fact that it is supposed to address the chronic skills shortage that threatens to leave the United Kingdom floundering in an ever more competitive global marketplace. Some 20 per cent. of adults lack functional literacy and numeracy, 36 per cent. have lower than level 2 skills compared with 27 per cent. in France and 17 per cent. in Germany. The estimated cost to employers of low skills in our economy is £10 billion a year, and social exclusion through low wages, lack of satisfaction and lack of opportunity creates a vicious circle of social and economic deprivation for individual workers. The Green Paper does not fully address those problems.

John Mann (Bassetlaw): I have listened to my hon. Friend. Does he agree that there is a lack of research in certain areas to quantify the broad statements that he is making, especially in relation to the coalfields? In coalfield areas between 1944 and the present time, young people in many schools have been described as pit fodder. There is a lack of information on the section of the community who have been badly represented and are lumped into the grand category of underperformers.

Mr. Willis: With respect, I do not quite know what point the hon. Gentleman is making, other than to support my comments. The reality is that most of the indices of educational and training performance or access to training show that, up to level 3, we significantly underperform compared with our European competitors and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development averages. That is the point I was making. It does not matter whether these young people are in the coalfields of Yorkshire, the former steel areas of the north-east or the rural areas of Cornwall, if they are underachieving and not fulfilling their potential, that is an issue for the House and for the Green Paper.

John Mann: Will my hon. Friend give way again?

Mr. Willis: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman calls me his hon. Friend, and I shall give way.

John Mann: I am agreeing with his points about underperformance. Does he agree that it is precisely that breakdown by specific areas that is lacking? In the coalfields in particular, the tremendous underachievement and lack of aspiration has not been recognised. I have

[John Mann]

tabled 30 parliamentary questions on this issue in the past two weeks, but all the answers give the same broadbrush categorisation and cannot give specific figures for the coalfields. A breakdown of key areas of the community is essential in tackling underachievement and lack of aspiration.

Mr. Willis: I did not want to belittle the point that the hon. Gentleman was making. I thought that he was supporting my comments. I totally agree with him. When the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) and I sat for many happy hours considering the Learning and Skills Bill, we knew that that would be one of the objectives of the Learning and Skills Council, especially the regional councils. They would do the research that the hon. Gentleman wants. *[Interruption.]* The Minister, who is noted for his courtesy, says from a sedentary position that it is a bit early. I would like to know when the Learning and Skills Council will deliver on anything, let alone on this key area. Frankly, I am fed up with constantly hearing the excuse that it is too early. This is a vital issue, and we cannot plan for skills shortages unless we have the data that the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) rightly referred to, and I thank him for that.

It is precisely because of the skills shortages, which have been identified by hon. Members on both sides of the House, that I am surprised that in her introduction to the Green Paper the Secretary of State does not mention training. Not once in the introduction is that word mentioned, yet the person who wrote chapter 1—it may well have been the Minister—obviously recognised the importance of training, because it is included as a key aim and a key outcome. It says that the Government aim to achieve

"a greatly improved 14-19 system of education and training which is of world-class standard and of which we can be proud."

My criticism is that the Green Paper does not reflect training needs.

I understand the Secretary of State's caution about vocational education and training. She is right when she says that she wants to wage a war on vocational snobbery. However, that requires more than indignant words: it needs an understanding of the problem, courage and huge commitment, especially in resources. Skoda did not turn round the image of its cars by indignant outpouring. It did so by making its product affordable, desirable and of high quality. There is nothing wrong with espousing the concept of vocational training provided that the product we deliver to our young people is desirable, affordable and of high quality.

Mr. Hopkins: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Willis: I shall give way, provided that the hon. Gentleman does not drive a Skoda.

Mr. Hopkins: As I come from Luton, I drive a Vauxhall. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that this problem seems to have been cracked on the continent, particularly in Germany, where vocational qualifications seem to have equal status with other forms of educational qualification?

Mr. Willis: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that comment. That is clearly the case, and not just in Germany. I visited Holland, where vocational education, especially that from 14 to 19, has a parity of esteem with what people in this country would describe as academic education. In Scandinavia, one finds exactly the same: vocational education is regarded as an alternative way of delivering education and training, not as an inferior or superior system. What is patently wrong with our vocational system is that, all too often, it appears to be second best and sub-standard. That is why we have real difficulty in turning young people on in that way.

That is not a new problem. I began teaching in 1963—I know that that is a long time ago—in a secondary modern school in Leeds. In the same year, the Newsom report was published, which some hon. Members will remember. It was appropriately named "Half our Future". I wondered whether the Green Paper would be called "The Other Half of our Future". The Newsom report stated:

"all schools should provide a choice of programmes including a range of courses broadly related to the occupational interest for pupils in the fourth and fifth years of a five year course".

The outcome of that report and Government policy from 1963 onwards was remarkable for its lack of success. It singularly failed to deliver for the youngsters who were identified by Newsom as requiring an alternative curriculum at that time. It was unsuccessful because, in Newsom's words, it aimed to reflect the "reality" of working-class adult life.

A huge message must be received by the Under-Secretary and his colleagues before they bring the White Paper back to the House. We must never return to the days when we had a pseudo class-ridden education system. To compliment the hon. Member for North-East Bedfordshire, the 1988 reforms were aimed at doing exactly the opposite—they tried to establish a middle-class education system for all, with middle-class values. I do not say that in a derogatory way; that was the aspiration. Before we throw that out, we must be sure that we have something better to put in its place. We must not, therefore, make the same mistake. Instead, we must aim to create a world-class training culture beginning at 14.

Vocational GCSEs may broaden the existing curriculum. I accept totally the point made by the right hon. Member for Dewsbury that we have got into the habit of calling them vocational GCSEs, and I do so purely as a way of picking up from the Green Paper. Will they capture the imagination of a target group of young people who know that they are unlikely to fare better in assessment terms than they do now? Vocational GCSEs are not the whole answer. If we are to introduce parity with GCSE qualifications, we might, by definition, make some marginal inroads into the 50 per cent. who do not get 5 A to Cs. However, let us not pretend, other than by dropping the standard, as the hon. Member for North-East Bedfordshire seemed to indicate, that that will address the issue.

The key training initiative in the Green Paper is the modern apprenticeship. It appears, however, that the advice from the Secretary of State's advisory committee is being ignored. Sir John Cassels, in his report, "The Way to Work", found that apprenticeships were too peripheral to education and training. He reported that young people do not choose them, parents do not value them as a worthwhile route, careers advisers see them as a last resort, and, what is more, 93 per cent. of Britain's

employers are not engaged with modern apprenticeships at all, yet that is the big idea for the training programme in the Green Paper.

The Under-Secretary would also accept that, when inspection was introduced in 1988, it highlighted huge problems of weak initial assessment, poor induction, poor tackling of key skills, a hit-and-miss approach to off-the-job training, and poor monitoring. To be fair, I also accept that, since inspection has been introduced, those standards have risen. The reality, however, is that modern apprenticeships may be a good idea for a small number of young people but are not the mass panacea that is required if we are to meet some of the huge training needs of our students. I therefore urge the Under-Secretary, as it is not apparent in the Green Paper, to put employers at the centre of the training agenda. If he does not do that, and focuses purely on delivery by schools and colleges, he will fail and he will have missed the boat.

I offer the Under-Secretary the concept of chartered institutes on the lines of traditional guilds, which could be given the responsibility for developing training programmes at prescribed levels. The Government could ensure that chartered status means a right of access to higher education, and allow employers to have direct access to funding on a level playing field with other providers. We cannot hope to win the support of employers if they are not equal partners. Without their endorsement, work-related education and training will never succeed.

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the replacement of the national training organisations with the sector skills councils will make a significant contribution towards improving those relationships? Does he also accept that the key to making this work in local communities is for educational institutions and small and medium-sized enterprises in particular to have much closer relationships than in the past; and that mentoring is making a significant contribution towards that? Does he also accept that, in terms of the modern apprenticeship, the very reason for establishing the Cassels commission was to tackle the issues that he has identified? We have agreed to practically all Sir John Cassels' recommendations.

Mr. Willis: I am grateful to the Under-Secretary for his intervention and for the passionate way in which he responded to those accusations. I totally agree with him about breaking down the NTOs into sector-related and—as I would call them—chartered institutes. We must engage consumers, too. The right hon. Member for Dewsbury talked about having a plumbing GCSE, and I agree that we must give our trades the kind of esteem that we give other areas of the curriculum. Giving chartered status to tradesmen engenders confidence in the consumer, too, so that can be a win-win situation.

The key to the success of the whole of the Government's programme on 14 to 19 education is empowerment of individual students. We applaud the concept of an individual learning plan for each student. We do so because it was in our 2001 manifesto. We are therefore delighted that the Under-Secretary has picked up yet another good idea. I am pretty sure that when he and his colleagues are in my constituency, spending huge amounts of money, they will talk of nothing else.

Young people must be empowered to move from institution to institution. I include employers and private providers in that provision. The needs of young people, and not of providers, must be paramount. However, students must be supported by access to concessionary travel and education maintenance allowances. Those in work must also have the right to time off for study. The objectives will not be achieved if students do not have the necessary support mechanisms.

It is no good offering greater choice and diversity to people in rural Devon or rural north Yorkshire. The infrastructure must be put in place to allow them to take advantage of diversity. It is no good claiming that education maintenance allowances work if they are not extended to students throughout the country.

Mr. Syms: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. It is very important that pilot schemes cover rural as well as urban areas, to determine how students make choices. He is also right to say that matters such as transport are very important in rural areas.

Mr. Willis: I agree with the hon. Gentleman.

Students aged between 14 and 19 must have access to independent and individual careers education and guidance. At the moment, that is in very short supply.

I have no problems with the Government's policy with regard to the Connexions service. It started by trying to help those students who most needed support. They were identified as low achievers who would probably drop out of the system otherwise. However, the idea that bright youngsters who might get more than five GCSEs at grades A to C do not need individual guidance or support is wrong.

We must get away from the proposition that only schools can supply that guidance. In the past, schools have often used their influence to draw students into the programmes offered on those schools' menus. We must offer young people a menu involving a variety of institutions and employers, and that means that each student must also have access to individual advice.

The hon. Member for North-East Bedfordshire spoke about providers, and especially about further education colleges. I do not often agree with everything that the hon. Gentleman says, but I do on this occasion. When the Minister for School Standards responds to the debate, will he register an objection to the appalling comment made by the Minister for Lifelong Learning, which was repeated on the BBC programme "Newsbeat" on 7 March? She said:

> "If you are a learner in a further education college, you have a 50-50 chance of coming out of that college having achieved what you set out to do, and that is not good enough."

Was the Minister for Lifelong Learning speaking on behalf of the Secretary of State or the Prime Minister, or was she simply barking mad on that day? There is no evidence to back up that appalling slur on further education colleges. She must know that 68 colleges in this country have been inspected so far, and that only three have been judged inadequate. The inspectors found that 92 per cent. of teaching was satisfactory or better, that 93 per cent. of curriculum grades achieved were satisfactory or better, and that 58 per cent. of those grades were good or outstanding.

[Mr. Willis]

We should celebrate our colleges, not denigrate them. We should not tell students not to go to them because they might end up with nothing. *[Interruption.]* The devil is in the detail, and I see that the Minister for Lifelong Learning has just entered the Chamber. I shall repeat what I have just said for her benefit. I can tell her that I asked the Minister for School Standards, when he winds up, to deal with her remarks of 7 March, in which she claimed that 50 per cent. of students were likely to leave college without achieving what they went to college to achieve.

In 2000-2001, 85 per cent. of youngsters who entered FE colleges achieved the qualifications that they entered college to achieve. That huge achievement rate is to the credit of our colleges.

If all that interests the Government is the number of students who enter further education, embarking on full-time courses—if that is the Government's vision, and how we are to measure success—the whole thing will fail: it will be an absolute waste of time. I applaud the student who enters an institution and, after one term, says "This is not for me" and thinks about where to go from there. I applaud the student who, after six months, drops out because of family arrangements or financial problems, and returns to college later. Are we to denigrate the college because a student falls on hard times—because, for instance, a young mum becomes pregnant again? That is what the Minister is saying. We must have a flexible system, because ultimately flexibility is the key.

The hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West made a point about the funding and organisation of education for those aged 14 and above, to which the Minister responded very abruptly. Indeed, she dismissed it out of hand, which is a pity. At present the education of 14 to 16-year-olds is funded by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, and benefits from an additional grant from the Department for Education and Skills. Under the Learning and Skills Act 2000, however, learning and skills councils can fund their education, and under the new Education Bill they can also fund employers. Learning and skills councils also fund 16 to 19-year-olds in schools, and in further education colleges there are 73 different funding streams. It is sad that Ministers are saying that all that can be dismissed, and does not really matter.

Let us consider the case of a student who spends some time in a school, some time in a college and some time in a workplace. Let us consider the bureaucratic paperchase involved in the attempt to audit the situation—to establish where the money comes from, and to whom it goes. That must not happen.

As my party has not made a firm decision in this regard, I will speak openly to the Minister. We were very supportive of the regional agenda, but the Government should not dismiss the idea of a single structure for 14 to 19-year-olds out of hand. It is surely a matter for discussion, regardless of whether the learning and skills legislation is the right vehicle.

I am delighted that the Minister accepts that the issues of GCSE and the 16-plus barrier must be examined. I respect the view of some Conservative Members that GCSE in its present form should be retained and that all students should take it, full stop. However, I do not agree: I think that the examination has outlived its usefulness as a universal qualification for those aged 16-plus. It might well be used as a staging post if schools or colleges wanted that, but at present it constitutes a genuine barrier.

David Hargreaves, the former chief executive of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, has made some important comments about GCSE. He says that in the case of many students it is an irrelevance, and that Government and indeed educators should stop always looking for age-related examinations and start looking for examinations to be taken by students when they are ready to take them.

The right hon. Member for Dewsbury referred to the unit-accreditation system. I think it is entirely right for the sector we are discussing; we must constantly accredit young people's achievements throughout the process.

I accept that we must have national norms. Perhaps we shall have a Bury certificate or diploma, or a Barking certificate—but that joke was made earlier, and it fell flat even then. Such a certificate is an interesting proposition, and one that we will seriously consider. We must not return to the idea that we can liberate the framework for 14 to 19-year-olds, while retaining a barrier that says schools are failing unless students meet the Government's target for five A to C grades. That is a major issue that the Government must address.

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Given the consensus that a far more individual-based learning programme is in the interests of the system and of young people, does the hon. Gentleman agree that GCSEs will still be appropriate for many young people? Does it remain his party's policy that GCSEs should be abolished?

Mr. Willis: The hon. Gentleman should read again my north of England speech, a copy of which I kindly gave him. What my party and I object to is the universalist approach whereby all students should take GCSEs at 16. If an institution decides to examine literacy and numeracy to the national standards through GCSE english and mathematics at age 14 or 17, that is a matter of agreement between the student and institution concerned.

I urge the Minister to avoid getting bogged down. If we want to liberate the process, we cannot at the same time argue that we must judge schools and ensure that they keep to their task through the principle of five GCSEs at grade A to C for 16-year-olds. The Minister should not turn his back on the idea of scrapping league tables for 16-year-olds, and of finding different ways to evaluate student progress and what schools, colleges and other providers do.

Mr. Lewis: I accept that we need to refine the way in which we measure performance, but does the hon. Gentleman agree that, if our reforms for 14 to 19-year-olds are to work, the issue is not the scrapping of league tables? I suspect that the speech to which he refers contains an element of spin. Is it his party's policy that GCSEs should be abolished?

Mr. Willis: Other Members would probably rather speak than hear us bandy words about. I made it absolutely clear in my north of England speech that the universal application of GCSEs has had its day, but I have no problem with a school's wanting to use GCSEs as part of its process.

Before the Minister gets too excited, I should explain what happens in some of the schools that I have visited. In year 11, students in those schools spend two to three weeks before Christmas preparing for their mock GCSEs. In the run-up to Easter, they spend another three or four weeks in preparation. They have a further four weeks' study leave, and then they spend three weeks sitting their GCSEs. That is some 13 weeks in total. After that, they have nine weeks off. If the Minister is condoning that amount of lost educational opportunity, he must say so. I want us to use that time in a much more productive and valuable way.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. May I tell the House that the first four speeches have taken 139 minutes, with the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) clocking up the longest innings so far? To my mind, that represents self-indulgence. There are 11 hon. Members trying to take part in a debate that can now last only about 90 minutes. I ask for rather more restraint on their part if I am to satisfy as many as possible.

5.4 pm

Mr. Kerry Pollard (St. Albans): It is almost a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis). We last debated together in a television studio, when we were on opposite sides of the argument. I agreed with much of the sentiment behind his speech.

On Shakers' credentials, I was a regular supporter at Gigg Lane years before any of the Front Benchers, and, I suspect, before my right hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury (Ann Taylor).

The ages between 14 and 19 are when most young people decide which route to follow of the many available. Some will follow an academic route from secondary school to higher education, some will go to further education and some will leave school at 16 and go to work, or a combination of the two. That time is the gateway to their future. My constituency has excellent secondary schools, all with full rolls and highly successful sixth forms. Indeed, three of my schools came top in the performance league tables.

We have an ongoing problem with a shortage of school places, as a result of which some students have to travel outside the town to secure a secondary school place. Each year, the county consults on how to resolve the problem. One year, the villages to the north are selected and the next the villages to the south, so the problem is batted about. This year, the villages to the north have been selected, with the Tory county council deciding that Sandringham school, which is bang in the middle of my constituency, should be allocated to Harpenden, which is—incredibly—five miles away. That beggars belief, and I have written to the Secretary of State to seek advice. I also presented a petition to Parliament last night, asking that that crazy scheme be overruled.

All the sixth forms are highly successful, offering a range of academic and vocational courses. We also have a good FE college that provides a huge range of academic, vocational and recreational courses. All the post-16 providers work together in consortiums to ensure that the range, level and quality of arrangements for our students are first class.

A cause for concern is the change in the funding arrangements, whereby the Learning and Skills Council has taken over responsibility from the local education authority. Our secondary schools are especially worried about the continued funding of their sixth forms. Over the years, a gap has opened up between the funding per pupil for sixth forms and for FE colleges. The worry is that a levelling down will occur, which would seriously jeopardise the continuing viability of our successful sixth forms.

St. Albans has benefited from much capital expenditure over the past few years, including a new roof on Nicholas Breakspear school, a new gymnasium at Loreto school, a new sports centre at Marlborough school and new science facilities at Beaumont school. I could go on and on. Only this morning, the Under-Secretary with responsibility for early years and school standards opened a nursery centre of excellence—one of only 50 in the country—in my constituency. Many millions of pounds have been spent.

Extra revenue has also been made available, in one form or another, to all our schools. By far the most popular form is the one-off sums—typically £50,000 for a secondary school—that the Chancellor has announced periodically. Those sums are not ring-fenced and can generally be used by schools to meet their own priorities. It is rumoured that later this week some more money will be available for teachers as part of the school achievement award.

Some of our secondary schools were shut last week when the National Union of Teachers staged a one-day strike. I have total sympathy with and understanding of teachers' real concern, although I have my doubts about their method of drawing attention to it. However, I have stood on picket lines myself in years gone by.

Teachers deserve to be treated the same as other professionals. It costs a teacher the same as a police officer to live in an expensive area. Teachers in my area receive a £750 cost of living allowance, whereas police officers receive two and a half times that amount.

I wish to address the subject of apprenticeships. We are acutely short of plumbers, electricians, carpenters and others with light skills. Young people do not seem to be attracted to those highly skilled and highly paid trades. That shortage is seriously undermining our local and regional economy. One of the reasons for the shortage is that those skills are less valued than computing or business studies skills. Each skill is of equal value and we need brain surgeons and plumbers—and more of the latter. When water is pouring through the ceiling, I know which I would prefer to be on hand.

It is imperative that we actively promote the concept of vocational skills. I recently met the Federation of Master Builders, which shares my concern. It proposes an innovative idea whereby young people start their apprenticeships in year 11. We all know of young people who see little value in continuing their studies in year 11 but who might be happy to begin their transition into work while still at school.

Another scheme is run at Feltham young offenders centre. One of the training arms of Ford motor company has set up a pilot scheme to train young offenders to become motor mechanics. The scheme has been working

[Mr. Kerry Pollard]

since October with, I am told, 20 young offenders taking part. Once they have finished their sentence, they will complete their apprenticeship in a Ford garage in their area.

That seems a fantastic scheme. It is a great credit both to Ford and the prison authorities. My guess is that those young people will grow in confidence and self-esteem as a direct result of that initiative, will end up with a marketable skill and will resume their role as a productive member of society.

I pay tribute to Tony Bartlett, who retires today after being head teacher at Marlborough school in my constituency for the past 18 years. He is an educator to his fingertips, an inspirational leader who has transformed a failing school. It is now full—it has a full sixth-form—and is immensely popular. His retirement is a loss to education. He is one of the best men I know and I wish him well. I commend the Green Paper.

5.10 pm

Mr. Robert Syms (Poole): My contribution will be equally brief, given the number of hon. Members who wish to contribute to the debate.

My perception of education at the moment is that there is a crisis. When I visit schools, two things clearly emerge. The first is the amount of bureaucracy—the circulars to schools from the Department for Education and Skills, and the amount of time it takes teachers and head teachers to read them. The second is the shortage of teachers.

A total of 300,000 qualified teachers under the age of 60 are no longer in education. In 2001—in this era of acute teacher shortage—83,400 people who held teaching certificates had never used them. The number of teacher vacancies has risen in England and Wales. In 2001, it rose to 5,079, up nearly 60 per cent. on the 2,977 vacancies in 2000. Therefore, many of my schools are struggling to deliver core subjects in the curriculum.

I recently visited Poole high school, which has a problem with mathematics teachers. The problem is not unique to Poole high school; it affects many schools throughout the country. The school has a number of classes with no maths teachers; pupils are simply being supervised. The situation is made a lot worse by the fact that the Government are funding more advisers, the pay scales for whom are leading more teachers to leave schools; Poole local education authority has lost six experienced teachers. I am not sure that there are the means of delivering many of the Green Paper's lofty aspirations.

I welcome a number of things in the Green Paper. We clearly have a chronic skills shortage throughout the United Kingdom, and to tackle it a much broader range of skills will have to be delivered. Three quarters of 16 to 18-year-olds in England were either in education or in training at the end of 2000, which is below European, OECD and G7 levels. If we are to retain a world-class economy and be not the fourth largest economy in the world but the third largest, we must produce a lot more people with a greater range of skills.

I welcome the teaching of citizenship, which is long overdue and necessary. Problems arise when we create pathways whereby people have to go to more than one institution. The difficulty in rural areas is that people are not going to have the same choices as those in urban areas. When I was on the education committee in my former life as a local councillor, the question of people having to travel between institutions tended to loom large.

As the right hon. Member for Dewsbury (Ann Taylor) said, advice for pupils will be remarkably important. The Green Paper says that there will be little additional burden on teachers, that there may be more training and that there will be implications for employing more teachers, but I do not think that it says enough about that. Although it sets out the vision, as it were, it asks lots of very wide questions, as the Minister acknowledged in his reply to my intervention. When we get the consultation about where we are heading, we will have to decide how to execute policy. With a shortage of teachers, it will be very difficult to execute a policy over the next few years. That is my principal point.

My next point is on funding. One of Dorset's disadvantages is that it is in the south-west of the country and does not get the area cost adjustment. Poole borough council suffers grievously from not receiving the area cost adjustment. There are gaps—about £200 per pupil in the resources that Poole and Hampshire receive—affecting almost all age groups. It will be difficult to deliver good-quality education. The area cost adjustment is worth 6.2 per cent. extra to our neighbour in Hampshire. If that were available to Poole, the local education authority would receive an extra £3.482 million a year. During my five years as an MP, Poole has been deprived of about £17.5 million of education provision for its pupils.

When the Government decided to remove post-16 funding and introduce learning and skills councils, they institutionalised the area cost adjustment within those funding arrangements. Many schools in my area are suffering from a shortage of teachers and of resources. They work hard and produce good results in the national league tables, but it is not easy without full support. Delivery in Poole will therefore require greater emphasis on securing the requisite teachers, and better and fairer funding for our local schools, which we are not receiving.

The document has important implications for teacher supply and teacher work load, and more should have been said about them if we want the strategy to succeed.

Those are my major points. In order to give other hon. Members a chance to contribute to the debate, I shall conclude.

5.16 pm

Gillian Merron (Lincoln): I welcome the opportunity to talk about the Green Paper on "extending opportunities, raising standards". Let me say straight away that the title should include an additional element about "developing aspirations". I refer not just to the aspirations of young people, but to those of their families, who have a crucial role in developing potential.

Those involved in education in my constituency generally welcome the Green Paper, particularly its tone, intention and direction. Any criticisms have been constructive and should help to inform the Government in their efforts to help 14 to 19-year-olds to reach their potential. The Government's long-term commitment to education, particularly the concept of education for life, is especially welcome. Any age is the right age to develop one's education.

The Green Paper is all about seeing young people as whole people who have individual differences, strengths, weaknesses and talents. The reference to ensuring high-quality advice and guidance, to which several hon. Members have referred, is also important. If young people are to make the right choices at 14 and then get to wherever they want to go, we have to help them. That applies particularly to young people with special needs, who have an untapped wealth of potential that we should help them to fulfil. My right hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury (Ann Taylor) mentioned that we need expertise, time and the right people in place to support 14 to 19-year-olds and help them decide where they want to go.

I want to make three main points relating to collaboration or partnership, vocational development and encouraging a wider range of young people to set their sights on getting to university.

Last week, at Yarborough school in Lincoln, I saw in action a good example of the intent of the main proposals in the Green Paper—an enterprise activity. A number of 15-year-old students who had been specially selected and had agreed to participate were looking for a niche for their talents; they found it in work that took place over two days, sponsored and supported by Stamford Homes. Teams of young people worked together to seek planning permission for, build, market and sell homes in Lincoln. They were even required to fill in planning application forms, for which they have my greatest admiration. They also earned the admiration of the planning officer at Lincoln City council, who was impressed by their work.

The activity involved team building, communication, self-confidence, conflict resolution, presentation and marketing skills, development of business acumen and the ability to use maths and English, to name just a few skills. That is the sort of activity to which the Green Paper refers. I asked the young people involved whether it had made a difference and whether they might consider staying on at school. As we all know, unless young people stay on beyond 16, they might never consider university. Their answer was yes, because they could see a niche in their school for their talents and skills. I commend Yarborough school and Mr. Legg, the head teacher, and his team, for seeing the possibility of working with a company such as Stamford Homes to offer young people such an opportunity.

The school is also developing incubator units for young people who want to start a business. We have nothing similar in the locality, and we need to be able to provide support and facilities if we are to encourage young people to consider going into business.

As we head towards April's Budget, it is interesting to note that an independent review by the chairman of the Financial Services Authority, Howard Davies, which was commissioned by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor, recommends that business people should go into the classroom and discuss careers and enterprise with pupils. Mr. Davies urges the Government to allocate many millions of pounds to the programme, which, as he rightly points out, would offer pupils a grounding in finance and the economy. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor will consider that in his budgetary considerations.

Let me give an example of collaboration and partnership with industry that is taking place in my constituency. As several hon. Members have said, industry and business are vital to the Green Paper's success. Alstom Power, a company that makes gas turbines in my constituency, has taken up the challenge. At its conference centre in Lincoln, it hosted the national launch of the science and engineering ambassadors scheme. The idea is to send ambassadors to schools to spread the word that engineering and science-based careers are exciting, worth while and should be considered. Fifteen young Alstom engineers have agreed to tell young people about the opportunities available if they work hard at subjects such as science, engineering, technology and maths. As Alstom currently has 30 science and technology vacancies, it obviously benefits that company and others to encourage would-be engineers to train and appreciate the advantages of that. Mark Papworth, the managing director, said that he would like to see young people

"flow through the education pipeline directly into businesses such as ours".

There is a place for them, and the Green Paper has to make that happen.

The science and engineering ambassadors scheme is a model for good practice, and I hope that Ministers will promote it. The City of Lincoln community college, a school that is bidding to become a specialist engineering college with the support of Alstom Power, believes that we must quash the myth that engineering is a dirty and undesirable industry in which to work. Barbara Peck, the head teacher, has said that students have limited pictures of engineering and science, fixing on stereotypes and a history of redundancies. That sets the wrong tone when it comes to persuading more people into engineering. I hope that the science and engineering ambassadors scheme, in which role models say "I've done it, it's worth doing", will bring more young people into engineering.

To widen participation it is important not only to meet the Government's target of having 50 per cent. of young people go into higher education, but to consider who those people are. The Green Paper offers us a way to do that. The figure for those who apply to university from Lincoln is barely half the national average. In certain wards—Abbey, Boultham and Park—participation in higher education is less than a third of the national average. Clearly, a problem exists to be addressed in my constituency, and elsewhere.

The key to widening participation is early intervention. Many people would say that 14 is too late, and I hope that Ministers will consider that. Connexions, further education colleges and universities must be able to engage young people at 14. Not all schools allow access, but I was pleased to accompany my hon. Friend the Minister for Lifelong Learning to the university of Lincoln to see a widening participation scheme in action. As part of a scheme involving local schools, young people were invited to the university to experience what it might be like.

The university should be congratulated for working with 11 associate schools, including the City of Lincoln community college and Ancaster high school. The Green Paper should encourage such good practice. Associate schools sign up with the university so that it can offer them academic advice, technical and other resource advice, opportunities for staff development and focused open days. Ex-pupils who are now university of Lincoln students can go back to their schools to promote the idea of going into higher education.

[Gillian Merron]

Key to the process is the making of early conditional offers to individual students who, for a variety of reasons, need to be encouraged to think about going to university. I asked some of the young people whether anyone from their villages had ever been to university. The answer was no, and that they had never thought about it. Having visited the university, however, they could see that it was possible. That is the kind of work that the Green Paper needs to encourage.

On vocational development, the Green Paper proposes that all young people should undertake some work-related learning. We could all learn something from that. Recently, I was shadowed by Caroline Bray, a student from Lincoln Christ's Hospital school, who wanted to find out what it is like to be a Member of Parliament—if anyone wants to know, they had better ask her. I learned a lot from her work placement, not least because she asked the questions that we rarely have time to ask ourselves. If business and industry encourage and support work placements, it is not only the young people who will benefit—the firms will benefit too—and those young people may be able to see their future role, whether as Members of Parliament, entrepreneurs, managers or whatever.

As many right hon. and hon. Members have said, the vocational option should not be seen as a second option; it should be seen as a positive choice which can feed much into specialist schools. There are some exciting possibilities and I am not sure that they have been fully considered. Perhaps the Green Paper could encourage the combination of subjects, as is done in universities. Science and engineering could be put together, as could history and the heritage industry and foreign languages and tourism. That policy could contribute to a move away from vocational work being seen as second class which it is far from being.

I am interested in the new award at 19, possibly to be called a matriculation diploma, as it would raise aspirations and would better prepare young people for working life. They would participate in activities related to active citizenship, work-based learning and wider interests. That part of the Green Paper interests me because I believe that to succeed in the world these days one needs to be more than merely academic; one needs to be a grounded person who has a real understanding of what life is about. I hope that the new award at 19 will focus on that.

To gain success and the achievements set out in the Green Paper, we need to challenge certain perceptions. We talked about the need to challenge the notion that vocational courses are inferior to academic courses; they are not. It is important to promote the schemes that I described, which are supported by companies such as Alstom, as well as the associate schools programme at the university of Lincoln and to support new specialist schools.

Finance is another area that concerns me, and those concerns were endorsed when I met a group of students at the university of Lincoln to discuss positive ideas for student financial support. I realised that their perception of the level of repayments on loans was far in excess of the reality. That is important because if we want to encourage young people to stay on at school so that they can go to university, they must know what the reality is. Those students were not aware that six out of 10 students in Lincoln pay no fees or that a graduate has to earn more than £10,000 before any repayment on their loan is required. Indeed, a graduate earning £11,000 a year would be repaying £90 a year.

As was endorsed in my discussions at the Bishop Grosseteste teacher training college in Lincoln, a number of potential students and their families are put off staying on at school in order to go into higher education because they are frightened of debt. If the fear of debt is preventing people from fulfilling their potential, we have two problems—the problem of actual debt and the even bigger problem of not understanding the true picture. We have a job of work to get the true information across so that people are not unnecessarily worried.

On education maintenance allowances, North Lincolnshire college and the Lincolnshire LEA certainly consider that there is a need for them nationally, and they would like their scope to be extended.

I very much welcome the Green Paper; it gives us a very strong basis on which to work. Education, as we all know, is the key that unlocks the door. It gives choices that people may be denied, possibly because of their backgrounds, and it opens minds. I believe that education is a great leveller upwards. We should raise expectations, not lower them.

The Green Paper allows us to envisage a plan not only for individuals and their families, but for industry, the education system and the country. It is time that we removed artificial ceilings on aspirations, and we, as a Government, have a responsibility to do so. I commend the Green Paper to the House because I believe that, by extending opportunity and raising standards and aspirations, it will take us along the right road.

5.36 pm

Mr. Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater): I read the Green Paper with interest, but I saw little on special needs training and teaching for children aged 14 to 19. I tried to find out whether there was an audit of special needs teachers and trainers in the United Kingdom, but there does not seem to be; nor could I find out how many teachers are special needs trained. When I talked to people at the Dyslexia Institute, which is by far the largest special needs training body in the country, they said they could stream children aged 5 to 6, but by the time those children become 14—or young adults—they can do little because by then the education system has almost failed them.

I wonder whether the Government would consider the American system. In the 1970s and 1980s, there were reading wars in America, believe it or not, and a debate in Congress on how children would be taught to read from an early age to when they left college at 19. Congress passed the Reading Excellence Act and gave $110 million for 10 years' research into longevity and convergence—in other words, how reading will be affected in future. America is therefore almost at the forefront of special needs teaching in the world.

In the United Kingdom, there has been three years' research into literacy on behalf of all children and there is only enough money to evaluate 250 children. Unfortunately, because of the amount of money given to the researchers, they have had to lower the age from 14—which they wanted to use—to seven and a half.

The money was given by the Department for Education and Skills, the lottery and, interestingly enough, W. H. Smith. Together, those three bodies gave £500,000 to examine that very complicated and difficult subject. However, as I have said, there is nothing about that in the Green Paper.

I also wonder whether the Minister is aware that the Dyslexia Institute is directly helping children aged 14 to 19 who are on remand or bail. Instead of excluding them from the education system or not allowing them to take part because they have been stigmatised in the eyes of society, the institute is trying to help with their education because a lot of those people have special needs problems. They can then return to mainstream education, so that they can read, write and articulate themselves, as we can, and be given the chance to go forward and get jobs or start apprenticeship schemes. That issue needs to be considered because, again, nothing in the Green Paper addresses it.

I also considered the school census, which I mentioned in a debate two days ago. The Government want to include in the schools census children's names, addresses and postcodes, on which I have a particular view, but I wonder whether there is a chance to include special needs training. If no one keeps such records and considers the issue in the longer term, people will not be able to carry out certain academic research and we will not be privy to it. Surely one way of doing that is to include that information in the schools census, so that education departments, research establishments and other organisations have a chance to evaluate what special needs training those young adults will require, not only now but 10 to 20 years from now.

The legal ramifications are interesting. In America people have taken the American Government to court for failing them in education. Under the convention on human rights that we have enshrined in our legislation, will we have the same problem, at least potentially, whereby we have not developed a child's ability as far as we could because we have failed in special needs? I should be grateful if the Minister would comment on that.

The Minister could consider helping the Dyslexia Institute. It has 360 staff, most of whom are teachers and virtually all part-time on a low wage. It is trying to pioneer distance learning for as many people as possible throughout the United Kingdom. It covers the whole United Kingdom. In that way it can deal with problems without somebody having to get to a certain location, unlike the Learning and Skills Council. People can log on at a library or some further education centre to continue study on, for example, the three Rs. The institute is looking for some help from the Government. I see nothing about this in the Green Paper, yet this is the very age group that needs help now.

A slight problem arises with the devolved countries of Wales and Scotland. The Scottish education system is different from ours and faces a problem getting enough specialists through the system to teach in Scottish schools. The situation in Wales is better because the system is the same as in England. Again, would the Minister look at that?

This country is the undisputed leader in this type of education within Europe. We are leading the way, which is marvellous, but can we keep the momentum? The Dyslexia Institute is exporting its expertise to European countries in an effort to take education forward. An hon. Member made an interesting point about language training. Any dyslexic will find English and other languages difficult. If we can encourage other countries to take part in language training, surely it will be of benefit to us all.

Last year the Dyslexia Institute looked at 3,048 young adults and children across 145 outposts and 94 extra outposts to try to make sure that all young people regardless of age have a chance of being seen by a specialist if they feel that they need help. It is also working to look at 7,200 psychological assessments. Special needs covers not just the inability to interface in mainstream schools, but help at other levels. I am not saying that any part of the community is better or worse than another; I am just saying that people need to be assessed at that level. The fact that the institute with the small amount of resources at its disposal is looking at 7,200 people a year shows that there is a problem at this level.

In summary, I ask the Minister to look into this for the future because there are ways to address it. Research has been done in America and is being done here, but it needs a commitment from Government to look ahead. Since 1970 when dyslexia, dyspraxia and other conditions were discovered, all Governments have failed to address the problem through a lack of financial commitment. I ask the Government to give a commitment in the Green Paper or in future legislation that they will provide funding or look into funding, either through county councils, specific educational trusts, universities or other organisations, to help these children as they cannot help themselves. Direct intervention is needed by Parliament to put money into education departments across the United Kingdom. This is a United Kingdom problem; it is not specific to any one area. I hope that the Minister will take those points on board and will not let our children down. In this area we all fail our children.

5.44 pm

Mr. Kelvin Hopkins (Luton, North): I must declare an interest in that I am vice-chair of governors at Luton sixth form college. I have been associated with the college for nearly two decades. It was the first sixth form college, is one of the largest and has a tremendous record of success in educating young people. There is also a first-class college of further education, Barnfield college, in my constituency. We have heard much about further education colleges and their successes. I taught A-levels in various subjects, so I have some experience.

When I was teaching in the 1970s, I noticed that the enormous difference between those studying A-levels and those studying other subjects was one of social class. In our college, we tried to educate A-level students and others, such as day-release students doing manual courses, in the same classes, at least in liberal studies. That is where those social divisions really showed up. Our educational problems have been complicated by social divisions. I am glad to say that they are reducing, but I fear that if we are not careful, those social divisions will re-emerge and become strengthened by the fragmentation of our education system, particularly at secondary level.

I worry about some of the Government's initiatives on specialist schools. The parental choice approach to secondary schools is also causing problems of social class. That will undermine not just the comprehensive system,

[Mr. Kelvin Hopkins]

but our success in bringing those who have not achieved so highly up to the standards of which they are capable—standards that we want them to reach.

Widening participation means considering those who are at the bottom end of educational achievement, not those at the top. Fragmenting the system and introducing specialist schools is to do what we have always done: considering the top end, rather than the bottom. Those of us who had the good fortune to go to university and who had a fairly pressured, rigorous secondary education have had all the advantages, and we must ensure that the rest of the population—the two thirds, or three quarters, who never had them—have them in future, especially those in the bottom two or three deciles.

Luton sixth form college has many successes. At the moment, 60 per cent. of its students are from ethnic minorities. Every year, 500 ethnic minority students, mainly from the Asian communities, obtain A-levels and go on, mostly into higher education. In terms of integrating into society people who have come from the far-flung fields of Pakistan and Bangladesh, from the Indian communities and the West Indies, Luton sixth form college is doing a tremendous job at every level. However, it has its problems.

The Sixth Form Colleges Employers' Forum Ltd. recently published a document called "In a Class of their Own". I know that it has been passed on to the Minister, who has kindly written back saying what a good document it is. All hon. Members should get hold of a copy, and I draw attention to the last page, which states that if we doubled the number of sixth form colleges, we would transform education in this country.

The sixth form college is a very efficient way of educating people. Such colleges take students who have lower abilities. The value-added factor for marginal ability students is tremendous in sixth form colleges. That is because they have optimum-sized classes. Very small classes do not work, neither do very large ones. The optimum class size of sixth form colleges really does work. In addition, a variety of teachers teach the same subject. That leads not to competition between the teachers, but to a variety of approaches, which leads to best practice from different teachers. Students who have particular strengths can tune their subjects carefully because they have the maximum possible subject choice owing to the large number of parallel classes. That cannot be done in small school sixth forms.

I went to a small school sixth form, so I know that they do a good job in many ways, but they are limiting. Sixth form colleges provide all the advantages of variety, which helps students to play to their strengths. They will not be tied to particular groups of subjects because that is all that is taught in the school.

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): Doubling the number of sixth form colleges, as the hon. Gentleman suggests, would effectively remove school sixth forms. Surely he realises that many pupils and parents value school sixth forms and want to retain them.

Mr. Hopkins: I believe that one London borough has replaced its school sixth forms with a sixth form college. That can be particularly effective in densely populated urban areas. If one can explain to parents that a sixth form college will make their children perform better and get better results, most will accept it. On the other hand, I appreciate that sensitive problems are sometimes involved. People who know great schools that they have been through and loved can find it upsetting and threatening to see them change.

For our education system to be successful, we must consider what works, and sixth form colleges, like colleges in general, work. In Luton, we have state high schools for 11 to 16-year-olds, one Catholic high school for 11 to 18-year-olds, the sixth form college and a big further education college. That works in an area where a high proportion of parents are from non-traditional backgrounds. Many are from ethnic minorities and some come from extremely poor backgrounds, but their children do well because our system works. Rather than having theories that favour a certain system, such as allowing small schools to develop their sixth forms, let us do some research to find out what works.

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): A powerful principle in this matter is that of choice. We should allow parents, and indeed students, to choose of their own volition which is the better option—a local sixth form college or a sixth form in a school. We should not take them down one route and reduce their choice by abolishing sixth forms and putting everyone into sixth form colleges.

Mr. Hopkins: I can only refer the hon. Gentleman to the situation in Luton, where the great majority of people want their youngsters to go to the sixth form college because it is a good college and they know that they will do well. That is fine, but if one does as the hon. Gentleman suggests and allows free choice, banding out into social classes will recur. That does not help education.

Mrs. Annette L. Brooke (Mid-Dorset and North Poole): Local choices can be important, and the hon. Gentleman is giving a local illustration. However, does he agree that another solution is for sixth forms to work together, co-operating rather than competing to allow for a certain range of subjects to be taught at certain schools? In an urban area, that could enable a young person who has not matured sufficiently to stay in their own community school for at least several days a week.

Mr. Hopkins: I entirely accept the hon. Lady's point, but it goes at least halfway, if not further, towards what I am advocating: collaboration to achieve economies of scale and a sufficient variety of subjects for students to choose to suit their needs and talents. Sixth forms in some schools could specialise in certain subjects and have more students, more teachers and optimal class sizes. The hon. Lady makes a fair suggestion, and it would not lead to the problem of disrupting schools and upsetting people who are attached to their schools. However, sixth form colleges should at least be given a fair crack of the whip.

My final point concerns the serious funding gap between sixth form colleges and schools. Sixth form college teachers are paid less than school sixth form teachers, and the funding per pupil that colleges receive is about one third below that received by schools. They are not treated well, yet they do a fantastic job. My hon. Friend the Member for St. Albans (Mr. Pollard), who has

left the Chamber, referred to the danger of funding for school sixth forms being levelled down to equal that of colleges. I ask Ministers to honour our commitment to sixth form colleges by pressing the Treasury to level up the funding so they are treated as fairly as schools. In time, we will move towards education provision by sixth form colleges, and the sooner we do so the better.

5.54 pm

Mr. Mark Hoban (Fareham): I want to focus my comments principally on the Green Paper, which deals with "extending opportunities, raising standards". It contains much that we can all support. I particularly welcome the possibility for pupils to fast track on their exams, but we must bear in mind the central importance of GCSEs and the risk that, if we leave GCSEs to less able pupils, there may be a problem with parity of esteem. I am also pleased to see the emphasis on high-quality vocational education. It is important that when we offer children a vocational route, the education that they receive is of a high quality, and I shall turn to aspects of that in a moment.

The introduction to the Green Paper refers to the need to

"engage those young people who have traditionally been alienated and disaffected from school."

The objective to meet the needs of those pupils is absolutely right, and I share the aspiration in the Green Paper to have a more flexible curriculum to re-engage those children. There is a distinct logic in the idea that to attract children into school and keep their attention, we must make sure that we match their aspirations with the choices on offer in the curriculum. Having said that, I have a major concern about the implications of introducing flexibility to the curriculum. I refer in particular to the proposal in the Green Paper to make the taking of a modern foreign language in the 14 to 19 age group, and especially the 14 to 16 age group, voluntary.

The importance of foreign languages must be apparent to those of us who have worked in multinational companies. We realise the extent to which we, as a nation, are at a disadvantage compared with our colleagues in France, Germany, Italy and countries further afield because of our inability to grasp the basics of a modern foreign language. We are sending out a very perverse message to our European neighbours and to our children if we encourage children to take foreign languages in primary school, but tell them at 14 that languages are an option that can be dismissed. It is the educational equivalent of that Victorian headline, "Fog in the channel. Europe cut off". It reinforces the impression that so many people in Europe have of us being an isolated nation rather than one that takes part in the full range of cultural links that are possible if people speak a foreign language.

It is now possible for schools to disapply the element of the national curriculum that requires children to take a modern foreign language. According to the Green Paper, a third of schools take advantage of that for 5 per cent. of pupils. The opportunity to do that is widened by the Education Bill which, under powers of innovation and autonomy, will allow children to disapply specific parts of the curriculum. We can create space in the curriculum for additional vocational topics without telling pupils that a foreign language is entirely optional.

I turn now to the quality of vocational education. We need to be clear that we are not shunting low achievers and those who are disaffected or bored into poor-quality vocational education. That message would demonstrate that there was no parity of esteem between vocational and academic subjects.

In setting the curriculum for vocational GCSEs, we need to make sure that we fully engage local business communities and talk to organisations such as the CBI and the Engineering Employers Federation. Their comments should be reflected in the content of the curriculum, so that employers recognise and accept it, and when they are confronted with students who come from school or college with vocational GCSEs, they will know that the value of those qualifications is equal to that of physics, French, English or maths. They will also know what skills and attainments children have acquired by studying vocational GCSEs. If we fail to achieve that comparability in the minds of employers, we will not meet the aspiration of achieving parity of esteem for vocational and academic GCSEs.

To achieve employers' acceptance of vocational qualifications, we must ensure that the teaching of the subjects is skilled. The Government talk about choice, diversity and partnership in the provision of vocational education, so I hope that they will take into account the vast number of private companies that already provide good-quality vocational education to people who are in work, and consider the talents that such companies have that can be harnessed in the schools sector. I especially welcome the suggestion made by the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) that chartered institutes become the providers of some of the vocational qualifications. As a member of the Institute of Chartered Accountants, I recognise its ability to provide continued professional education both through its membership and district societies, and by employing the services of professional firms and other organisations.

Organisational issues surround the creation of the 14 to 19 age group. My constituency contains five 11 to 16 schools and one further education college. I am not sure how schools will accommodate what will in effect be three levels of attainment for those in years 10 and 11: foundation GCSEs, higher GCSEs and perhaps hothousing children to AS-levels. Although there is much talk of partnership, organisation and arrangements between schools and FE colleges, I wonder whether bussing children from school to school to meet their entitlement to access to the humanities, modern languages and other subjects is the right approach.

I wonder whether we are heading back to having three tiers of schooling: primary school, middle school, and secondary school—with the sixth form that many people want in their local communities—covering 14 to 19-year-olds. We might decide that the way to achieve the high-quality vocational education we seek is to stop having schools with specific specialties such as engineering, science or the arts, and instead set up specialist schools simply to provide vocational education, perhaps centred on FE colleges.

Although I have covered the main points I wanted to make, I have one final comment. Too often in education, we have seen headlines today, but no delivery tomorrow. If we set aspirations for high-quality vocational education for disaffected children within our school system, we must ensure that the Government deliver on their objectives.

6.3 pm

Charlotte Atkins (Staffordshire, Moorlands): I welcome the Green Paper. For too long, we expected the one size fits all structure to meet the needs of all pupils; it did not, so pupils often voted with their feet and left after 16. We have that problem in north Staffordshire, where too many young people decide not to stay on post-16. Only three of every four 16 to 18-year-olds were in education at the end of 2000. That record will not ensure that Britain closes the gap between it and its European competitors in the provision of skills.

I am pleased that the Green Paper is broad enough to tackle high-fliers as well. They often feel constrained by what is on offer in terms of the range of subjects, the ability to take exams early, and the flexibility to enable them, for example, to attend lectures at the local university. Why should they not be able to do so? However, I am not totally convinced about the new tier of achievement at A-levels if it is only so that universities can single out the best pupils. Our universities should look for more than A-level results; they should follow their American counterparts and consider a far broader range of abilities. They should seek evidence that students are doing things other than A-levels and that they have that extra spark, rather than look for more of the same, or the best of the same.

The problem for high-fliers is that timetables often do not allow them to take the range of subjects that they want to study. For instance, they are often not able to take maths and further maths. We should ensure that high-fliers and others have access to high-quality, vocational courses. That is the way to raise the status of those courses.

High-fliers who want to take a large number of exams cannot do so because there is only a short time to fit them all in—perhaps only three weeks. I hope that the practice of taking exams early will become much more common than it is at present. Some schools refuse to do that.

Some people see the proposals on language learning as downgrading language skills, because they are not included as core compulsory subjects. I disagree. Trying to motivate 14-year-olds who do not think that languages are for them is like hitting one's head against a brick wall. It is important not to cajole them, but to inspire them by starting much earlier.

I am delighted about the commitment that by 2012 all primary school children should be entitled to study languages. I would much rather it were sooner, but I realise that we have to build capacity in our primary schools to achieve that. I believe that extending and revitalising the language assistant programme will help, primarily because primary schools will not be teaching grammar, but will enthuse children to develop oral language skills. We should also look to our universities, which have overseas students and language students who could work with pupils in our primary schools. That might not only enthuse pupils, but could also encourage students to take up a teaching career. We could do with them in our primary and secondary schools.

Many primary schools, especially in the most deprived areas, have breakfast clubs. Why do we not use those to enable children to speak a foreign language once a week? Why not have a French café where children could ask for their cereal or croissant and use their language skills. We must show that language is fun and has a practical purpose. Kids who do not go abroad for their holidays need to know that speaking a foreign language is a practical skill. I would also welcome summer schools, when a whole day could be spent pretending to be in France using French.

Mr. Hopkins: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Charlotte Atkins: I am sorry, I shall not give way as other Members want to speak.

Children at primary school level do not have the inhibitions that older students have when experimenting with languages. Information and communications technology is a great boon to language teaching. Westwood high school in Leek has a fantastic language laboratory, which was paid for by Britannia mutual building society. Students can learn and work independently, and teachers can listen to their efforts without them being aware that their attempts at pronouncing French, German or Spanish are being overheard by the teacher. That is a great way to build students' confidence.

There is a great shortage of linguists in north Staffordshire, so I am pleased that we will be promoting specialist language colleges, and that there will be 200 by 2005. However, I am concerned because my local schools, which I have been pressing for specialist language status, say that there are hurdles to becoming specialist language schools. Perhaps the Minister will address that problem in his closing remarks.

I would like a much broader range of languages to be taught, not just the standard German and French. I am surprised that Spanish is not offered more often, given the huge markets in Spanish speaking countries in South and Latin America.

I was very concerned when I read in *Overseas Trade* magazine that, in February, ambassadors from Germany, France, Italy and Spain had issued a joint plea for language teaching in England to be improved. Clearly, we must do that. As the German ambassador to London said:

> "You are selling in European and global markets—but you are hardly ever able to speak the languages of your markets."

That demonstrates that we are missing opportunities to export and build our businesses abroad.

I was very pleased that the Green Paper drew attention to the work of my local further education college. The collaboration between Leek college and Meadows special school has greatly improved the employment opportunities of young people with learning disabilities. The Honeycomb project offers young people not only craft and vocationally-based opportunities, but social and emotional development opportunities, including hair and beauty, self-presentation, art, use of the college multi-gym and ICT activities. The heart of the project is a furniture recycling and wood manufacturing business—pupils experience a real work environment in which they make a full contribution to the business. Leek college has always had a good reputation for working with young people with special needs. I am delighted that the Green Paper has given that national recognition.

I welcome the introduction of quality vocational GCSEs and their focus on pupils of all abilities. They have the potential to excite young people, especially those who are turned off by the mainstream curriculum. A large proportion of students do not fit neatly into the route from

GCSEs to A-levels or the route from NVQs straight into the workplace. It is important to cater for those students. The principal of Stoke-on-Trent college, Graham Moore, raised with me a valid concern: the difficulty that schools may have in making vocational GCSEs sufficiently practical and in not having equipment available. NVQ students have always had to be assessed in the workplace, which has been increasingly difficult on courses such as construction and catering, as small firms do not have the necessary range and quality of training experience. Vocational GCSEs must not suffer from the same problems.

Although I accept that the funding gap for students in further education and schools may cause difficulties, it is important that schools work closely with colleges to provide a real range and choice of courses. Students will then be able to exploit the facilities in FE colleges. That is already happening in Leek. Leek college and Leek high school are sharing their skills and facilities to provide the best possible outcome for students in the college and the school. Under the previous Conservative Government, colleges were encouraged to compete and to embrace market forces, which did not help colleges. I am therefore pleased that that approach has been rejected in north Staffordshire. We have developed a concordat whereby all four local colleges work together—and try not to compete head to head—to provide, between them, the courses that are required locally.

We must also be realistic about how quickly we can get vocational GCSEs off the ground. Of course we want to introduce them quickly, and some will be introduced by September 2002. The major influx of those courses, however, will occur towards 2005. It is important to get them absolutely right and to ensure that more schools are ready to deliver a broader curriculum. Schools and colleges must deliver real choice for their pupils.

Provision must be for boys and girls. We hear a lot about the under-achievement of boys, but let us not forget that there is still a real gender divide in science and ICT. The situation in chemistry is better, but three times more boys than girls achieved passes at physics A-level in 2000.

In the crucial ICT sector, where we have such shortages, about 24,000 girls achieved A* to C grades in GCSE computer studies in 2001, compared with 32,000 boys. In the same year, about 4,000 girls achieved an A-level in computer science, compared with 13,000 boys. It is clear that girls are not engaging in ICT in the same numbers as boys. I fear that the expectation persists in some areas that boys will take to computers, and that girls will not.

The situation in the workplace is even worse. The number of people in ICT jobs has risen by more than 50 per cent., but the proportion of women in those jobs is falling—from 25 per cent. in 1995, to 22 per cent. now. Women account for only 8 per cent. of the work force in software engineering. The success of girls in school should not blind us to the gender stereotyping that still persists.

Huge challenges lie ahead. The Green Paper will address many of them. We have made a huge and beneficial start.

6.16 pm

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): I shall be brief, as there is little time left. The Green Paper contains some good ideas, and some bad ones. That is typical of this Government, but the belief that improvement can be regulated underlies too many elements in the Green Paper.

The Government must be aware that teachers and head teachers are buried in initiatives already. They complain endlessly about the flow of initiatives. The Green Paper risks adding to the flow of new initiatives, ideas and changes, leading to less stability in our schools, and giving heads and teachers less time to sort out the initiatives with which they are dealing already.

The Government therefore must be very cautious about how they proceed with these proposals. It is very important that any change adds value to the present system, and does not attempt to turn it upside down, as that would merely make matters still more difficult for the hard-pressed teachers to whom I and my colleagues speak every week. Again and again, they refer us back to the problems that they face with work load, with initiatives, and with the requirements laid on them by central Government.

I have two points to make about the Green Paper. The first has to do with the proposals for examinations. Much earlier, we heard about the Liberal Democrats' proposals for GCSEs. I am profoundly worried by the Green Paper's proposal that some pupils should abandon GCSEs, for a very straightforward reason.

The Green Paper refers—rightly—to the need to create a vocational route in our education system that is an "equally valued pathway". I believe that we will not generate such a pathway by tinkering with our exam systems. Creating a system in which many pupils—probably the brighter ones—do not take GCSEs but move straight to AS-levels and A-levels would take us back 20 years, to the time when we had a system of O-levels and CSEs.

In effect, that would lead to the creation of a second-class exam system for pupils perceived to be less able. We must not allow that to happen. From my own childhood, I remember that a stigma was attached to pupils who took CSEs rather than O-levels. The introduction of a single examination system at 16 was a positive step towards removing that divide. I should hate to see that divide restored because of the introduction of a system that allowed some pupils to fast-track into the A-level syllabus and ignore GCSEs. The result would be that a huge question mark would hang over the heads of those who did take GCSEs, and the implication would be that they were second class.

My second point has to do with sixth forms. The hon. Member for Luton, North (Mr. Hopkins) spoke about the role of sixth form colleges. However, the Government make a virtue of the need for teachers working with pupils in the 11 to 16 age group to prepare those pupils for what they will encounter in the curriculum for 14 to 19-year olds. The danger of fragmentation of education by the removal of sixth forms is very great. It worries me that, despite all the assurances we have heard from Ministers, sixth forms are suffering financially as a result of the transition to LSC funding.

Schools in my constituency are suffering in that way. Last week my county council in Surrey discussed a scheme to rebalance sixth-form funding. As a result of

[Chris Grayling]

the LSC formula imposed by the Department, schools are losing out or gaining in a very haphazard fashion. They will, I know, seek the Department's support for the rebalancing of the system and the formulae. I hope that the Department will provide that support.

The Green Paper contains much to be welcomed, and many aspirations that all Members share. There are pitfalls, however, and the biggest is this: we must not impose on heads and other teachers, or indeed on college lecturers and principals, more change that would turn their lives upside down in the wake of the changes of the past few years. The steps we take must be careful and measured, and must secure the stability of our system rather than destabilising it at what is a very difficult time for schools and colleges throughout the country.

6.21 pm

Mr. Chris Mole (Ipswich): I applaud the quality of today's debate, and thank the Government for initiating it.

Life is often difficult for young people between 14 and 19. They experience too many hormonally driven distractions: they have to decide what to wear on a Friday or Saturday night, for instance. We have to square the circle, as a society. As those young people make their decisions, we must decide how to meet the needs and wishes of individual students without making them feel that they have been on a rollercoaster through education and straight into work, while also recognising that we must meet the skill needs of national and local economies.

My constituency certainly lacks the skills that are needed to support its growing knowledge economy. We have a shortage of both software developers and computer network technicians. That tells us something about the two levels of skill that we need from those emerging from the education and training system. My point is that there must be a balanced approach that respects the needs of the individual while meeting overall needs. I welcome the existence of that balanced approach in the thrust of the Green Paper.

Too many of our young people are still disengaged from their education. All too often, their parents may have had an unfortunate school experience and may therefore not have the aspirations for their children that we might have for ours—and, indeed, for theirs. I commend the focus on "drivers for change" and the raising of standards in the Green Paper. I particularly welcome its focus on beacon schools, a number of which can be found in my constituency. Such schools provide an incentive for improvement and continuous development, similar to the incentive provided by other mechanisms such as "Investors in People" and charter marks.

One issue that is, perhaps, underplayed in the Green Paper is the role of beacon local education authorities. They are mentioned, but to no significant extent. My constituency contains an LEA that provides support for schools. Suffolk county council was identified by the Government as a beacon council for its work in partnership with schools: it was a constructive LEA, working with schools in difficulty. It gained its status because it had a clear vision about support for schools, consistent criteria for the triggering of early intervention, flexible support systems and effective statistical models. By those means it sustained a good "family" of LEA schools. There were never any grant-maintained schools in the area.

Much progress has already been made, as the results show. Suffolk has achieved a faster improvement than other counties in terms of the percentage of pupils achieving five or more grades between A* and C. In 1997, 47.4 per cent. achieved such grades; by 1999, that figure had risen to 53.5 per cent. I commend the Labour-led county council's current policy and performance plan, which establishes a target of 60 per cent. during the life of the current council, towards 2005. LEAs can play a positive and essential role in negotiating with schools, and in cajoling and encouraging them to achieve those targets.

The target of five A* to C GCSEs covers some 50 per cent. of young people's achievement. There is a long statistical tail behind that, and I am glad to see that the Green Paper refers to the number who achieved just one GCSE, and to those who achieved A* to G qualifications. Those targets are equally important. We must also remember the care system targets as set out in the quality protects management action plans, which were developed by social care services and education departments.

I therefore welcome the intention to raise the value of vocational qualifications and to introduce flexibility into the curriculum. That is the way to re-engage disaffected young people. As others have said, the effective use of work experience has a positive role to play, and in that regard I draw the House's attention to the young people whom I met at a print works in West Flanders, who were experiencing Europe as a potential world of work opportunities.

As the Green Paper makes clear, mechanisms exist to enable young people to stay on in higher education, and on that point I leave the House with a final thought. When I first entered politics as a councillor in the late 1980s, under a Tory council and a Tory Government, only 28 per cent. of young people in Suffolk stayed on in post-16 education; now, about 70 per cent. stay on. In Ipswich, new sixth-form schools have been built, and partnership sixth-form schools such as Coplestone and Holywells high school have been established. I therefore welcome the broad thrust of the Green Paper, and I hope that the Minister will respond to some of my points.

6.27 pm

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): I am pleased to be able to contribute to the debate. Like many newly elected Members, I have spent some time visiting schools in my constituency. I have visited primary and secondary schools, and some further education colleges in the local area, but my odyssey is by no means complete. By and large, I have been very impressed by what I have seen, but I have also encountered some concerns in my discussions with teachers. I undertook to raise them in the House, if possible, so in the context of the debate I shall attempt to keep my word.

One concern was pay, especially in relation to housing costs. Obviously, that is a particular problem in London and the south-east, including Essex. There is also the issue of disruption in the classroom, which has been touched on. Suffice it to say that most teachers join the profession to teach children, not to act as police officers. Many teachers want firmer action to be taken against disruptive pupils. Although there have been some recent changes in policy in that regard, most teachers to whom I spoke think that there is further to go.

The principal issue that I want to discuss on those teachers' behalf—it arose time and again—is the burden of paperwork. In December 2001 alone, secondary

schools received some 510 pages of instructions from the Department for Education and Skills. At a rate of two minutes per page, it would take 17 hours to digest those instructions from the centre. To that must be added the considerable amount of paperwork that individual teachers have to cope with in their own right—not least in respect of performance-related pay.

Many teachers have complained to me about what they call the Sunday evening syndrome—*[Interruption.]*—which I should like to explain to the Minister if she would pay me just a moment's attention. Teachers have to sit down in the middle of Sunday afternoon and spend hours filling in paperwork, so that they are up straight, as it were, for their return to work on Monday morning. A large proportion of their weekend is given up to bureaucracy simply so that they can go to work on Monday and begin their job as normal. Teachers find that intensely irritating and I would like to think that the Government would be prepared to do something about it. It was best summed up to me by one teacher who said:

"I know how to teach. Why do I need to spend hours filling in forms so that someone I have never met can second guess everything I'm doing—just let me get on with it."

Too many teachers are leaving the profession and 40 per cent. of final-year students never even make it into the classroom. The point was made to me that it is not just about pay, although that is clearly an issue; and it is not just about discipline, although that is clearly an issue too. Much of the problem is the bureaucracy. It is persuading teachers to leave the profession, taking with them skills that their potential students can ill afford to lose. Teachers in my constituency want to teach. They want less bureaucracy, not more. I promised to make a plea on their behalf, and I hope that I have done that. I just hope that the Minister will listen to it.

My final point concerns post-16 education and the funding of sixth forms. Essex county council was given several guarantees by Ministers that no school would be worse off as a result of the transition to funding from the learning and skills council. It is my understanding from the county council that because of the complexities and vagaries of the funding formula, when the mathematics are eventually worked out, many schools with sixth forms are materially worse off. In that sense, Ministers have not honoured their commitment. I invite them to reconsider the formula to see whether something can be done. To take Ministers at their word, it may be that they did not realise the implications of what they were doing. Perhaps they could now right that wrong.

6.32 pm

John Mann (Bassetlaw): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for squeezing me into this debate. I have only one point to make. I have a plethora of documents on education, both Government and party political, from the 1940s onwards and I am familiar with them all. But one factor is missing from every single one—the coalfields. The inner cities get a lot of attention and a lot of literature is devoted to them. There is no question that poverty in the inner cities is far greater in reality than poverty in the coalfields. However, what the coalfields have, more than any other area, is a poverty of aspiration and expectation.

That poverty of expectation was there throughout the last century and it remains to this day. In the mining villages, boys were expected to leave school at 15—a bit later it was 16—and work down the pit until they retired at 64 or 65, unless they had an accident and faced early retirement. Girls were expected to marry one of the boys and stay at home or, in more enlightened days, work in a textile factory to earn additional money, and then retire. The one thing that was not needed was high educational attainment.

The big difference between the 1940s, the 1950s and now is the behavioural questions. The behavioural problems in schools nowadays are not the same as those that existed then, because fathers sorted out any problems underground in the pit. The pits, by and large, are not there any more. That is a fact and that is how society now operates.

The biggest problem that I see in my surgery is literacy. Scores of retired miners cannot fill in the compensation forms for pneumoconiosis because they do not have the necessary literacy skills. Many of them have not sent the forms in yet because they are terrified of getting them wrong. There are queues at the citizens advice bureaux, which are filling in forms for people who cannot spell. That is still a major problem.

There is another big problem. Those kids all went to the secondary modern schools. In the pit areas, especially our pit area—the Dukeries—old barns on farms are being converted. Old manor houses have sold off land for middle-class housing. In those villages, primary schools are often attaining 100 per cent. in terms of Government standards. At the secondary schools, kids from existing or former pit villages have still got a low level of aspiration and low results. Those factors mesh together and disguise the problem.

We need three things. First, the Government's biggest achievement has been to start to sort out primary schools. Higher expectation and more money have made the biggest impact in my area—far more impact than any other scheme. Secondly, 14 to 16-year-olds have been lost before, but that is where it really hits homes. People talk about teaching kids French, German or Spanish; in some of the schools, we would like the kids to attend classes in the first place, learning and getting leadership and management skills, which they can use in the world of work. Therefore, I applaud the initiatives.

The final and crucial thing is that we should not run down what the Government are doing. On capital spending on schools, I will tell the House what I want. Bids are in from my area at the moment; I know that the Minister cannot comment. We have put in for every secondary school in every mining area to be rebuilt. Imagine the impact it would have on the aspirations of young people, their parents and grandparents if it was announced next week that every secondary school in the mining villages would be rebuilt as new. That is what I would call delivery.

I would welcome such an announcement next week. If we do not get it next week, we will keep pressing. That is what I mean by delivery. That coalfield perspective is crucial. That lack of aspiration and expectation is crucial. I salute this team of Ministers. I believe that they are the first in 50 years to recognise the difference of the coalfields and the importance of aspiration. More of it please.

6.37 pm

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): It is a pleasure to respond to what has been an excellent short debate. It is also a pleasure—I am sure that the Minister would agree—to have a debate on this important aspect of education. The difficulty has been to fit in all those on both sides of the House who wanted to speak, which has been a pleasure to see. It has been a pleasure to listen to the contributions.

There have been too many contributions to go through all of them in detail but I will mention a few. The right hon. Member for Dewsbury (Ann Taylor) made an excellent speech. She referred to the importance of pre-school education, and the importance of flexibility but not fragmentation in education. She also referred to the almost bewildering choice of qualifications and groups in education, which is an important concern. She was clearly wasted in the Whips Office. We are pleased to hear what she has to say now that she is a free woman again.

The hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) accused the Government of peddling motherhood and apple pie—and a bit of creationism as well. He talked about the lessons from Skoda and how the esteem of vocational training can be improved only through quality and not through rebadging, which is a valid point. His speech was not so much a Skoda as a stretch limousine, but we will forgive him that, since we have grown used to it.

The hon. Member for St. Albans (Mr. Pollard), who unfortunately is not in his place at the moment, was worried about the threat to successful sixth forms, a concern that many hon. Members on both sides share. He was concerned that the Learning and Skills Council may pursue the route of levelling down funding, rather than levelling it up, a point that was raised by other hon. Members.

My hon. Friend the Member for Poole (Mr. Syms) spoke about the crisis of bureaucracy, the shortage of teachers, and the chronic skills shortage. He spoke about the problems of teaching the same children in a variety of institutions, particularly in rural areas where travel can be a difficulty. He referred to the iniquities of funding which affect hon. Members on both sides of the House and various constituencies in much the same way.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater (Mr. Liddell-Grainger) made an important contribution, referring to the importance of special needs and the teaching of reading. He paid a particular and welcome tribute to the work of the Dyslexia Institute.

The hon. Member for Luton, North (Mr. Hopkins) voiced concern about the possible fragmentation of the education system and the dangers of a more socially divisive form of education. My hon. Friend the Member for Fareham (Mr. Hoban) voiced his strong concern about the future of language teaching if the Green Paper proposals were to come into being. He also spoke about the importance of real quality in vocation education and the difficulties caused by bringing in early AS-levels in 11 to 16 schools, something that may be compounded by the uncertainty about the funding arrangements and structures, about which we heard more today from the Under-Secretary.

My hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling), in a brief but cogent intervention, said that teachers were already buried under initiatives from the Government and referred to the danger of tinkering with the exam system, as set out in the Green Paper. My hon. Friend the Member for Rayleigh (Mr. Francois) mentioned the burden of paperwork and spoke tellingly of the Sunday evening syndrome that affects teachers in his constituency.

The Under-Secretary talked about the Bury connection, and went on to say that he hoped there would be no political knockabout in the debate. Unfortunately, I was led to fear for his short-term memory, because he immediately went on to attack the previous Government on the basis of spurious figures that he claimed about education funding, passing over the fact that the last Government spent a higher percentage of the nation's wealth on education than the Labour Administration from 1997 did. He went on to blame the recent widening of the gap between high and low achievement on the previous Government: again skating over the fact that it is happening now under this Government and is not attributable to the Government who went before.

The Under-Secretary spoke about the group of young people who have been put off education by the content of the curriculum. That is a concern that Members on both sides take seriously and recognise must be dealt with. He spoke about a cycle of failure and about social problems. He also mentioned language teaching and made it clear that schools must offer languages, even if no one takes them. What is the percentage reduction in those taking languages post-14? What in practice will be the effect of what is being set out?

In response to an intervention from my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt), the Under-Secretary made it clear that he thought that schools might be statutorily required to offer the teaching of modern languages, but that it might be provided by another institution; schools did not need to offer it within their own institution. Rapidly, this commitment—such as it was—is becoming a meaningless pledge.

If languages are not taught in the institution where the pupil studies but are offered elsewhere, what are the implications for travel costs? How will they be met? What are the implications for disadvantaged pupils, for whom the difficulty may be greater? What are the implications in rural areas, where it may be difficult to move from one institution to another? Is it not less likely that people will take languages in the 14 to 19 period of their education if they have to go elsewhere to do so?

We heard about modern apprenticeships and the matriculation diploma. We are concerned that the future planning of 14 to 19 education appears to be something of a black hole in the Government's thinking. It is not clear whether the Government wish the area planning of education to be executed by learning and skills councils, local education authorities or some other body. Having said that they are not intending to move funding or planning to the learning and skills councils, the Government must make clear where exactly they want that funding and planning to take place and what the implications will be.

The Under-Secretary pledged that we would have not necessarily the publication of the responses to the Green Paper but "a representative summary" of responses. That gave cause for concern to all Members who have experienced the Government's tendency to publish only those pieces of information that appear favourable,

and not always an open and honest sample of what they have received. The Government say that they want to raise the status of vocational education, an objective that we all share. However, they seem to want to do so by downgrading the GCSE still further, which gives real cause for concern.

My hon. Friend the Member for North-East Bedfordshire expressed several concerns on behalf of the further education sector, concerns which grow stronger daily. I know from constituency experience and conversations that I have had how angry people in that sector are, especially at the recent remarks of the Minister for Lifelong Learning. On reflection, she may want to retract those remarks and make it clear that good work is being done in that sector and great achievements are being made.

My hon. Friend also asked for a definition of a higher education experience, for which he has been waiting for six months. There seems to be no sign of such a definition.

The Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills, the hon. Member for Bury, South (Mr. Lewis), kindly drew attention to the recent literary work of the former chief inspector of schools and invited us to quote from it. I wish that I had more time to quote those views about the Government—the book contains some wonderful quotes. I am sure that hon. Members of all parties are already digging into it. *[Interruption.]* The Minister for Lifelong Learning says that she has not bothered, but perhaps she should. I offer her this quote:

"The Government should stop flailing around inventing new recruitment wheezes. It should stop wasting public money on what must be a hugely expensive advertising campaign . . . Deal with disruptive children. Cut the paperwork and the distractions. Reform the approach to pay. Action on these fronts would, at very least, ease the current crisis."

We are grateful to the Under-Secretary for drawing attention to the former chief inspector's comments. They do not necessarily paint a flattering picture of the Government's achievements to date.

In the Green Paper, there is a huge shift away from the Government's mantra when they first arrived on the scene in 1997, claiming that they were about standards, not structures. The Green Paper presages massive structural change. Its objectives are common to both sides of the House, but there are real fears about the approach. Esteem for vocational education will rise with standards in vocational education. That will not happen if the Government proceed with a policy to allow vocational GCSEs for the less able while early AS-levels are provided for the brightest pupils. Pupils in such circumstances—those who are most able to cope with the exam overload—will be spared it. Those who are stretched to cope with GCSEs at 16, AS-levels at 17 and A-levels at 18 will still have to face the overload that currently damages the breadth of their experiences in the curriculum and outside it.

There is an inherent contradiction in the Government's policy on languages. To say that they want more at primary level, fewer at secondary level and more for adults is absurd. Now that we have had confirmation that languages need not be offered in all schools, the concern is even stronger.

The Green Paper risks taking us round in circles. We envisage far more bureaucracy and confusion for qualifications and the planning and funding of 14 to 19 education. It does nothing to lift the threat to their future that sixth forms already feel. It risks devaluing vocational qualifications and accelerating the demise of GCSEs. We shall support the Government in seeking better vocational education, parity of esteem for vocational education and greater flexibility. However, I hope that the Minister for School Standards will accept that the debate has flagged up real concerns on both sides of the House about the Government's approach, and I hope that he will take them seriously.

6.49 pm

The Minister for School Standards (Mr. Stephen Timms): We have had an interesting debate. The House has been right to focus its attention on our important proposals for education for those aged 14 to 19. There has been a great deal of progress in education over the past five years, with dramatic improvements in primary schools as the literacy and numeracy strategy has been successful in raising standards.

This afternoon, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State set out in a speech to Demos how we shall apply those lessons to the middle years, for 11 to 14-year-olds, and we are starting to see evidence of improvements. Some 50 per cent. of teenagers achieved five good GCSEs last summer, a year ahead of our target date. In addition, we received a positive assessment, from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development Pisa study, of our 15-year-olds. That international comparison was published just before Christmas. Extra investment has also borne fruit in our schools.

That said, it is certainly the case that many challenges remain. In particular, those challenges come at ages 14 to 19. Too many people drop out of education much too early. In 1998, there were fewer 17-year-olds in education in Britain than in all other OECD countries except Turkey, Mexico and Greece. The hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) rightly drew attention to our poor performance by comparison with other countries on level 3 qualifications. We must do better, and we will.

There are other challenges. The Pisa study drew attention to our high overall achievement, but also pointed out that the gap between those who do and do not do well in Britain is a big one in international terms. We need to close that gap and to fire the imaginations of many more of those who lose their enthusiasm for education much too early. My hon. Friend the Member for Lincoln (Gillian Merron) gave an interesting example from Yarborough school of how that is being done around enterprise. We need more examples of that kind.

We need to address skills shortages and to raise the skills of those entering the work force in order to boost productivity and promote economic growth. We need to ensure that we meet the needs of those likely to struggle at GCSE while also stretching and challenging those whom we expect to do well at A-level. The Green Paper will allow us to address all those challenges.

I welcome the consensus about the need for more opportunities for high-quality vocational options, as the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) has just said. We need to meet demand from young people and employers. We shall offer eight new GCSEs in vocational subjects from September, and several hon. Members, including my right hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury (Ann Taylor), said that we shall need additional

[Mr. Stephen Timms]

subjects. I agree with that, and we look forward to offering more subjects from 2004. It is important to make the point that those examinations will be rigorous. They are not a soft option, and they will attract academically able young people. They will develop important skills that employers will prize.

We cannot realistically offer these new options, however, if we also insist that every pupil does everything that the national curriculum currently requires. That is the reason for a more flexible curriculum at 14 to 16. The core compulsory subjects will be restricted to those essential for progression—maths, english, science, and information and craft technology.

Points have been made about modern and foreign languages, particularly by the hon. Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt) in his characteristically courteous contribution, by the hon. Member for Fareham (Mr. Hoban) and by my right hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury in her impressive and wide-ranging speech. We fully recognise the importance of modern foreign languages. That is why we propose a statutory entitlement to them for all pupils at 14 to 16. That will mean that those subjects will continue to be available to those who want them.

We have a poor record of teaching and learning modern foreign languages, and the hon. Member for Fareham told us that one third of schools are currently disapplying the national curriculum requirement. I am not sure whether that is right, but the Green Paper makes it clear that the requirement for MFL is disapplied for about 32,000 pupils, which is a large number. If that is so, why should we pretend that there is an effective compulsory requirement at present? Why require people to go through the cumbersome disapplication procedure if it is in their best interests to do something other than MFL?

Mr. Brady: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Timms: Given the time, I had better press on. I will give way in a moment if I am able, but I started rather late.

We are committed to tackling the long-standing problems. We do not think that the answer is to force reluctant, uninterested and potentially disruptive 14-year-olds to study languages. However, we do want to get young people interested in learning a language at an early age—my right hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury and my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, Moorlands (Charlotte Atkins) made this point—and to provide them with the opportunity to continue with that interest throughout life. We made that proposal in a pamphlet published on the same day as the Green Paper, which set out our ambition for all primary school children to have an entitlement to study languages within 10 years and for there to be at least 200 specialist language colleges by 2005.

All that means that young people will have significant choices to make at 14—more significant than they would have had to make in the past. I agree with those who have pointed out that we need to ensure that they will have the advice and support to choose wisely, with their parents and teachers.

We are building up modern apprenticeships, with targets for many more young people to take them up and a national framework that defines the basic standards and will strengthen the relationship between employer and apprentice. Of course, apprenticeships almost entirely disappeared during the 1980s. The fact is that we need to be investing in the skills of young people at the workplace. The system of foundation and advanced modern apprenticeships is allowing us as a nation to do that once again.

The hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough said a good deal on that subject and I thank him for the welcome he gave to the vision and to a number of the specific proposals in the Green Paper—the learning plan, for example. He suggested that our proposals for modern apprenticeships were too small scale. I do not think that that is the case. We have set a target of, I think, 28 per cent. of young people going into such apprenticeships by 2004. It is a substantial programme. I agree with the hon. Gentleman about the need to involve employers very closely in the design. We are doing so with the sector skills councils, and as the proposals come to fruition, he will see that the high ambitions that he rightly set out will be met.

An important point that goes to the heart of the discussion is that we need to switch the focus of attention from what young people achieve by the age of 16 to all that they will achieve by the age of 19, whether they have been at school, in a college or earning a wage. GCSEs at 16 are a staging post in secondary education, not a finishing post. I do not believe that what we are proposing amounts to downgrading GCSEs, as the hon. Member for North-East Bedfordshire suggested, nor do I agree with the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough that they should be downgraded. They are not the end of secondary education, however. That is the importance of the matriculation diploma at age 19 as a target for every young person to aim for throughout their teenage years, signifying recognition for their achievements, whether they have been pursuing academic or vocational options, or a mixture of the two.

As my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary said in opening the debate, we also want the diploma to recognise wider interests—citizenship, volunteering and wider activities. I am one of those who think that there is some merit in the name "matriculation diploma"—*[Interruption.]* If we had had to put that to the vote this afternoon, I might have found myself in something of a minority. One reason why I think that it has some merit is that people will be able to matriculate. The hon. Member for North-East Bedfordshire was talking of the benefits of graduation and I agree that there are some benefits. However, I disagree with the hon. Gentleman on one matter—I think he said that having different levels of the diploma might be unhelpful. I was recently in the United States looking into graduation. I was struck by the fact that it is often at different levels in US high schools. I was at a school where there were three levels.

This has been an interesting debate and it has been very useful from our point of view in helping us to make decisions on the basis of our proposals. The hon. Member for Poole (Mr. Syms) made some important points about rural issues. That is why the Green Paper draws attention to the need for pathfinders in rural areas. I was also interested in the remarks of the hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. Liddell-Grainger) about the Dyslexia Institute, which is not an organisation with which I am familiar. I would certainly be interested to know more. A number of my hon. Friends also made important and useful points.

We have set out today our plans for a coherent 14 to 19 phase of education. We want to get away from the fragmentation to which my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary referred at the beginning of the debate. This week, I launched at Canary wharf the first of 56—

It being Seven o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Noisy Neighbours

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Caplin.]*

7 pm

Bob Russell (Colchester): I wish to dedicate this debate to the memory of the late Spike Milligan, who was the patron of the Right to Peace and Quiet Campaign, predecessor to the Noise Network and a great supporter of the UK Noise Association, which was formed in 1999 as the umbrella organisation for various groups involved in the battle to combat noise. Over the years, Spike attended many events in the Jubilee Room to meet Members of Parliament and highlight noise issues with them. I am told that he had a personal dislike for piped music and noisy neighbours.

The UK Noise Association, which receives a grant from the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust, campaigns—perhaps too quietly, for I wish it were better known—to reduce noise in our everyday lives and to silence, or at least quieten, the cacophony of noises that disrupt what we would like to think is civilised living. The noise fighters can hardly shout from the roof tops, so I shall speak up for them this evening.

I also wish to place on record the excellent work of Mrs. Val Weedon, who formed the Noise Network as a result of her experiences with a particularly annoying noisy neighbour and who has subsequently been awarded an MBE for her unstinting work in seeking to reduce and eliminate noise. She is secretary of the UK Noise Association.

A noise is a noise is a noise. Noise annoys, but it can do more than annoy; it is increasingly causing more and more people considerable distress, ill health and, in some cases, it ends in death—the victims take their own lives because they cannot put up with things any longer, or they take the law into their own hands and kill the perpetrator. It is estimated that every 10 weeks, on average, someone dies as a result of neighbour-noise conflict.

The negative impact of noise in society is recognised by the Government, and I welcome the publication late last year—five days before Christmas—of a consultation paper from the air and environmental quality division of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

Unacceptable noise is not just an urban issue, for I suspect that an early morning crowing cockerel may not be everybody's idea of a welcoming dawn chorus; it is a sound that country folk should accept as being part of rural life, whereas it would not be at all popular in an urban setting. I use that illustration to make the point that what is an unacceptable noise for one person can be perfectly acceptable to another. It is a question of common sense and fairness. Thudding heavy-metal music is unbearable at any time—unless people like it. In my opinion, it is a form of non-physical thuggery for someone to inflict it on others, particularly during the traditional quiet hours of night and Sunday afternoons.

I understand that the consultation period for DEFRA's proposals entitled "Towards a National Ambient Noise Strategy" ended on 15 March. Perhaps the Minister would be kind enough to state when the findings will be published and when he expects new measures to be taken to remove unacceptable noise from our lives. However, although I welcome the consultation paper, I must register

[Bob Russell]

my strong disappointment that measures to deal with noisy neighbours are specifically excluded. Having devoted a whole chapter to what is headed "Neighbour Noise", its introduction states:

"This consultation paper has as its remit ambient noise—noise from transportation and industry—and thus explicitly excludes consideration of neighbour noise."

If we are being asked to accept that the Government are serious about tackling the problems caused by the growing number of antisocial noisy neighbours, that is clearly a wasted opportunity. I shall return later to what chapter 3 says.

According to the UK Noise Network, quoting a study by the University of Sheffield, our towns and cities are 10 times noisier than a decade ago. It is said that a fifth of the European Union's residents suffer a noise problem.

In its publication "Noise and Liveability", the UK Noise Association states:

"Noise can be much more than just an irritant. It can damage people's health and education and blight their lives."

It also states that noise tends to be more of a problem for poor people, who often live in noisy areas and do not have the opportunity to move away.

Noise comes in so many different ways—obvious examples are from road traffic, flight paths and railway lines, but there are many others. Tonight, however, in the limited time available, I shall concentrate only on the noise nuisances caused by neighbours—hence the title of my debate.

I am told that the Government have issued a leaflet entitled "Bothered by Noise?", in which they advise residents what action is open to them if they suffer from noisy neighbours. Will the Minister inform me when that leaflet was last updated and where the public can obtain copies?

I understand that later this year the EU Commission will issue a noise directive. I am not sure whether this has prompted the UK Government to publish their consultation paper, but in any event both moves are welcomed provided, of course, that we see immediate and positive action.

I hope that the Minister will be able to offer us good news—that there will be action, and that the Government are determined to reduce noise and where possible eliminate it completely. If the Government could introduce "Silence is golden" measures, that would be an opportunity for us to give three hearty cheers of approval. Yes, there is a place for noise, such as a standing ovation, which is unlikely tonight, musical delights, such as the last night of the Proms, and spontaneous loud cheering such as I witnessed three times on Saturday when Colchester United beat Queens Park Rangers 3-1.

Noise has its place, but that place is not transferring noise from one domestic dwelling to another or many others, or to their gardens. As the Prime Minister said on 24 April last year:

"We need an improved local quality of life."

I am sure that he was not talking about his immediate next door neighbours but was making a generalisation.

In support of the Prime Minister, I should again like to quote from what the UK Noise Association has told me:

"It is quite simple. Noise blights the quality of life of millions of people. Liveable communities will not be created across the country if the UK remains as noisy as it is today."

If there is one thing worse than a noisy neighbour it is a neighbour who is deliberately noisy—someone who gets perverted pleasure from inflicting misery on others by deliberate acts of noise aggravation that he or she pursues with callous zeal. This can take the form of loud music at all hours of the day and night, early morning do-it-yourself builders who think that banging and electric drills are all right, binge parties that last for hours, and running up and down carpetless floors and stairs. Unattended barking dogs are also a major cause of concern. There are many other examples of noisy neighbour behaviour. "Love thy neighbour as thyself" is sadly so often lacking in 21st century Britain.

It seems that the 24-hour lifestyle that this country is increasingly witnessing has regrettably not seen some active participants realising that they must adapt their behaviour accordingly. What may be acceptable during normal hours is often totally unacceptable to the rest of society in the early hours.

I am sure that all Members can recount tales of woe and misery raised with them by anguished constituents who are at their wit's end. Examples I have in Colchester include a young man with an electric guitar who slept by day and played his guitar by night, ruining the sleep of the family next door. This ended only after months of distress when the council's environmental noise people confiscated his equipment and he was taken to court. Some may feel that a punch on the nose would have been more effective, but it would be wrong of me to support such direct action.

Another example is the couple living in an upstairs flat who felt that removing the carpet, as some form of fashion statement I believe, and constantly walking over the bare floorboards in heavy shoes was acceptable. The noise for the elderly lady living below was intolerable and she was forced to leave her home for days at a time to get peace and quiet elsewhere.

There have been numerous occasions involving loud music at all hours of the day and night, with open windows allowing the high volume sound to annoy the immediate neighbourhood.

We are told that there are powers to deal with such antisocial elements in society. Are they working? Are they strong enough? How effective are they? Evidence suggests that they are inadequate, and even when the powers-that-be get involved the process is time-consuming and slow. What are the Government going to do about it?

Mr. Colin Daines, environmental control manager for Colchester borough council tells me:

"Whilst legal controls may be improving, the derisory fines imposed by magistrates for the noise and other environmental offences that we do take to court, do not seem to reflect the seriousness of the problems and the major effects they can have on those who are suffering them. We do try to educate our local JPs but any assistance from 'above' eg via the Home Office would be welcomed."

Chapter 3 of DEFRA's document says that neighbour noise is not part of the consultation. It outlines a catalogue of measures, which, if they are to be believed,

will provide a framework to ensure that England is a green and pleasant land, where at all times neighbour quietly speaks peace unto neighbour, where the only noises to be heard are the twittering of song birds and the joyous laughter of small children playing—and over there we can see pigs flying past. The world is not like that, and the consultation paper is wrong to con us into thinking that there is adequate legislation—let alone an enthusiasm from local authorities, the police and other agencies—to deal with noisy neighbours. The theory is fine; the reality is somewhat different.

In explaining why neighbour noise does not form part of recent noise strategy consultation, the consultation paper states:

"Neighbour and local neighbourhood noise is a major source of disturbance to many people and can have a significant impact on quality of life and the local environment. This chapter summarises the legislation available to local authorities and others to deal with neighbour noise. It outlines the positive actions being taken to provide local authorities and others with effective powers to address complaints about neighbour noise and to raise the general awareness of the impact that the generation of noise can have on others."

The legislation is clearly not working. Noise complaints are increasing, certainly in my constituency if my postbag and advice bureau are a good guide. The Acts of Parliament that we are told

"provide powers to address neighbourhood noise"

are: the Environmental Protection Act 1990, part III; the Noise and Statutory Nuisance Act 1993; the Noise Act 1996; and the Control of Pollution Act 1974, part III. I am advised that a consultation is under way to seek views on whether, and in what way, the Noise Act should be reviewed. There is compelling evidence that something must be done.

An indication of how seriously noise is regarded as an issue by the Government is reflected in the statement in the DEFRA consultation paper that the Noise Forum—yes, there is such a body—

"meets twice a year and provides an opportunity for the exchange of information and views between those affected by noise and those who have a responsibility for dealing with it."

Twice a year? I hope the Minister will agree that meeting twice a year is hardly an acknowledgement that tackling noise is high on the agenda.

It is not just noisy neighbours, however, who are to blame. The design of buildings, particularly flats and homes in multiple occupation, needs to be addressed. In total, an estimated 2.5 million homes in this country have bad sound insulation. The UK Noise Association published an excellent brochure last Friday week entitled "A Sound Solution". I am advised copies have been posted to every MP. It sets out a strategy to minimise noise nuisance in housing by using better sound insulation. I invite the Minister to support the aim of making our nation's homes quieter by design and construction, and that applies to new-build as well as the existing housing stock.

The National Housing Federation, which represents around 1,400 not-for-profit housing organisations that own or manage about 1.7 million homes in England, tells me that there is a need for all agencies to work together on individual cases to agree enforcement action, to provide support for those at risk and to intervene to help people address their behaviour. It says:

"People displaying noisy and anti-social behaviour can cause a great deal of distress to their neighbours. We support our members taking swift and appropriate enforcement action to deal with proven anti-social behaviour, such as racism, harassment and drug dealing."

That is fine for housing associations and local authority tenants, but we need to consider all cases of noisy neighbours. It not just tenants who are bad neighbours. Indeed, the two specific constituency cases that I highlighted involved owner-occupiers.

The future does not sound good. Mr. Richard Mills, secretary general of the National Society for Clean Air, commenting on the Government's draft national ambient noise strategy, said:

"There is a clear opportunity now to develop, for the first time in the UK, a coherent and strategic approach to the control of ambient noise. These proposals simply fail to meet the challenge.

As things stand, nothing will prevent the noise climate in the UK getting worse for at least another five years, when all momentum will have been lost.

Ministers promised us a strategy to tackle noise. Sadly, it's all quiet on the policy front."

It is clear that legislation is not deterring noisy neighbours. It must be improved so that immediate action can be taken. If we can have neighbourhood wardens issuing on-the-spot fines for owners of dogs that foul the pavement and for louts who drop litter, why cannot we have noise wardens with the power to take immediate action against those generating unacceptable levels of noise?

I invite the Minister to accept the recommendation of the UK Noise Association urging that more resources should be allocated by local authorities to provide a higher quality service with the employment of dedicated noise officers. Current experience throughout the country is that the level of service provided by local councils is variable.

The Government support the European convention on human rights, article 8 of which establishes the right of respect for

"privacy, family life and home".

Article 1 of protocol 1 establishes a right

"to the peaceful enjoyment of your possessions and protection of property".

The human rights of the victims of noisy neighbours are being infringed. The Government have a legal obligation to ensure that legislation is adequate. The Government may not have been entirely silent on the question of noisy neighbours, but they need to do a lot more to tackle one of the great social miseries of modern times.

7.15 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): I congratulate the hon. Member for Colchester (Bob Russell) on securing this debate and on the robust and not too noisy way in which he made his case.

The hon. Gentleman raises a serious issue and I assure him that the Government take it seriously. My right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment, who was unable to attend the debate, has been actively seeking ways to improve the quality of life for local people. We realise that noisy neighbours are a quality of life issue, and the Government acknowledge that quality of life is an indicator against which we measure our policies—and we do so. That relates to issues such as litter, graffiti, dog fouling and, of course, noisy neighbours.

I have considerable sympathy with people who endure intrusive noise as a consequence of the inconsiderate actions of their neighbours. The hon. Gentleman gave some examples from his constituents—I have nothing but sympathy for those people.

[Mr. Elliot Morley]

Noise is something that affects us all. We all make it in one way or another and many of us suffer because of our different perceptions about certain noisy situations. The hon. Gentleman fairly pointed out that what some people regard as a nuisance, others do not. That can cause difficulty. Despite that, there are clearly situations where noise is wholly unacceptable.

Our ambient noise strategy relates to an important commitment in the rural White Paper. There will be consultation about what should be included in the strategy and how it will be applied, and we shall take the responses into account. Ambient noise refers to background noise; that is not the same as neighbour noise where there can be great variability. As the hon. Gentleman noted, there is a difference.

The hon. Gentleman pointed out that there were several Acts relating to noise. They include the Environmental Protection Act 1990, amended by the Noise and Statutory Nuisance Act 1993, which contain powers for the investigation of complaints about noise. Local councils have the duty to investigate complaints of noise from premises—land and buildings—vehicles, machinery or equipment in the street. Those duties are described in a popular departmental booklet, "Bothered by Noise? There's no need to suffer". I am glad to tell the hon. Gentleman that I can provide him with a copy at the end of the debate. He will then be fully up to date with the Government's position on noise.

I take the hon. Gentleman's point about proper design standards. We should take into account the need to minimise noise in everyday living. That is a fair point.

Dealing with noise is the responsibility of local authority environmental health officers. They can serve abatement notices on the person responsible and, in certain cases, the owner of the property. The notice may require that the noise be stopped altogether, or limited in level or to certain times of the day. Specific works may also be stipulated. That should enable the noise nuisance to be abated, and failure to comply with the terms of the noise abatement notice can result in heavy fines.

In the circumstances, and in the light of recruitment problems, I consider that, overall, environmental health officers do an excellent job in both investigating and taking action against the instigators of noise.

As constituency MPs, we are all familiar with the problem. We know that in many cases people who are accused of making noise often hotly deny it. That is one of the reasons that evidence must be collected by the environmental health officer. However, that cannot be done overnight—it takes some time. Often, people have to fill in log sheets, and devices that record noise are placed in properties. When a matter is disputed, evidence is necessary for a successful prosecution, so there may be delays in dealing with complaints. However, environmental health departments do a good job.

The noise complaint figures announced by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment last December show that, almost always, informal action, by directly confronting the person responsible or through the use of mediation, can resolve neighbour disputes without the need for the local authority to use enforcement measures, either through the use of abatement notices or taking action through the courts. Inevitably, of course, the odd local authority is not as responsive as it might be. However, the Government's best value inspection service will help to identify and encourage improvements in services where they are needed.

I understand that Colchester borough council's environmental health department provides a round-the-clock service to deal with noise complaints, which is good because not all councils do that. In addition, the council has been awarded beacon status for its work in maintaining a quality environment, and it is to be congratulated on that. In fact, Colchester was one of only five councils that applied for that status and were successful, which is a tribute to it.

Bob Russell: It is Liberal Democrat led.

Mr. Morley: I understood that it was a hung council, but I give praise where praise is due.

I realise, of course, that going round to see one's neighbour does not always produce results. I saw a report concerning an incident in the hon. Gentleman's constituency in which someone was attacked by their neighbour in a noise dispute.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the consultation that is taking place. I accept that the Noise Act 1996, which introduced a night noise offence, has not been entirely successful. That is why my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment announced the outcome of a review of the Act in line with a parliamentary commitment to do so which was made on 20 December 2001. We aim to ensure that local authorities can use the Act fully by seeking changes, which will mean that they will have more control over the level of resources which they need to commit to dealing with noise complaints at night. We are currently looking at ways of making the existing powers less prescriptive and non-adoptive. That would make the night noise offence more widely available for use by local authorities when dealing with night noise complaints. Local authorities will welcome that development. I understand that Colchester borough council, among others, has not yet adopted the Act. That is one of the reasons for our consultation on potential changes.

We have acknowledged the need to raise awareness of noise by sponsoring the very successful noise action day, which has become an annual event and will be held on Wednesday 22 May this year. That is co-ordinated by the National Society for Clean Air and Environmental Protection, which works with local authorities, schools, mediation groups and citizens advice bureaux to help to educate the public about the problems that can be encountered and the solutions that can be used. It does no harm to draw attention to these issues because people sometimes cause noise nuisance unintentionally, and a little thought and awareness can solve the problem.

We will soon be announcing the outcome of the three pieces of research that have been mentioned. The purpose of the noise attitudes survey is to ascertain the attitudes of the public to various types of noise as it affects them in their homes and the surrounding neighbourhood. The survey is a follow-up to a similar one carried out in 1991. It utilises two questionnaires and will enable a direct assessment to be made of changes in attitudes.

A parallel national noise incidence survey is also being carried out to determine the noise climate through measurements. The results of that will be compared to a

similar survey conducted in 1990-91 to determine whether there have been major changes to trends in the noise climate. We need to take those issues into account, and they will influence our response. Both those studies represent the largest of their kind undertaken in the UK. Both studies have been extended to cover Scotland and Northern Ireland, and taken together their results will inform the debate about how noise impacts on our communities and how the public respond to it.

In addition, we have commissioned research to help us to understand how other EU states deal with noise complaints and what effective procedures are used to resolve any noise problems identified. We want to establish what good practice is used which may be applicable in this country.

The hon. Member for Colchester has raised a serious issue thoughtfully and comprehensively. I hope that my response shows that we as a Government take it seriously and that we are trying to deal with it through a range of actions. Local council environmental health officers, supported by the police, are on the front line. I pay tribute to their thorough work, which is often carried out in difficult circumstances, but is often highly successful. We intend to give them the tools and the powers they need to do that job, and we are consulting on the best means of doing so. I assure the hon. Gentleman that we will take into account the points he has made tonight in future considerations.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-five minutes past Seven o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 25 March 2002

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Tourism

1. **Mr. Peter Luff** (Mid-Worcestershire): If she will make a statement on her policies to promote tourism to England. [43142]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tessa Jowell): I am sure that the House will join me in recognising that the achievement of the British film industry at last night's oscar award ceremony is a great shot in the arm for tourism. Our congratulations therefore go to Julian Fellowes, for best original screenplay for "Gosford Park"; to Jim Broadbent for his supporting role in "Iris"; and to Peter Owen for the best make-up award for "The Lord of the Rings: the Fellowship of the Ring".

On the substance of the hon. Gentleman's question, we recognise the importance of tourism to the economy and the problems that it faced in 2001, so we are working closely with the industry on a programme to accelerate its recovery, which focuses in particular on raising quality, improving training and skills, strengthening data and marketing England's many wonderful tourism attractions.

Mr. Luff: Notwithstanding Jim Broadbent's splendid performance in "Iris", I suspect that the oscars will be a rather bigger shot in the arm for the New Zealand tourism industry, bearing in mind the location of "The Lord of the Rings".

The Heart of England tourist board represents my constituency. From a rather arbitrary glance at a group of other counties, it seems that it does not do a bad job representing that really difficult brand against the very stiff competition of Scotland and Wales, which are much more powerful brands. When will the Government give England equal footing in tourism promotion with Scotland and Wales?

Tessa Jowell: There are two points to make. First, although England spends less than Wales or Scotland on marketing, the fact is that we do better in terms of the amount of money that visitors spend than they do, so what we spend represents good value for money. However, I take the hon. Gentleman's point that we need to do more beyond the short-term focus on marketing, and my Department is currently in discussion with the English Tourism Council to establish how that will be achieved.

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley): Will my right hon. Friend take on the plight of inland tourism for those constituencies, such as mine, that have had to deal with the problems of foot and mouth disease? The local authority is dependent on the millions of people who visit Chorley, so I wonder whether extra resources are available so that we can ensure that there is not a decrease in tourism this year, but a peak.

Tessa Jowell: I thank my hon. Friend. Obviously, the million visitor campaign that I announced to the House last month, which is worth £40 million, will provide an enormous boost to help the United Kingdom tourism industry to get back the high numbers of visitors from abroad—particularly, from America—that have fallen sharply in the wake of the events of 11 September. However, the industry is optimistic, and we are working with it to deliver on that optimism.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): I am sure that the right hon. Lady would want to join me in expressing the hope that our tourism industry has a very successful Easter season over the weekend and the few days ahead, but is she aware of the widespread concern, in rural and urban areas alike, about the impact of any recurrence of foot and mouth disease? Can she tell us what strategy the Government have to deal with any new outbreak? Is she aware that it is strongly rumoured that the Government plan to merge the regional tourist boards into the regional development agencies? Will she take this opportunity to confirm that that is not the case and say when, at long last, she will announce a market function for the English Tourism Council?

Tessa Jowell: The answer to the hon. Gentleman's first question is yes. The answer to his second question is that we are liaising very closely on the issue with our colleagues at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. The answer to the third question is no.

Digital Television

2. **John Robertson** (Glasgow, Anniesland): What action she is taking to ensure equality of access to digital television. [43143]

The Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting (Dr. Kim Howells): The digital action plan, which was drawn up with the involvement and agreement of major players, sets out the Government's proposals to encourage the take-up of digital television by making it more accessible and the equipment and technology more available and, of course, affordable. The plan was published last December, and so far more than 8 million households in the United Kingdom are connected to digital services on a fee-paying basis.

John Robertson: I thank my hon. Friend for his answer. Does he agree that it is vital that we have three solid platforms for digital television in the United Kingdom, if only to supply a service and provide value for money for the consumer? In the light of ITV Digital's

problems, will he ensure that the communications Bill, when introduced, promotes healthy competition, thus ensuring consumer choice and value for money?

Dr. Howells: Yes, I can confirm that the communications Bill will be designed to promote healthy competition. Hopefully, it will maintain a number of platforms for digital broadcasting because we believe that that is important.

Nick Harvey (North Devon): Will not the difficulties of ITV Digital and the impracticality of putting cable into rural areas leave BSkyB in a strong market position, which the competition authorities have already suggested it is abusing? Will the Minister use the forthcoming communications Bill to ensure that the platform provider and the service provider are regulated separately? Will he also ensure that everyone gets access to all forms of digital television for a one-off payment without subscribing to services that they often do not want?

Dr. Howells: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will not mind if I say that the Bill is to be published in just a few weeks. If he can wait that long, he will, I hope, be pleased with its comprehensive nature. The Bill will be put out to full consultation, so he will have plenty of time to raise any specific points.

Mr. Chris Bryant (Rhondda): My hon. Friend will know that although it would be a delight to have universal access to all forms of digital television immediately, it will be difficult to achieve that without exalting every valley and laying low every mountain. Bearing in mind many people's worries about the future of ITV Digital, what plans do the Government have to ensure that some form of digital terrestrial television survives so that everyone has not only universal access to digital television, but universal choice?

Dr. Howells: The Government have correctly maintained a platform-neutral position on digital broadcasting and services, and we aim to stick to that. I am sure that my hon. Friend will agree that during the Ofcom debate the House became well acquainted with the problem posed by a large number of people living in hilly topography, and we are looking closely at that.

Mr. Tim Yeo (South Suffolk): If the Minister is not aware of the fact that the survival of ITV Digital can be only a matter of days, he should be. Talk about what the communications Bill, which will not become law until next year, may do is pie in the sky. The success of digital terrestrial television depends on a proper element of competition between at least three providers. Does the Minister have any immediate plans to achieve that in the next few weeks?

Dr. Howells: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman does not mean to speculate on this subject. He knows how sensitive the issue can be for the value of shares in the relevant companies, for example. I have no more intention of speculating on the likely outcome of discussions involving ITV Digital than I have on the likely date of the next revival in Welsh rugby.

Mr. Yeo: That certainly is a long way off, and the problem of ITV Digital is more serious and urgent. It is not a matter of speculating about what will happen to ITV Digital. Everyone is aware of the acute problems that it faces, and the Minister has just told the House that the Government have no strategy to address them. Does he understand that the survival of ITV Digital has been made much more difficult by the Government's failure to set a clear timetable for digital switchover, to turn up the digital signal and to modernise the media ownership rules, as my ten-minute Bill would have done a couple of weeks ago? Does he agree that dithering by Ministers on all the issues is leading rapidly to a disaster for ITV Digital subscribers and for football, and is a huge setback for Britain, which had the chance to lead the world in digital television until Ministers set about squandering it?

Dr. Howells: That rant serves only to undermine further the position of some important companies in this country. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will not take such stupid speculation outside the Chamber.

Mr. Derek Wyatt (Sittingbourne and Sheppey): It is serious if the digital platform goes. Sky was originally going to be an investor in digital terrestrial television. Is that a possibility if the box itself is controlled by the new Ofcom status?

Dr. Howells: We will present our plans for regulation when we publish our communications Bill, which, as I said, will be soon.

King Edward VII Convalescent Home, Osborne

3. **Mr. Andrew Turner** (Isle of Wight): What the intended use is of the former King Edward VII Convalescent Home for Officers, Osborne. [43144]

The Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting (Dr. Kim Howells): We are currently considering a range of options with English Heritage. These include using the lower floors to enhance visitors' appreciation of the house and the estate, using the upper floors for holiday lets and conferences, and opening parts of the gardens previously restricted to convalescent home use.

Mr. Turner: I thank the Minister for that answer. Since the Government took the decision, which is much regretted on the island, to close the convalescent home more than two years ago, nothing appears to have happened. How are the Government complying with the requirement of the Osborne Estates Acts 1902 and 1914, which state:

"As a memorial to Her late Majesty"—

that is Queen Victoria—the Government

"shall devote the rest of Osborne House and the grounds under their management to be used for the benefit of officers of His Majesty's naval and military forces or their wives, widows or family"?

That was subsequently extended to include other branches of the public service. I have had many answers from the Government saying that they are considering the matter; when will they comply with the law on this matter?

Dr. Howells: I do not believe that that is the law on the matter. English Heritage is undertaking external repairs to the property. That work has been delayed, and we estimate that it will be completed by December 2003.

We are talking about a facility on the Isle of Wight. Most people recovering from serious illnesses or operations want to be cared for near their home and their family, and that is where the provision is being made.

Gambling

4. **Mr. Mark Hoban** (Fareham): When the Government plan to bring forward legislation on gambling. [43145]

The Minister for Sport (Mr. Richard Caborn): May I begin by expressing the shock and sadness felt, I believe, throughout the House on the tragic death of Ben Hollioake, the Surrey and England all-rounder? I would like, if I may, to send our sincere condolences to the family. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has today written to the family. Many would say that this accident has robbed us of one of our brightest young talents.

In answer to the question, we shall publish tomorrow a document setting out the Government's conclusions on the report of the gambling review body. It will include proposals for comprehensive modernisation of the law on gambling in Great Britain. We shall introduce a Bill when parliamentary time permits.

Mr. Hoban: I am grateful to the Minister for that answer, and I look forward to seeing him in the Chamber tomorrow when he makes an oral statement on the content of his proposals. The House will expect him to make that statement because of the enormous importance of the proposals to the gambling industry. Will he take this opportunity today to confirm to the House that his plans will safeguard the future of the jackpot machines on which so many members' clubs depend for their survival?

Mr. Caborn: There will be a debate on the document and the Bill in Government time. It is right that the document is printed tomorrow and that Members have time to reflect on the proposals. As the hon. Gentleman said, the document is a comprehensive response to the Budd report, so it would be wrong to have that discussion tomorrow. We believe that there should be a full debate in Government time, and that will be arranged.

The hon. Gentleman is right to draw attention to jackpot machines. Many of my hon. Friends, including my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-East (Mr. Turner), have campaigned very hard to retain jackpot machines in members' clubs. That has been considered very sympathetically, and we have decided to keep them because of the strong representations that have been made and because of the role that the clubs play in the social infrastructure in the areas where they operate.

Syd Rapson (Portsmouth, North): Will the Minister consider carefully the effects of the proposals on the mostly family-run seaside fairgrounds and arcades? These are places of wholesome entertainment, not gambling addiction.

Mr. Caborn: That highlights the need to publish the document and let Members reflect on it. We shall have a thorough debate on it in Government time, and I hope that what my hon. Friend hears tomorrow will be helpful to him.

Mrs. Joan Humble (Blackpool, North and Fleetwood): Will my right hon. Friend consider carefully the proposals for resort casinos contained in the report, and recognise that while they offer enormous opportunities for a town like Blackpool, some sections of the community are genuinely concerned? Will he ensure that there is full consultation on those important proposals with local communities, especially in towns such as Blackpool?

Mr. Caborn: My hon. Friend knows that the issue was raised in the Budd report; the Government will state their position in their response. The gambling industry is extremely important: it employs 125,000 people, has a turnover of £7 billion, and contributes in excess of £1 billion to this country's tax revenues. It is therefore important that we get our policy right. When hon. Members have read the document published tomorrow, they will take a view and we will debate the matter in the House.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): It is good news that a full response to the Budd report is to be published tomorrow. Will the Minister confirm that as the Government's proposals develop from a response to the report and into a Bill, he will hold further consultation with the leaders of the reputable parts of that important industry, in particular the British Amusement Catering Trades Association?

Mr. Caborn: Yes. We have consulted the industry, including BACTA and many others who have a vested interest, to make sure that we deal with the gambling industry in a way that enables its potential to be realised, while ensuring that we keep the controls and restraints that have given the UK gambling industry its international credibility. We shall maintain a close working relationship and consultation with those who have a vested interest.

National Lottery

5. **Mr. Jim Cunningham** (Coventry, South): If she will make a statement on the progress being made to ensure a fairer distribution of lottery funds following the introduction of the fair shares policy. [43146]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tessa Jowell): Fair shares is a major initiative designed to target funding at the deprived areas that have benefited least from the lottery. The Government will continue to encourage lottery distributors to ensure that all parts of the country benefit from lottery funding.

Mr. Cunningham: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. How many and what percentage of applications have been successful, and who decides?

Tessa Jowell: Fair shares is a new programme that is to start at the beginning of April. I announced it to the House two or three weeks ago. It is designed to meet a specific problem—namely, deprived areas that have received less than the average share of lottery funding. I announced a further consultation on the future of lottery

distribution last week. I believe that we will go further and take steps through the distributors to ensure that every part of the country receives the entitlement to lottery funding that those throughout the country who play the lottery have the right to expect.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): The Secretary of State will be aware that one of the cardinal principles stated in the 1997 White Paper on the lottery was that it should be operated through an arm's-length procedure, free from Government interference. The lottery has now operated for several years with a surplus of several billion pounds, but that money has been tied up with red tape, with the result that worthy applicants cannot access the funds. That gives the lottery a thoroughly bad name. Will the right hon. Lady investigate and ensure that the bureaucracy and red tape binding the lottery are rapidly diminished so that applicants can get the money that they deserve?

Tessa Jowell: The hon. Gentleman confuses several points in his question. I assume that he is referring to lottery balances—the money held in the national lottery distribution fund on behalf of the distributors. Almost all this money is overcommitted: it awaits distribution to specific approved projects.

There are delays in getting the money out. Two weeks ago I announced to the House the objective, agreed with the lottery distributors, of ensuring that current lottery balances—in excess of £3 billion—should be reduced by one half by 2004. The distributors are signed up to that objective. I believe that it will be an important way of maintaining public confidence in the lottery—confidence that the public's money is being well spent—and that people will continue to play.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): Is it not the case that the west midlands and east midlands have been poorly treated in relation to lottery distribution? If and when the Wembley project fails next month, as it deserves to, would not a way of bridging the gap be to reallocate the project immediately, preferably to Coventry or perhaps to Birmingham? Did my right hon. Friend see the comments in the *Evening Standard* next week about Wembley? The *Standard* said:

"The transport links are dreadful, the surroundings grim, the whole area unequipped to handle major sporting events. It is nostalgia gone mad."

Does my right hon. Friend agree with the comments of that London-based journalist?

Tessa Jowell: Let me take issue with my hon. Friend on both parts of his question. First, it is not the case that the east midlands and west midlands have done badly from the lottery. Parts of the west midlands have certainly received less than their fair share; they are among the 51 areas that will benefit from the fair shares programme. On my hon. Friend's second point, the development of the Wembley stadium is a Football Association project, funded by the lottery. It is not for Government to intervene and pull the plug or anything else on a national stadium project that we hope will succeed.

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): Although I wish the fair shares initiative success, will the Secretary of State take the opportunity to say that it will not prejudice in any way the quality or worthiness of applications for lottery funding? Will she give an assurance, for which my hon. Friend the Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) was asking, that there is a strong case for making applications simpler? I was involved with one on behalf of a charitable trust; we experienced extraordinary difficulties in seeking to apply for funds for a particular project.

Tessa Jowell: The hon. Gentleman is right; it is important to be vigilant about reducing bureaucracy. That was one of the points in the proposals that I set out last week, and includes lottery distributors being more collaborative and working together to enable local community groups and other organisations that wish to submit bids that do not fit clearly with one distributor to do so. The awards for all scheme is a good example of that kind of collaboration.

Mr. Ian Davidson (Glasgow, Pollok): Given the dispute between English Members about the site of a new football stadium, does the Secretary of State agree that it would be better if money were saved and teams were invited to play in Glasgow or Cardiff, where they would be assured of a warm welcome? The money thus saved could be spent in areas like my own, where many constituents have particular difficulty with the complexity of the forms. Ordinary working-class volunteers find it immensely difficult to fill in all the forms and jump through all the hoops, which deters many of them from making an application. Does the Secretary of State agree that it would be far better not to waste that money in England but to spend it in Glasgow instead?

Tessa Jowell: I note my hon. Friend's observation. I only add that yes, of course much more can be done by the distributors to solicit applications from parts of the country that have not yet put in bids. I should like to pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Rothwell (Mr. Challen), who has led a group of Members on both sides of the House in driving forward the determination to ensure that every part of the country and every community has the opportunity to benefit from the lottery.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): May I echo the sentiments of the Minister for Sport about the tragic loss of Ben Hollioake, a talented young cricketer whose potential will never be realised?

Last week, at Southwark cathedral, the right hon. Lady made an announcement which, she stated, was extremely important; it is regrettable that a similar statement was not made to the House. In that announcement, she mentioned that lottery funds are £3.5 billion underspent. Precisely how will that be allocated? Will the fair shares policy mean that there will be fairer distribution of those funds? Can she guarantee that they will be distributed in an objective, non-partisan and apolitical way, and that a balance will be reached, as she promised the House, between urban and rural areas, as rural areas have lost out greatly in the distribution of lottery funds?

Tessa Jowell: May I try to clear up some confusion that the hon. Lady clearly has, which she also had when she spoke on behalf of her Front-Bench colleague, the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo), in the debate

two or three weeks ago? Money in the lottery balances is not underspent. It is money that has been committed to projects, but that has not yet been spent. It is not free and unallocated; it is waiting to be spent—on projects under the fair shares policy, in coalfield communities, and so forth.

I have made absolutely clear the Government's determination to bring pressure to bear on the distributors to ensure that the level of lottery balance, which I believe to be unacceptably high, is halved over the next two years.

Mr. Bill Tynan (Hamilton, South): My right hon. Friend will be aware that Hamilton receives one of the lowest amounts of lottery funding. Therefore, on behalf of my constituents, I thank her for including south Lanarkshire in the group that will be targeted under the fair shares policy. What kind of publicity will there be to ensure that local charitable organisations are given the opportunity to apply? If there is such a campaign, when will it run?

Tessa Jowell: My hon. Friend raises an important point. This is a matter for the lottery distributors, but he touches on an important gap. In deprived communities particularly, where there are not large numbers of voluntary organisations and active civic organisations, there is often simply not enough awareness of how the lottery works, how it can be accessed and what it can do. It is that information gap that we need to overcome. That will in turn ensure that our objective of every community benefiting from the lottery will be achieved.

Ofcom

6. **Mr. Philip Hammond** (Runnymede and Weybridge): What representations she has received from the existing regulators with regard to the shadow Ofcom. [43147]

The Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting (Dr. Kim Howells): All the existing regulators have welcomed the proposal to establish the Office of Communications and have been working closely with my Department and the Department for Trade and Industry on setting up the new body.

Mr. Hammond: I am sure that the Minister would agree with me that part of the point of setting up Ofcom is to have a genuinely new body that is focused on the converged world and is a product of that converged world. Does he share any of my concerns about the fact that the communications Bill is being developed with a large input from the existing regulators' staff, who are uncertain of their status and even of whether they will still be employed under the new regime? Is he entirely confident that that level of input from the old regime is the best way to develop a regulatory regime for the future?

Dr. Howells: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will take it from me that we are not being overly influenced by existing regulators or by any influence that they care to bring to bear on the debate. We have tried to consult as widely as possible, and once we have published the Bill there will be a period of about three months for further consultation. I very much hope that everyone—existing regulators as well as everyone else involved in the industry—will contribute to that consultation, and I am very confident that they will. We have very few opportunities in a generation to make a good job of regulation, as I am confident we will under the Bill.

Ms Debra Shipley (Stourbridge): Will my hon. Friend take it from me that when the chief executive of the regulatory body for the Independent Television Commission appeared before the Culture, Media and Sport Committee on which I serve, she was extremely weak? Very disappointingly, she knew very little about children and advertising—a subject on which more than 120 Members have supported a ban for the under-fives. Furthermore, does he accept that there is a clash between what the Department of Health is promoting for children and health, and what the Department for Culture, Media and Sport is allowing in terms of advertising aimed at children? As we have seriously obese children in this country, that is a very serious topic.

Dr. Howells: I have read my hon. Friend's early-day motion on the subject. I understand that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State met her to discuss the matter.

National Lottery

7. **Sir Teddy Taylor** (Rochford and Southend, East): What the total sum of unclaimed lottery prizes was at the most recent date for which figures are available; and what is the largest single unclaimed amount. [43148]

The Minister for Sport (Mr. Richard Caborn): The total of unclaimed national lottery prizes was £455.6 million as at 19 March, and the largest single unclaimed amount was just over £3 million.

Sir Teddy Taylor: While we should all be grateful to the national lottery for raising about £3 million every day for worthy causes over the past eight years, do not the Government and Camelot think that an inquiry should be made into why so many people do not claim their lottery prizes? Is there a case for putting a public notice at the place where tickets are sold if there is an unclaimed prize of £1,000 or more? Does the Minister accept that his figures are startling and that we should do something about the matter?

Mr. Caborn: The hon. Gentleman has a point, and I will raise it with Camelot. No one wants to see prizes unclaimed. When I saw the figures, I thought that they were staggering. There is nearly £500 million of unclaimed prize money. However, the rules are in place. If the ticket is lost or has been stolen, a claim can be made within 30 days. A claim can be made within 180 days if the claimant has the ticket. There is accommodation for late claiming. If a ticket has been lost or burnt in a fire, for example, that is catered for by the rules.

I take the hon. Gentleman's point and I will ask Camelot whether it can put notices in shops—

Mr. Chris Bryant (Rhondda): Has the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir Teddy Taylor) lost his ticket?

Mr. Caborn: No, I do not think so, but I will raise that with Camelot.

Andy Burnham (Leigh): If there is unclaimed lottery money, amateur rugby league clubs—Leigh has some of the best in the country—would gladly take it off my right hon. Friend's hands and make use of it. To date, rugby league at the grass roots has received only £12 million from the £1 billion or more in the sports lottery fund—less than a third of the money given to rugby union. Does he agree that rugby league is owed more from the lottery? Does he further agree that giving money to amateur rugby league clubs would be one of the best ways of fulfilling the Government's objective—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The question is about prizes, not distribution.

Television Drama (Impartiality)

8. **Dr. Julian Lewis** (New Forest, East): If she will make a statement on the requirement of broadcasting legislation that television drama based on recent historical events should be treated with due impartiality. [43149]

The Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting (Dr. Kim Howells): The BBC, under the BBC charter and agreement, and other broadcasters under the Broadcasting Act 1996, are required to preserve due impartiality as respects matters of political or industrial controversy or those relating to current public policy. Those general requirements would apply, if relevant, to drama based on recent historical events.

Dr. Lewis: I thank the Minister for that excellent reply, which is absolutely right. Will he join me in giving a pat on the back to the BBC for its decision, at last, to broadcast "The Falklands Play" by the distinguished playwright, Ian Curteis, on the 20th anniversary of the Falklands crisis, both on BBC Radio 4 and on the new BBC 4 digital television channel?

Does the hon. Gentleman recall the contrast when 15 years ago the same play was shelved by the bosses at the BBC because it presented the then Prime Minister in what they regarded as too favourable a light? Does he agree that when the play is broadcast on the new digital channel, and if it is well received, it would make amends if it were at last to be broadcast on BBC 1?

Dr. Howells: I believe that the right authorities for deciding what should be shown on television are the television companies and the owners. The House would be a very poor place in which to make decisions on what should or should not be on television.

I am glad that the play is to be shown. I understand that a radio version is to be broadcast. I hope that there will be a good and fulsome debate on the play, which will provoke further discussion on that type of controversial drama. I am entirely in favour of it.

Miss Anne Begg (Aberdeen, South): I am glad that the Minister said that it is not the role of Government to interfere in the creative process. They should be cautious about increasing any type of regulation, because it smacks of censorship. It must be up to the broadcasters to decide what is broadcast. It is important that we allow our playwrights to dramatise events that may have occurred in the recent past. We often get a greater understanding of motivations and events through dramatisation, which may be slightly fictionalised.

Dr. Howells: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend.

Music Industry

10. **Mike Gapes** (Ilford, South): If she will make a statement on her Department's support for the British music industry. [43151]

The Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting (Dr. Kim Howells): We can be rightly proud of the quality of music produced in this country, and I fully recognise the enormous cultural and economic value that the industry represents. We are working closely with the industry to ensure its continued success at home and abroad.

Mike Gapes: I am grateful for that reply. Does my hon. Friend agree that there is enormous diversity in music in this country, from folk music to jazz, from classical music to garage—*[Laughter.]* I had to mention garage for my daughter. Does he agree that it is important that we take account not only of the producers and publishers of music but of the interests of those that distribute music, including companies such as Britannia in my constituency, which plays a vital role in distributing every day the largest range of music as widely as possible, both in this country and abroad through exports?

Dr. Howells: Britannia does an excellent job in distributing music. The music industry faces a great problem with distribution. A great part of society has a strange attitude towards what amounts to the stealing of intellectual property rights from musicians, composers, orchestras and so on through the internet. Napster was a classic example. It is important that we try to change those attitudes and that culture. The distributors have an important part to play in that. They must not only go about the business of distributing and selling music—and indeed of commissioning and promoting it—but move beyond that to try to convince young people that if we cut off its creative roots, music will not be available to buy in future.

Pete Wishart (North Tayside): It will not have escaped the Minister's attention that EMI faces difficulties: it is to shed some 1,800 jobs. That seems symptomatic of the music business, whose situation can only be described as patchy. May I press the Minister further on what he and his Department intend to do about the vexed issue of music piracy? As he knows, the music industry has identified it as a very real and damaging issue.

Dr. Howells: Over the past few years, we have worked to try to pull together all the enforcement agencies, from trading standards officers to the special police forces that the owners of intellectual property rights, especially the big recording companies, have set up, to try to track down the thieves who are rather romantically called pirates.

They are thieves. They are taking away the only source of revenue of one of our most important industries: it is worth perhaps £4.5 billion to this country and employs a lot of people. It is important that we do not lose impetus in taking these thieves on, tracking them down, punishing them and stopping their activities wherever they happen. That means that we must move across borders and continents.

Golden Jubilee

11. **Mr. Mike Hall** (Weaver Vale): What meetings she has held with officials at Buckingham palace regarding the celebrations for the Queen's golden jubilee. [43152]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tessa Jowell): I have had a number of meetings since taking over responsibility for the jubilee celebrations. My officials are in contact with the palace on a daily basis.

Mr. Hall: May I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to the international fun in athletics team event on 5 July in the millennium stadium in Cardiff, organised by UK Athletics under the leadership of my good friend, George Bunner? It will bring teams from the UK and South Africa together in a decathlon event that will have worldwide coverage and be a great way of celebrating the Queen's golden jubilee. Does my right hon. Friend agree that it will be a great vehicle to export the idea of the jubilee across the Commonwealth?

Tessa Jowell: That is but one opportunity, and it chimes well with the themes of the jubilee that the Queen has set and that are very much shaping the planning of events over the jubilee weekend and throughout the rest of the year.

ELECTORAL COMMISSION COMMITTEE

The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, was asked—

Voting Age

29. **Bob Spink** (Castle Point): What recent discussions the Electoral Commission has had with the Government on the reduction of the minimum age for voting. [43172]

Mr. A. J. Beith (representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission): The commission has been working closely with the Government's children and young people's unit on the "Y vote, Y not?" project, which is consulting young people about measures to encourage increased participation in elections. One suggestion is to reduce the minimum voting age. The commission has told the Government that it intends in due course to reconsider that as part of its programme of reviewing electoral law and practice.

Bob Spink: I am delighted by that reply, which represents a sound way forward. The right hon. Gentleman will know of the public's disenchantment with politics in general and of young people's disengagement in particular. It is right that we should consult widely with young people in considering that important issue.

Mr. Beith: The commission will note with interest the hon. Gentleman's comments, which are somewhat in line with my own views.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): If we are asking people to fight in Afghanistan at the age of 19, should not we think about allowing them to vote at 16?

Mr. Beith: I cannot disagree with the hon. Gentleman, but the commission has to take into account a variety of views. Several different views are represented even within the Government.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): Will the right hon. Gentleman take in one of those views now? Although it is absolutely correct to encourage young people to take an interest and participate in voting, many people feel that it would not be sensible to reduce the minimum voting age.

Mr. Beith: The hon. Gentleman's different point of view will have been noted by the commission.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

The hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, was asked—

Sex Discrimination Act

30. **Mr. Huw Edwards** (Monmouth): What recent discussions the Church Commissioners have had to bring the Church of England within the jurisdiction of the Sex Discrimination Act 1975. [43173]

Mr. Stuart Bell (Second Church Estates Commissioner, representing the Church Commissioners): Although there is no general exemption in the Sex Discrimination Act for the Church of England, the Act contains a limited exemption for cases where that is necessary to comply with a religious body's doctrines or to avoid offending the religious susceptibilities of a significant number of its members.

Mr. Edwards: My hon. Friend will appreciate that in Wales the ordination of women happened even later than in England. Does he agree that if the Church is to be relevant to modern society, women and men should have access to all jobs regardless?

Mr. Bell: The national Church institutions have a comprehensive equal opportunities policy that applies to all their employees and a rolling programme of diversity awareness training for staff. As regards the ordination of women priests, the Church aims to follow best practice in so far as the provisions of employment law apply.

Church Maintenance

32. **Mr. Andrew Mitchell** (Sutton Coldfield): What steps the Church Commissioners are taking to encourage individual parochial church councils to undertake maintenance of church buildings. [43175]

Mr. Stuart Bell (Second Church Estates Commissioner, representing the Church Commissioners): Parishes can draw upon the advice of the Council for the Care of Churches but need no encouragement, if money can be found, to maintain or repair our nation's churches, the general condition of which are a credit to the work that they carry out.

Mr. Mitchell: I agree with the hon. Gentleman, but does he accept that the problem rests principally on rural churches, where there are particularly sparse congregations, and on some of our great inner-city churches, where the local congregations are not as wealthy as in other areas? Will he reflect, with me, on the joy and pleasure in the royal town of Sutton Coldfield that our town church, which needed to raise £70,000 for roof repairs, has been successful in raising that money by various means, not least the generosity and good sense of my constituents?

Mr. Bell: The hon. Gentleman makes a pertinent point. Demographic changes mean that there are churches where there is no population. A diminution in traditional building skills means that simple works cost disproportionately more than in the past. We welcome his statement about his church in Sutton Coldfield. He is right: by virtue of huge voluntary fund-raising efforts by churchgoers, friends associations, local communities and others, and to a lesser extent the welcome support of the state, such costs are being met in the manner to which he referred.

Hunting

33. **Mr. Gordon Prentice** (Pendle): How many accidents involving hunting with dogs on Church lands have been notified to them since 1995. [43176]

Mr. Stuart Bell (Second Church Estates Commissioner, representing the Church Commissioners): None.

Mr. Prentice: Is there an obligation on the tenants of Church land to report accidents to the Church Commissioners and if not, why not? Is not it about time that the Church of England showed some moral leadership on the issue and banned hunting with dogs on its land? Finally—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has put two supplementary questions. He is only entitled to one.

Mr. Bell: I am grateful to you for your protection, Mr. Speaker. Two in a court of law is quite sufficient; three in the House of Commons is overwhelming.

Any accidents on Church land would be referred to the Church Commissioners. In relation to foxhunting on Church land, existing tenancies may not be altered unilaterally but it may be possible to make provisions in new tenancies. The enforcement of any ban on foxhunting by the commissioners as landlords would be difficult and could undermine our relationship with tenants.

I notice that my hon. Friend the Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks) is in the Chamber. The Church Commissioners will support and follow any legislation that is passed in both Houses of Parliament.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): Will the hon. Gentleman tell the House what consultation has been held with tenants of Church land as to whether they are in favour of hunting with hounds?

Mr. Bell: The position of the Church Commissioners is that our long-standing policy on foxhunting is to allow our tenants to follow their consciences in deciding whether to allow hunts on the land that we entrust to their care.

Mr. Tony Banks (West Ham): A number of clergy support hunting. Does my hon. Friend think it strange that so-called men of God should take pleasure from seeing one of God's creatures ripped to pieces for their fun?

Mr. Bell: That was a short question. The Church recognises many differences on theological issues and many differences on foxhunting.

ELECTORAL COMMISSION COMMITTEE

The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, was asked—

Voter Participation

34. **Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff, West): What consideration the Electoral Commission has given to the use of incentives to encourage voter participation in elections. [43177]

Mr. A. J. Beith (representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission): Consideration of the use of financial or other individual incentives to encourage voter participation is not currently part of the commission's planned review programme. However, I understand that the commission gave evidence to the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions earlier this year on a proposal from Blackburn with Darwen council for a pilot scheme linked to the May 2002 local elections that would have involved entering all electors in a prize draw. The commission concluded that the proposed scheme did not fall within the legal framework for electoral pilot schemes set out in the Representation of the People Act 2000.

Kevin Brennan: Rather than considering ideas such as compulsory voting, would not it be better to offer incentives for people to vote? Perhaps we could have a good citizens tax credit or a free lottery ticket—as in the suggestion described by the right hon. Gentleman—on the basis that, for citizenship, the carrot would be better than the stick.

Mr. Beith: The hon. Gentleman is entitled to his view but I believe that such proposals would face many legal and some ethical obstacles. Several other pieces of legislation might bear on them. As I said, the Electoral Commission has no current plans to conduct a review on the feasibility of introducing such proposals, but is considering a wide range of initiatives to encourage voter participation and to make the process of voting more accessible and user-friendly.

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, for those for whom financial incentives are beyond the pale, a cheap—indeed, free—incentive would be to allow voters to vote at any polling station? In this age of modern technology, it must be possible for lists to be available at any polling station. Would the commission look into that?

Mr. Beith: The commission is looking into the possibility of voters being able to vote at more than one polling station.

Political Parties (Donations)

36. **Martin Linton** (Battersea): Whether it has asked the Electoral Commission to report on the desirability of an upper limit on donations from private individuals to political parties. [43179]

Mr. A. J. Beith (representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission): The Committee is not responsible for determining the Electoral Commission's work programme. Accordingly, we have made no request to the commission to report on the desirability of an upper limit on donations from private individuals to political parties, nor do we have any plans to do so. However, in its 2001 report on the general election, the commission stated its intention to look at the case for introducing a cap on party donations as part of a wider examination of state funding

Martin Linton: In welcoming that reply, may I draw the right hon. Gentleman's attention to the problems created by large donations, even when the motives of donor and recipient are pure? Such donations often create the perception that parties will feel beholden to donors. Will he ask the Electoral Commission to examine the early-day motion on that subject, through which many hon. Members have expressed support for a limit of £100,000? Indeed, some have amended the figure to £20,000. Will he also ask the commission to consider the experience of Quebec, which has had a donations limit of 3,000 dollars for many years?

Mr. Beith: I shall certainly draw the commission's attention to that early-day motion and to that experience. Of course, measures have so far concentrated on transparency and disclosure and the regular reporting of donations by parties.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

The hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, was asked—

Clergy Poverty

39. **Mr. Lindsay Hoyle** (Chorley): If he will make a statement on poverty among clergy members. [43182]

Mr. Stuart Bell (Second Church Estates Commissioner, representing the Church Commissioners): A survey of stipendiary clergy, which considered their financial circumstances, among other matters, was undertaken by the Archbishops Council in 1999. A copy of it and its results is available in the Commons Library.

Mr. Hoyle: My hon. Friend is doubtless well aware of the poverty that affects the clergy throughout this country. A modern society ought to ensure that we pay the clergy, who should not be so dependent on the Church. Can we look forward to their being paid proper salaries with regular increases?

Mr. Bell: About one third of clergy said that they had debts, excluding mortgages, car loans or interest-free credit arrangements. Very few clergy—about 5 per cent.—had applied for, or were intending to apply for, working families tax credit. Fewer than 4 per cent. received any other state benefits, excluding child allowance. However, we of course take on board my hon. Friend's point.

Stipends and Pensions

41. **Sir Sydney Chapman** (Chipping Barnet): If he will make a statement on the contribution made by the Church Commissioners to clergy stipends and pensions. [43184]

Mr. Stuart Bell (Second Church Estates Commissioner, representing the Church Commissioners): I am pleased to see that the hon. Gentleman is again present for Church Commissioners' questions.

For the year ending 31 December 2001, the commissioners contributed £22 million to the stipends of parish clergy, and met bishops and cathedral clergy stipends totalling £7.1 million, of which £900,000 was pensions contributions.

Sir Sydney Chapman: I am grateful to the Second Church Estates Commissioner for that information, but could he also give that answer in percentages of the total? In any case, will he confirm that those figures underline the Church Commissioners' important contribution to clergy stipends and pensions, and that the real lesson is that—within ethical restraints—we should encourage the commissioners to maximise their assets, because they are doing a worthwhile job in a noble way?

Mr. Bell: On percentages and the pensionable stipend, in line with actuarial advice, the contribution rate will rise from 21.9 per cent. to 29.1 per cent. with effect from 1 April, and to 29.5 per cent. from 1 January. The hon. Gentleman's other points are valuable and will certainly be heard in other quarters.

ELECTORAL COMMISSION COMMITTEE

The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, was asked—

Voting Arrangements

43. **Simon Hughes** (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): What reviews the Commission has undertaken into allowing electors to vote at any polling station. [43186]

Mr. A. J. Beith (representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission): The Commission is examining the matter. It has not undertaken a formal review of the principle of allowing electors to choose any polling station at which to vote, but it has declared its intention to press forward an agenda for making voting easier and more user-friendly. As part of that agenda, it will evaluate several pilot schemes during the May 2002 local elections, including a scheme to allow voters to choose from among a number of polling station locations the one at which they want to vote.

Simon Hughes: If I may link my right hon. Friend's answer to the issue of younger voters, will the commission consider locating polling stations in schools with sixth forms and sixth form centres, and in colleges and universities? If we are to get young people to vote, it is much more likely that they will vote if the voting place is somewhere that they have to go during that day.

Mr. Beith: I shall pass on my hon. Friend's interesting suggestions to the Commission.

Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): Will the commission also consider electoral abuse at polling stations, and study my Adjournment debate on 4 July last year about intimidation in polling stations in my constituency at the general election? Will it also consider other abuses, including introducing stricter requirements for enforcing the law on leaflets distributed without imprints and those that tell people not to vote for sitting MPs and that are distributed months before the election?

Mr. Beith: The commission has studied the hon. Gentleman's Adjournment debate, as have I, and I believe that he has met or communicated with the chairman of the commission on those matters. Although the commission is not the prosecuting authority in such matters—it is a matter for the police if an offence has been committed—it reviews the effectiveness of the law and whether any changes are required. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman's efforts are being carefully considered.

Consignia (Restructuring)

3.31 pm

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Ms Patricia Hewitt): I should like to draw the attention of the House to my declaration of interests contained in the register.

With permission, Mr. Speaker, I would like to make a statement on the announcement that Consignia made this morning about its restructuring plan for Parcelforce and the outcome of its review of its distribution systems.

That announcement, although it comes as a blow to many hard-working employees and their families, is the first of several necessary steps that will lead to the renewal of postal services in Britain. As is well known, Consignia plc—the company running the post office network, the Royal Mail and Parcelforce—has been losing money. Its costs have risen at a time when the rate of growth in mail volumes has slowed, with competition from fax, e-mail and the internet affecting demand. The company is losing more than £1.5 million every day and Parcelforce Worldwide alone is losing £15 million a month.

In the 10 years of its existence, Parcelforce has never made a profit and has now amassed losses of close to £400 million. Parcelforce's business model has failed and repeated attempts to make it work over the past 10 years have not succeeded. The losses on parcels have drained investment from the rest of the Post Office. For the sake of the company as a whole, Parcelforce now needs to be restructured and restored to profitability.

It is important to consider how the company got into this position. The British Post Office used to be admired across Europe for its high standards of performance. But in the 1980s and 1990s—*[Interruption.]* Hon. Members should just listen. During those years, other postal services across Europe began to modernise and invest so that they could deliver better services in a rapidly changing market. But successive Conservative Governments did not care about improving delivery. *[Interruption.]* They allowed the Post Office to stagnate and starved it of investment. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Hon. Members must allow the Secretary of State to be heard.

Ms Hewitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It must be all that sea air in Harrogate. *[Laughter.]* Oh go away; they are pathetic. While new technologies and changing markets were transforming the communications sector, our postal services were allowed to drift and decline. *[Interruption.]* I meant bracing air, okay? It must have been the Conservative party leader's speech that over-excited them.

Since 1997, the Government have given the Post Office the greater commercial freedom to meet those challenges that management and unions had long called for. Greater freedom within the public sector has meant freedom for the company to make more commercial choices. But with freedom comes responsibility. The company will be responsible for controlling costs, organising itself to meet the needs of customers and modernising the way in which it works. The Government have a responsibility too—to ensure that the company has the best possible management and the resources needed for investment. In this way we ensure that public and business customers will get the best quality service.

We have already taken several steps to strengthen the management, and today I have announced that Allan Leighton has been appointed the new chair of Consignia, a role that he has been playing on an interim basis since January. He will be responsible for getting a grip on the situation that the company faces, and that involves stemming the losses, reforming the company's industrial relations and developing a new vision and strategy for the future.

Allan Leighton has a proven track record of success in business. I believe that he has the determination, drive and energy needed to transform the Post Office's performance. As the interim chair and as a non-executive director of the company, he has seen at first hand both the problems that exist in the company and the tremendous potential that it has. He has already spent considerable time in sorting offices, post offices and delivery offices around the country and he was out there again this morning, talking to some of the work force about the changes that the company announced today.

The changes are as follows. The first is the integration of the universal parcels service into the Royal Mail itself. Under the universal service obligation, which we have enshrined in legislation, the company is responsible for delivering parcels of up to 20 kg to every part of the country. By giving this responsibility to the Royal Mail, the company will create a more efficient service, safeguarding the 30 million parcels sent by the general public every year so that people will still be able to send parcels from their local post office just as they do now.

Secondly, there will be a radical reshaping of the remaining Parcelforce business, which will in future concentrate on high-value, time-guaranteed express services. Thirdly, there will be changes to the mail distribution system. The existing network of road, rail and air has developed on a piecemeal basis. It has been causing delays, imposing excessive costs and reducing the quality of service to customers. The necessary rationalisation will increase the volume of mail carried by rail. Although the practice of sorting mail on trains will be phased out, bulk mail will be carried by rail during the day. The total number of road journeys undertaken by Royal Mail will be reduced, as will the number of vehicles used, cutting pollution as well as costs. *[Interruption.]* Conservative Members do not care about that, either. Fourthly, the company is stripping out layers of management and jobs in its operations and support services that are no longer needed as a result of the other changes.

The company expects that, together, these changes will mean the loss of 13,000 jobs over the next three years with a further 2,000 jobs going through natural wastage. The company has also made it clear that there will be further unavoidable job losses over the next three years. I will, of course, continue to inform the House as the restructuring of the company is taken forward.

As a contribution towards supporting the company as it restructures, I can also announce that the Government will forgo a dividend for this financial year, releasing an additional £64 million for the company.

I understand the very deep disappointment that postal workers will be feeling at this news today. This is not a decision that the company has taken easily or lightly, but it is unavoidable if we are to create a high-quality postal service that will offer good and secure jobs. I know that

[Ms Hewitt]

the whole House will welcome the fact that the company will offer as many of those affected as possible the option of continued employment in a different part of the business or a voluntary redundancy package. The company is, of course, in discussion with the trade unions. We will do everything that we can through the Employment Service and other agencies to provide support, assistance and new opportunities to those who lose their jobs.

These are difficult times for the company as management and work force grapple with the legacy of underinvestment and poor industrial relations and undertake the changes that are necessary to face the competitive postal markets of the 2lst century. I have made it clear to the new chairman that there needs to be a better partnership relationship between the management and the unions if they are to deliver this. That was recommended by Lord Sawyer in his report published last year, and he believes that there is a genuine commitment to change from all sides in the Post Office and Royal Mail to achieve this. The benefits of that relationship have already been demonstrated since his report was published. Compared with more than 43,000 days lost to unofficial action between April and June last year—that figure itself considerably lower than in the last year of the previous Conservative Government—only 1,352 days were lost to unofficial action in the three months from October to December. That is a tremendous improvement and the whole House will want to see it maintained.

I am confident that the path that we are pursuing is the right one. Greater commercial freedom; strengthened management; universal service enshrined in primary legislation—in other words, a delivery every working day to every address in every part of the country.

Today marks a turning point for the company. In the words of the new chairman, the measures announced today

"will ensure that real progress is made in the first year of a three-year strategy to restore profitability, deliver positive cash flow, improve services and make the business a better place in which to work."

Central to Allan Leighton and the company's task will be the relationship with the regulator. As right hon. and hon. Members will know, the postal regulator recently announced an extension of the consultation period; a welcome response, in no small part, to the concerns expressed in this House. In the coming weeks, Allan Leighton, the company and the regulator must have further talks and reach a shared analysis, both of the company's financial position and of the postal services market.

I know that today's news will come as a blow to many workers. But these changes, painful as they are, are unavoidable. Today must be the first step towards renewal, and towards creating a postal service that justifies the pride, and lives up to the expectations, of the millions of people in Britain who depend upon it every day.

Mr. John Whittingdale (Maldon and East Chelmsford): May I first thank the Secretary of State for giving me an advance copy of her statement?

This afternoon's statement is a humiliation for the Government. Less than two years ago, the then Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Tyneside, North (Mr. Byers)—who will have his own humiliation later this afternoon—said of the Postal Services Bill:

"It will ensure a strong Post Office that is better able to serve all its customers in all parts of the country."—[*Official Report*, 18 April 2000; Vol. 348, c. 940.]

Since then, the business has gone from recording a profit of nearly £400 million to losses currently running at £1.5 million a day. It has seen 547 more sub-post offices close last year alone, and 63,000 days lost in industrial action. Its performance has deteriorated so that it is failing to meet its delivery targets, and estimates put the number of lost items of mail at 1 million every week; although that may be less surprising, having discovered that the Secretary of State thinks that Harrogate is by the sea.

The Secretary of State, incredibly, has tried to claim that somehow it is all the fault of the last Conservative Government, yet this devastating decline has happened in the last two years. Her statement has signally failed to offer any proper explanation for what went wrong in the time since her predecessor was predicting such a golden future for the business.

Is not the truth that the structure for the Post Office created by the Postal Services Act 2000 was, in the words of the Chancellor's then spin doctor, "a dog's breakfast"? Have not the Government failed to give Consignia the full commercial freedom it needed so that, as a result, it has been unable to take the action necessary to modernise due to the constant interference from Ministers, while at the same time, its competitors in Germany and Holland, having been given that freedom, have gone on to become global players? Is not the result that the restructuring and job losses announced this afternoon have been made worse by the Government's abdication of responsibility and failure to act before now?

Turning to Parcelforce, the Secretary of State has said that its business model has failed. Will she confirm that the business model was approved by the Government, who are the 100 per cent. owners of the business? Is it not the case that Parcelforce is operating in a market that is already open to competition? Is it not the case that while its competitors have built up very successful businesses, it has pursued a strategy consisting of a series of disastrous acquisitions costing nearly £750 million over the last five years, in each case approved by the Government at the time the necessary finance was obtained from the Treasury's national loans fund?

Consignia's announcement of 15,000 job losses represents, we are told, just the first phase of restructuring. In her statement, the Secretary of State referred to further unavoidable job losses over the next three years. Can she confirm the reports that the total number of job losses required under Consignia's plans will in fact number anything up to 40,000? Will she say whether any of those will be compulsory redundancies?

The right hon. Lady's statement devoted just three lines to the regulator's proposals to introduce competition into the delivery of postal services, yet that issue will be crucial to the future of the Post Office. It is simply not good enough for the Government to pretend that they have no responsibility for this matter.

Will the right hon. Lady say whether the Government support the introduction of competition? Does she believe that the timetable set out by the regulator is realistic?

Will she consider delaying the full opening up of the market to competition until the restructuring of Consignia has been completed? Will she confirm that whatever happens, the universal service obligation will remain the first requirement on the Post Office, with an affordable uniform tariff?

There have also been reports that the restructuring of Consignia will require the closure of up to 10,000 urban sub-post offices, yet that was not even mentioned by the Secretary of State. Will she say whether that figure is correct? She will also be aware that the majority of those businesses are privately owned small firms that are struggling to survive. Will compensation be paid to those who lose their franchise? How does she intend to deliver on the Prime Minister's pledge that all those who wish to continue to receive benefits in cash will be able to do so if more than half the sub-post office network is closed?

Finally, will the Secretary of State confirm the one bit of good news that has been reported—that the name Consignia is to be consigned to oblivion and that the business will revert to being called the Royal Mail? Is it not the case that the problems of the Post Office are summed up by the time and money that has been spent on rebranding the business with a name that is neither respected nor understood while the fundamental weaknesses have been left unaddressed? Is that not why the Secretary of State had to come to the House today and why 15,000 post office workers, with perhaps another 25,000 to come, are having to pay the price for her and her Government's incompetence?

Ms Hewitt: The hon. Gentleman has worked himself up into a great lather of synthetic fury. He fails to acknowledge that, precisely when the German, French, Dutch and Swedish Post Offices were getting commercial freedom, his Government refused to give the Post Office the commercial freedom in the public sector that the management and unions demanded and Labour Members supported. If the Post Office had been given commercial freedom in the public sector years ago, it would have been able to make the changes and investment that other European postal services were making, yet the Conservative Government refused to allow it to do so. That is the fundamental cause of the problems that have built up over years—years when the Conservative Government failed to invest and reform.

Parcelforce has lost money every year in its 10 years of existence. The Government enabled Parcelforce to make the investments that it needed to make, including the creation of the new distribution hub in Coventry and the track-and-trace technology that will form the basis for the renewed and strengthened company.

There is a great deal more work to be done to deal with the very deep-seated problems in other parts of the business and in our postal services. Allan Leighton has made it clear that, as chairman, he and the management will be taking forward those discussions with the unions and examining every part of the business to see what needs to be done to improve the service for the public, which is fundamentally what we all want. Future job losses will depend on the work that has to be done with the business.

Of course the Government believe first and foremost in the universal service obligation. As the hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale) should be aware, Postcomm's primary duty as the independent regulator is to maintain that obligation. Of course, we believe in competition too, and subject to the duty to maintain the universal service obligation, the regulator's job, as established in the Postal Services Act 2000, is to promote greater choice and competition. The Government support an independent regulator, as did the Communication Workers Union in its submission on the White Paper. It seems that only the Conservative party does not know whether it supports an independent regulator.

Today's statement has nothing whatever to do with the network of post offices, and I am very sorry that the hon. Gentleman has repeated some of the scaremongering that we have heard before from him and some of his colleagues. I again remind the House of what Colin Baker, the general secretary of the National Federation of Sub-Postmasters said:

> "Talk of mass closures is scaremongering and wide of the mark. It is wrong to criticise the industry for being out of date and in decline and then create panic when we are doing something about it."

We are investing both in a compensation scheme for sub-postmasters and in schemes to improve local services.

On the hon. Gentleman's final—and least important—point, the name change was proposed and decided on by management, with the support of the unions, a couple of years ago. I entirely agree with the new chairman's view that the sooner the name goes, the better.

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Ochil): I thank my right hon. Friend for her statement and agree that consideration of the future of Parcelforce is long overdue. It should have been sorted out a long time ago, perhaps being sold off and dealt with once and for all. I welcome the forgoing of the dividend, which will provide the Post Office with additional resources to secure the most flexible redundancy arrangements that can be achieved.

Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the extension by Postcomm of the review period is largely due to the inadequate and inaccurate advice and information provided by Consignia accountants about the nature of the savings that could be achieved, and that Allan Leighton really needs to come in and sort out the Post Office, because most of us are sick and tired of an inadequate and incompetent management that cannot even produce proper financial information to enable the regulator to act effectively?

Ms Hewitt: I entirely agree, especially about the need to sort out Parcelforce. The proposal that the regulator made for opening the market to bulk mails above a certain limit was indeed based on information provided by the company, which has now decided that the figures were wrong. The important issue is that the regulator must, above all, make proposals for market opening that secure the maintaining of the universal service obligation, which is the No. 1 duty under the Postal Services Act. I hope that Allan Leighton and his colleagues will quickly sit down with the regulator to ensure that there is an exchange of accurate information to enable the regulator to make sound and sensible decisions that will secure the universal service obligation.

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): I add my sympathy to that expressed about the 15,000 postmen and women

[Dr. Vincent Cable]

who will lose their jobs. In the Secretary of State's discussions with Mr. Leighton during the past few days, did he specifically tell her that 40,000 redundancies are now in prospect? Was that one of the conditions that he set for his appointment as chairman of Consignia?

I welcome the new dividend policy, which the Liberal Democrat and Conservative parties have sought, but does the Secretary of State agree that £64 million, however welcome, is very small compared with the £2 billion that successive Governments have taken out of the Post Office in the past decade, undermining its ability to compete with the private sector?

Specifically on competition, I welcome the conversion of the Conservative spokesman to slowing the introduction of competition; it was the first statement to that effect that I have heard. Is the Secretary of State now part of that consensus, which seems to affect both sides of the industry and both sides of the House?

Finally, on the transfer of the universal parcel service as part of the universal service obligation, irrespective of whether that service makes a profit or a loss, is Parcelforce transferring a liability or an asset to the Royal Mail? Why is the private sector being introduced into not merely the parcel service, but the mail service, while making no contribution whatever through a levy to the maintenance of the universal service obligation?

Ms Hewitt: First, the conditions of Allan Leighton's appointment have nothing whatever to do with the job losses announced this morning or any that may be announced in future. Any question of future job losses has to do with the necessary modernisation and restructuring of the business. The point that Allan Leighton and I have discussed, which may be of interest to the House, is our agreement that we need to get away from detailed interference by Government and officials in the running of a company to which we have given commercial freedom. When the new strategic plan has been approved, it will be up to the company to deliver on that plan. It will report to us, and I, in turn, will report to the House at appropriate intervals.

The hon. Gentleman is right to draw attention to the enormous dividends that were taken out of the company during the Conservative years, when the dividend was set at 90 per cent. Of course, one of the first steps that we took was to cut that dividend to 40 per cent. As I announced a few moments ago, we will waive that dividend for the current financial year. A decision on dividends for other years, during which we have been in power, will be taken in the context of the strategic plan.

We made our position on competition clear when the Postal Services Act 2000 was introduced. The first and primary policy goal is to sustain the universal service obligation. Competition is valuable, and I would expect the hon. Gentleman to support the introduction of greater choice and competition to benefit consumers.

As for Parcelforce's detailed accounts, as I have said, it has made losses every year since it was established. I do not know how those losses break down between different parts of the Parcelforce business, and I am not at all sure that the company knows.

Mr. Tony Clarke (Northampton, South): I listened carefully to what my right hon. Friend had to say, but does she not consider it to be a matter of gross incompetence that Post Office managers announced the 15,000 redundancies at the same time as they announced that they had got it so badly wrong in wasting £2 million on changing the name to Consignia? Does she not feel that workers in the industry may ask why they should trust their judgment now if they got it so badly wrong then? Furthermore, considering the inevitable instability that there will be in the industry, why cannot the Government tell Postcomm that the unilateral liberalisation of mail at this time, outside that accepted by our European partners, could sound the death knell for the Post Office as we know it today?

Ms Hewitt: As I said, we have taken steps in government to strengthen the management of the Post Office. Even before the appointment of the new chairman, we had secured the appointment of a new finance director to the company, and my hon. Friend the Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness recently announced the appointment of a new chief executive for the post office network. The unions and hon. Members, at least on the Labour Benches, have welcomed that.

On Postcomm, I remind my hon. Friend that when we consulted on the new proposals and the creation of proper commercial freedom within the public sector, the Communication Workers Union said that it wanted a new regulator independent of the Government, on the same basis as Oftel, Ofwat and Ofgas, for instance. That is precisely what we have delivered within the framework of an Act that makes it clear that the No. 1 duty of the regulator—independent though he or she may be—is to secure the universal service. I know that the regulator takes that duty seriously.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): As the Secretary of State knows, the National Audit Office has produced a full report on the subject. Will she say more about Postcomm's proposals for the immediate liberalisation of mail and for achieving full competition by 2006, because those proposals go to the heart of the matter? Consignia accepts the need for competition but is against the timetable laid down by Postcomm, which it says will endanger the company. What timetable does the Secretary of State consider would ensure the survival, growth and profitability of that company and the maintenance of the universal service? Does she accept Postcomm's rationale that it is only by increasing competition to the extent that we have a fully competitive market by 2006 that the company can be saved?

Ms Hewitt: The excellent report by the NAO, to which the hon. Gentleman refers, clearly identifies two risks inherent in the situation. The first is that of introducing too much competition too fast, which might damage and jeopardise the universal service obligation. The second is that of not introducing enough competition, thereby removing from the company an incentive to modernise and to improve its service to its customers.

It is important at this stage for the company and the regulator to sit down and talk to each other, which they have only just begun to do, and to arrive at an agreed view of the company's finances and the nature of the market. On the basis of that analysis, the regulator will arrive at a sensible view of the situation and make a decision about market opening that does not jeopardise

the universal service, but which delivers the benefits to the consumer that I would expect the hon. Gentleman to wish to see.

Mrs. Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside): Can the Secretary of State say whether Allan Leighton has been given complete commercial freedom in relation to urban post offices? Do the Government value urban post offices? How will they protect services to deprived communities in Liverpool and elsewhere, and value post offices and sub-post offices for the services that they provide, as well as for the jobs that they offer?

Ms Hewitt: As someone who represents a number of deprived urban communities, I entirely agree about the importance of the services that local post offices provide in low-income areas, both urban and rural. The fact is that about two thirds of people in urban areas live within half a mile of two or more sub-post offices, many of which are struggling to survive commercially, as we all know from our constituencies. It makes sense for the Post Office to sit down and talk to sub-postmasters, to consider the detailed market within local communities and to produce proposals to rationalise and improve the network of urban post offices. That is what it will do, and it will not make any decisions on closures of any urban sub-post offices until and unless those consultations have taken place.

Mr. Keith Simpson (Mid-Norfolk): The Minister will be aware from the course of the questions that she has been asked this afternoon that the House appears to be unhappy with Consignia's track record. Will she now answer the question put to her by my hon. Friend the Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale) and tell us whether Consignia's business plan, which seems to have failed, was signed off by her predecessor?

Ms Hewitt: I was referring to the business model for Parcelforce, which is the main subject of today's announcement. That model was put in place in 1986, and although it formed part of the previous year's strategic plan, this Government, and my predecessor specifically, noted concern about its viability. I have no doubt that the company is right to grasp this nettle and to recognise that we cannot carry on with a company that is publicly owned and has been given commercial freedom, but which has been losing money for the last 10 years. By integrating the universal parcel service in Royal Mail, which the unions, among others, have been arguing for, we will strengthen the universal service and stem the losses that Parcelforce has been making ever since its business model was established under the Conservative Government.

David Hamilton (Midlothian): Does the Minister understand several points? One is that the work force already accept that restructuring should take place. Parcelforce is an example, and a bad one, of what happens when cherry-picking is allowed to take place throughout an industry.

The Minister spoke about vehicle losses that would take place under restructuring. Is she aware that in urban and semi-rural areas, workers require those vehicles because they are the only vehicles that they have nowadays to get them from one place to another? That is due to the subsidies that were paid, and indeed every local authority has to pay out millions of pounds because of that lot on the Conservative Benches. They sit there and cry crocodile tears over thousands of workers, but that is absolute rubbish. I can understand angry workers in the industry, but can the Minister understand why there will be great anger about what is happening under a Labour Government?

Ms Hewitt: The reorganisation of the transport system is something that the management and the unions have been discussing for some time. We are all familiar with the situation in urban and rural areas where a Royal Mail van that is collecting or delivering mail is rapidly followed by a Parcelforce van delivering parcels. That is not a sensible way to run a business, and by reintegrating the universal parcel service within Royal Mail, the company will be able to manage with fewer vehicles and deliver a better service to customers. Despite the fact that painful job losses will result from that, we should support the better service that will result.

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): Perhaps the only sympathy that one might have for the right hon. Lady stems from the fact that most of these problems have been dumped on her because of the incompetence of her hapless and hopeless predecessor, the right hon. Member for Tyneside, North (Mr. Byers). What plans are there to increase the price of a first-class stamp?

Ms Hewitt: That is a matter for the company and the regulator, and the company may well wish to apply to the regulator for an increase in the price of the stamp. But I do not think, and I hope that this is not what the hon. Gentleman was suggesting, that the problems faced by the loss-making Parcelforce or the inefficiencies inherent in an out-of-date transport system should be dealt with by increasing the price of the stamp paid by the customer.

John Cryer (Hornchurch): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the Post Office has for many years been run with a steadily and steeply declining work force and a management that is vindictive and bullying in the extreme? The job losses that have been announced today and those that will follow from the announcement in the coming years will hit some of the poorest and most vulnerable communities in Britain, including many of the people whom I represent in the London borough of Havering. Is not the only real answer to start to invest properly in the Post Office and even to allow the price of a stamp to rise, which it has not for some time? In addition, we should tell Postcomm and the European Commission, which seem desperately keen to break up the Post Office, to open it up to commercial competition and to end universal service, to get lost and stick their plans.

Ms Hewitt: I agree entirely, and I have said so before in the House, that part of the Post Office's problems are down to poor management and appalling industrial relations in some parts of the country. That situation, for which the union as well as the management bears some responsibility, was well described in Lord Sawyer's report last year. I am glad to say that many of those problems now appear to be behind us and that the union and the company are now committed to partnership working of the sort that is essential in any modern organisation that is to deliver decent customer service and be a good place to work.

[Ms Hewitt]

However, I repeat, today's announcement of job losses, extremely regrettable though they are, has nothing to do with the proposals from the regulator. They are a direct result of a parcels company that has been losing money for 10 years, an out-of-date and inefficient transport system, and inefficiencies in the management and support services—all of which are now being dealt with by new management.

Hywel Williams (Caernarfon): Mr. Allan Leighton, the new chairman of Consignia, is charged with reforming the company's industrial relations. That he begins with 15,000 redundancies is a kick in the teeth for the Communication Workers Union, which has worked hard to improve industrial relations over the past few months.

It is a kick in the teeth for the people of Wales that the depots at Wrexham and Pontypridd are to be closed, leaving only the Swansea depot working. Will the Secretary of State tell us what environmental or commercial sense it makes for parcels to be delivered to the far reaches of my constituency in the Llyn peninsula from Manchester or Liverpool?

Ms Hewitt: As Allan Leighton's announcement made clear, parcels that fall within the universal service will be integrated within the Royal Mail and will therefore use the logistics and delivery system of the Royal Mail as a whole. As for Parcelforce, the only way in which a sensible organisation can be created from the existing loss-making one is to rationalise the distribution system in the way that Allan Leighton proposes.

Kate Hoey (Vauxhall): The Secretary of State says that the regulator Postcomm is independent, but surely the Secretary of State ultimately has overall responsibility for the Post Office. Surely now is the time to discuss with the regulator the nonsense of accelerating the process of opening up to competition, to say that because of the current situation we need more time, and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch (John Cryer) said, to tell the European Union that the process is not something that we can speed up?

Ms Hewitt: The proposals made by the regulator, on which the regulator is consulting, are clearly within the scope of the European directive and are not being imposed on us by the European Commission. However, the independence of the regulator, which was sought by, among others, the union itself, was enshrined in the Postal Services Act 2000, which Labour introduced and supported. Now, the company and the regulator need to sit down and discuss the restructuring needed in the company, of which today's announcement forms a part, and a sensible regulatory framework that will allow the company to go forward and, above all, continue to deliver its universal service obligation. I hope that the regulator and the company will achieve that rapidly.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): I am sure all our constituents are greatly encouraged by the fact that the Minister responsible for mail delivery thinks that Harrogate has a coastline, and even more encouraged to learn that even more of our mail is to go by rail and thus be the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions. Before she prays in aid the National Federation of Sub-Postmasters, which has its headquarters in my constituency, may I remind the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry that that organisation co-ordinated the gathering of 3.5 million signatures in petition in response to her original proposals? She complacently reels off the fact that everybody lives within half a mile of two sub-post offices, but may I remind her that half a mile is well beyond the reach of pensioners in towns such as Worthing, and that many of those sub-post offices are the life-blood of parades of shops in village areas within urban areas, and without those sub-post offices whole communities will quickly fade and die?

Ms Hewitt: I welcome the hon. Gentleman's support for sub-post offices, whether in urban or rural areas; thousands of them closed under the Conservative Government. We have responded to the deterioration in the post office network under the Conservatives with the comprehensive report of the performance and innovation unit, and we have already invested and committed £270 million to investing in the urban and rural networks. Of course, we put a requirement on the company to prevent avoidable closures—something that the hon. Gentleman's Government never did.

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley): I am sure that my right hon. Friend agrees that this is a very sad day for the 15,000 people who are losing their jobs. As the representative of the shareholder—the Government—I hope that she will try to ensure that there are no compulsory job losses and that they will be voluntary. We ought to stop hiding behind the protection of Postcomm, which is not acting for the benefit of the business or the consumer. It needs to be dragged back and told that we ought not to change in advance of our European competitors, as we would face the danger of the same problems that we had with electricity market, where France has still not opened up its market. We keep saying that we will provide a universal service; however, we can do so only if one is profitable.

Ms Hewitt: I entirely agree with what my hon. Friend said about the people who face the prospect of losing their jobs. As the company said, every effort will be made to find alternative employment in other parts of the business for people whose jobs will disappear as a result of the restructuring; the rest will be dealt with, as Allan Leighton said, through voluntary redundancies. When people lose their jobs and take voluntary redundancy, the Employment Service will be ready to help them get new jobs as quickly as possible.

My hon. Friend is of course right that the company must restore its profitability, above all to secure the universal service and a better quality of service for customers. It is for that precise reason that these difficult and painful decisions have been made today; they are in the longer-term interests of the company and its customers.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): What would the Secretary of State say to the postman in the Wokingham sorting office who told me that costs have got out of control on branding, imaging and an increasing number of managers—from three to eight in Wokingham alone—

in recent years? He forecast that the bill would be paid for in job losses and the abolition of the early morning delivery. Despite all that nonsense about the universal service provision, the truth is that the first delivery in the early morning will go. That is the price of failure in spending far too much on branding, logos and more management.

Ms Hewitt: It is pathetic of the right hon. Gentleman to try and suggest that the £2 million spent on the rebranding exercise is the cause of the problem. It turns out to have been a waste of time, but it is certainly not the cause of the enormous problems that the company faces. Much more serious is the fact that costs have not been adequately controlled at a time when the expected growth in mail volumes has simply not been achieved. Let me point out to him that of the redundancies that the company announced today, 4,500 will fall in management and administrative support services.

Mr. Jim Cousins (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): Does my right hon. Friend accept that many of us who supported the introduction of a postal regulator did not anticipate that that would result in throwing post office services into a competition for which investment had not been made? Will she assure the House that there will be investment in the capacity to compete? Will she ensure that people who lose their jobs—most of them will be older workers who will come forward for voluntary redundancy—will be offered flexibility so that they do not face the choice of a slashed pension or income support? In particular, will she ensure that the urban post office network, without which neighbourhood shopping in working-class areas in this country will not survive, will be the target of sustained, meaningful and determined Government support?

Ms Hewitt: I share my hon. Friend's concerns about the urban post office network. In addition to the investment that I announced last week and the support that we have already provided, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions has established a fund to support sub-post offices in deprived urban areas, where they are particularly essential.

My hon. Friend is right that the company has suffered from underinvestment for a very long time. We are now supporting it in making the necessary investment in restructuring and modernisation. Of course, as part of the voluntary redundancy package, the company will be taking steps to enhance and support the pensions of those leaving the Post Office.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): How can the Consignia business plan be taken seriously when, judging by the right hon. Lady's answers, she cannot tell us how many urban post offices will close, where the redundancies will fall or even whether the price of a first-class stamp will rise? How many postal workers in rural areas will lose their jobs? There is already a shortage of them, and the service is deteriorating. Is not the bottom line of what she has told the House, as with everything else under this Government, that the price people pay will go up and the service that they receive will get worse?

Ms Hewitt: The hon. Gentleman does not seem to understand the idea of commercial freedom— *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let the Secretary of State answer.

Ms Hewitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The whole point about commercial freedom, which we have given the Post Office and which the hon. Gentleman's Government wholly failed to give it, is that those in management are responsible for managing the company. They must make the decisions about the necessary restructuring and modernisation of the company, and they will need to decide whether a price rise is justified and whether they can justify that to consumers by providing an improved quality of service.

I do not think that many of us in the House have been satisfied with the quality of service from the Post Office over some years. This morning's statement and the appointment of the new chairman of Consignia—the Post Office—are essential first steps in restoring the Post Office to health and in ensuring that consumers get a service on which they can rely and of which we can all be proud.

Mr. Kelvin Hopkins (Luton, North): May I ask my right hon. Friend about stamp prices? Are not stamps in Britain cheaper than in any other European Union country apart from Spain? A first-class stamp in Germany is the equivalent of 37p, as opposed to 27p here. Have we not had a Post Office on the cheap? Regardless of incompetent management—that is no doubt true—we have relatively low-paid postal workers and no blame should be attached to them for what has happened. Is not it as likely as day following night following day that, if the Post Office is opened up to competition and the private sector gets hold of some lucrative chunks, the first thing that will happen will be massive price rises to maximise profit?

Ms Hewitt: It is perfectly true that stamp prices here are lower than those in not all but most parts of the European Union. It is for the company to decide whether it wants to seek a price rise, and for the regulator, after consulting the consumer watchdog, to decide whether to grant it. However, we should be clear that stamp price rises, which may or may not follow, are not a way to get round problems of inefficiency, poor management and bad industrial relations. Those problems must all be addressed in any case. This morning's announcement was the first step to sorting them out.

David Burnside (South Antrim): Will the Secretary of State explain why in the necessary rationalisation of Parcelforce depots, Great Britain has taken a 50 per cent. cut but Northern Ireland has taken a 75 per cent. cut, which includes the closure of Belfast North, Londonderry and Portadown? Why are we taking more of the pain than the rest of the United Kingdom? When the Secretary of State is in discussion with Allan Leighton on job losses and consigning Consignia to the dustbin of marketing

[David Burnside]

disasters of all time, will she see that the senior managers who are responsible lose their jobs first, rather than the ordinary people on the ground?

Ms Hewitt: I want particularly to pay tribute to the men and women working in the Post Office in Northern Ireland, who have continued to do their job with enormous courage in extremely difficult circumstances.

The specific proposals for rationalisation of the transport depots have been made by Consignia on the basis of a detailed examination of postal patterns in different parts of the country. I shall be happy to obtain further information on the specific point in relation to Northern Ireland, and I will write to the hon. Gentleman accordingly.

Mr. Tony Banks (West Ham): Is it not a fact that Conservative Governments plundered billions of pounds from the profits of the Post Office, money that could have been used for investment purposes and restructuring? Is that not a further example of where we are inheriting the legacy of Thatcherism?

Will my right hon. Friend tell me—I have a large Parcelforce depot in West Ham—that there will be no compulsory redundancies? Will she tell us also to what extent there is still room for negotiation on which depots are due to be closed?

Ms Hewitt: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend's point that the Post Office has suffered from many years of drift and decline under the Conservatives. There was one review after another under the Conservative Government, and no decisions. There was a flat refusal to give the company commercial freedom within the public sector. Ninety per cent. of its profits were taken in dividend, and there was no investment. That was at a time when every other postal service in Europe was modernising.

My hon. Friend is right to say that it is this Government who have seized the problem and have put in the management that is required to make the tough decisions that are needed to start turning the Post Office round.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): Will the right hon. and geographically erroneous Lady confirm that on 25 March 1997 the Post Office was in profit? Will she tell us that she is confident that on 25 March 2007 the Post Office will be in profit again, that all the village post offices in my constituency will still be open and that we shall still have an early morning delivery?

Ms Hewitt: The profits that were being made in the Conservative years were artificially inflated to secure covert tax rises and the subsidy to the Treasury—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Ms Hewitt: There was little point in having a profitable company when the Conservative Government were taking 90 per cent. in dividends and refusing to let the company make the necessary investment. I believe that we are putting in place a management capable of restoring the Post Office to health. This is the first in a series of restructuring measures that will restore the Post Office to profitability and ensure that we have postal services throughout the country that will deliver for customers, including our constituents.

Railtrack

4.28 pm

The Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Mr. Stephen Byers): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I would like to make a statement on the bid for Railtrack plc made today by Network Rail.

As the House will be aware, Railtrack was taken into administration on 7 October as a result of a High Court order. As Mr. Justice Lightman said at the time:

"This is clearly a case where the making of a railway administration order is not only appropriate, but absolutely essential, and I shall therefore make that order immediately."

Railtrack was put into administration because it was, or was likely to be, unable to pay its debts. But let us remember also that it had failed to maintain the railway safely and properly. It had failed to gain a proper understanding of its assets. It had failed to manage modernisation projects such as the west coast main line. Let us not forget that Railtrack was at the heart of the flawed and failed privatisation carried out by the Tories.

The Government have always said that what we need is a successor to Railtrack that is focused on the public interest and on the needs of passengers. Railtrack has made some progress during administration under the management of John Armitt, and his appointment as chief executive has been widely welcomed in the industry, but I agree with the Transport Committee, which said in its latest report, the first for this Session:

"It is imperative that the process of administration be completed as soon as possible."

Because of the difficulties in putting together a business plan and the limited knowledge that Railtrack had of its own assets, the administrator has indicated that there will be further delays in launching his competitive process.

What we need is an end to administration, so that the improvements that we all want to see to the country's rail infrastructure can be delivered as soon as possible. There is therefore a value to the Government, the taxpayer and rail users in an earlier exit from administration. Network Rail's bid reflects that approach.

Network Rail says that its proposal could if accepted by the shareholders take Railtrack plc out of administration as early as the end of July this year. Network Rail would be a company limited by guarantee. It would not have shareholders, so it will not be paying out dividends. Unlike Railtrack, its operating surplus will be reinvested in the rail network. Its core focus will be the maintenance and renewal of Britain's railway. It will focus on the needs of the travelling public, not short-term profit for shareholders. It will be able to raise capital for investment more cheaply—a better deal all round for the travelling public.

The Government have always said that Railtrack shareholders should get the value in the company to which they are entitled. Railtrack Group has assets that could be used to provide value for its shareholders. My understanding is that Railtrack Group has over £350 million in cash deposits; it has an interest as owner in section one of the channel tunnel rail link; and it has some property interests.

The Government have indicated that a grant of £300 million will be made available to reflect the benefits of an early exit from administration. I must inform the House that, if such an early exit is not achieved, the money will not be available. An earlier exit from administration, resulting in a more focused and efficient rail network operator, would lead to a quicker realisation of efficiency savings, reduce performance penalties, and allow 10-year plan projects to proceed more quickly.

Network Rail's proposal, based on the concept of a company limited by guarantee, is designed to be more efficient than Railtrack, with lower financing costs and no dividends to pay. That is why the Government are prepared to make this payment. For the Government, it will be self-financing from savings that will be made. It therefore follows that, if there is not an early exit, the savings will not be made, and in such circumstances the £300 million will not be made available.

Since Railtrack was taken into administration, the Government have said that every single penny of taxpayers' money must be used to improve the rail network. That is exactly what the grant of £300 million will do. It will benefit the travelling public, and that has to be our top priority.

The administrator has said that he is actively reviewing Network Rail's proposal in the context of the administration. If today's bid were successful, it would enable a company limited by guarantee to become the successor to Railtrack. As the House will know, the Government have said all along that they view a company limited by guarantee as an attractive successor body.

Network Rail is committed to engineering excellence. Its bid has the potential to bring the rail industry together and overcome the fragmentation that has all too often characterised it in the past.

It is now for the administrator to decide how he should conduct the process in the light of today's bid. He has confirmed that he will treat any further proposals that might be made on their merits. Getting Railtrack out of administration must be done on the basis that it will produce a viable, financially sound company—one that takes a long-term perspective, and that puts the emphasis first and foremost on operating a safe, efficient and reliable rail network.

Taking action on Railtrack has been criticised by some, including the Conservative party—[HON. MEMBERS: No."] Yes. But today's developments demonstrate what can be achieved. As a result of today's bid by Network Rail, we can now see a railway system that is united and not fragmented; a railway industry with a shared strategic vision; a railway industry that values its employees and will invest in them; and a network provider that will answer to the interests of passengers and not private shareholders.

That is all now possible as a result of today's proposals. We are now in a position to lay Railtrack to rest and to put in its place a successor body that will deliver for the travelling public. On that basis, I commend today's developments to the House.

Mrs. Theresa May (Maidenhead): And so the entertainment continues—as Fred Karno's army parade one by one this afternoon. Today's two statements have one thing in common: from the Post Office to Railtrack, the originator of the problems is the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions.

[Mrs. Theresa May]

I refer hon. Members to the declaration that I made on 14 January, at column 33 of *Hansard*.

How many times since Railtrack was put into administration on 7 October last year has the Secretary of State come to the House clinging to his political life only to be saved by the support of the Members on the Benches behind him—support given because of statements such as the one he made last October when he told the House that

"the Government are not here to fund the shareholders of private companies."—[*Official Report*, 15 October 2001; Vol. 372, c. 959.],

or what he said to the *Financial Times*, also last October:

"I can say for certain that there will be no taxpayers money made available to support shareholders."

Indeed, in his statement today, the Secretary of State said:

"Since Railtrack was taken into administration the Government have said that every single penny of taxpayers' money must be used to improve the rail network."

That position was confirmed by the Prime Minister, who made it clear to the House in response to questions from my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition—I note that the Prime Minister is not in the Chamber to support his Secretary of State—in November and December last year and earlier this month, that money should go into improving the rail network and not to shareholders. But what do we see now? The Secretary of State has performed a 180-degree turnaround and there can be no weasel words about new money, extra money or money going to the company or, as the right hon. Gentleman put it earlier, "a grant to reflect the benefits of an early exit from administration". There is only one early exit that would benefit the railways and that is the Secretary of State's.

If the £300 million that will be used to fund the purchase of Railtrack is not new money, what work to improve the railways will be abandoned to pay for it? It is passengers who will pay the price for the Secretary of State's incompetence.

The Secretary of State repeated the point about an early exit: he said, "There is a value to the Government, the taxpayer and rail users in an earlier exit from administration." I wonder whether his indecent haste in trying to conclude the deal has anything to do with his desire to avoid legal action by Railtrack's shareholders. Of course, such action would have required him to explain, under oath, why he sought a court order to wind up Railtrack, given that funds from the rail regulator were available to keep it afloat. Some £300 million of taxpayers' money is being spent to save the Secretary of State's face—because we now know that a deal was on the table that would have compensated shareholders, sorted out Railtrack's finances and brought it out of administration early, and which would not have required money from the taxpayer.

I have this question for the Secretary of State: given his repeated assurances—in and outside this House—to Members, to journalists, to the public and to his own party that this Government would not use taxpayers' money to compensate shareholders; given the Prime Minister's assurance that taxpayers' money would not go to shareholders, but would be spent instead on improving the railways; and given that a deal was on the table to compensate shareholders without using taxpayers' money, why has the Secretary of State broken his word yet again by spending taxpayers' money on compensating shareholders? That is one question—and I expect an answer.

Mr. Byers: I will answer in my own way. There was one element of the hon. Lady's question that I agree with—that there is a link between the two issues of the Post Office and Railtrack. On looking back, people will see that it is this Government who are tackling the Conservatives' failure in respect of the Post Office—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Hon. Members must allow the Secretary of State to reply to the hon. Lady.

Mr. Byers: The reality is that Railtrack was a Tory creation that was failing the travelling public, and I make no apology for taking action on it; it was part of the problem with our railway system, not part of the solution. The Conservatives would have thrown millions more into it, but it would not have delivered an improvement in our railway system.

The hon. Lady raises a number of important questions. [HON. MEMBERS: "One."] No, there were a number of questions, as I think the record will show. She said that the £300 million will be taken away from other transport projects, but as a result of changes being made that sum will be self-financing through savings elsewhere. The simple explanation is that Network Rail will be able to raise money more cheaply than Railtrack was ever able to do.

On the hon. Lady's specific question, if there was a precise deal on the table that involved spending no taxpayers' money, the Government would consider it. Indeed, as I pointed out in my statement, the administrator has made it clear that, if further proposals are put forward, he will consider them. It is right and proper that he should do so. That is the answer to the hon. Lady's question. If there is a deal on the table, it will be for the administrator to deal with it.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): Why make the statement, then?

Mr. Byers: I am making the statement because I felt that it was appropriate that the House should be informed. The £300 million is money that the Government are prepared to make available because of the savings that we will make as a result of an early exit.

The hon. Lady raises the question of the winding up of Railtrack. No application was made to the regulator by Railtrack. It could have applied for an interim review, but it failed to do so. Railtrack attended the court, but it did not object to the administration order being made. That is the truth of the situation.

The hon. Lady asked about the statement that not a single penny would go to shareholders as opposed to the railway, but every single penny of the £300 million that we are committing will be used to improve the railway network. That is what will happen as a result of the deal that has been announced today. The difficulty the Conservatives have is that they cannot come to terms with the fact that their creation, Railtrack, is now being laid to rest and the alternative will put the travelling public first.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): No one doubts that the sooner we have a non-profit-making

company in charge of the infrastructure of the transport system the better for every passenger who uses the system. However, in a week in which the Secretary of State has issued letters of comfort to the private companies involved in the public-private partnership on the underground and an extension of the insurance to the aviation industry, I would be grateful if he could now clarify the Government's attitude to finance for transport. If this money is to be found, will the company be compensated from Government funds? If it is to be allowed to do the job that desperately needs doing—upgrading the west coast main line and modernising the other systems—it is essential that the cash is found. Will my right hon. Friend make it clear that in future infrastructure projects will be wholly Government projects or they will be private deals, and that we will see far less of these monstrosities that leave the taxpayer with the ultimate burden but not with the advantages?

Mr. Byers: I know that I have a disagreement with my hon. Friend on the role that the private sector can play. Private finance has a legitimate role to play in some of our major public sector contracts. However, it has to be on clear terms of value for money and it has to be for a reason. The reason must be that it will drive up the standard of provision.

In relation to the 10-year transport plan, we have £180 billion that will make a significant difference to the quality of the transport infrastructure. In relation to the £300 million grant that might be made available if there is an early exit from administration, none of that sum will be cut from existing projects because it is money that will be saved because of the efficiencies that will come from a company limited by guarantee.

I shall remind the House of the situation. Railtrack plc came to the Government to ask for additional resources—for £1.5 billion to be brought forward into control period 2. At the same time it was paying £709 million in dividends to its shareholders. There is a clear contrast between the two. The company limited by guarantee will have the interests of the travelling public first, and savings will be made as a result. Indeed, savings will come from the fact that the company limited by guarantee will be able to obtain money more cheaply than was possible for Railtrack. I agree with my hon. Friend that we must be clear about the benefits when we involve the private sector in such arrangements. The greater clarity we have will also be so much to the good.

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): I am sure that the Secretary of State will acknowledge that although Liberal Democrats have been highly critical of the way in which he has handled the administration of Railtrack, we nevertheless gave full support to the principle of a not-for-profit public interest company to replace it. At the same time, we also fully supported the Secretary of State's earlier statement that no additional taxpayers' money should be used to bail out the shareholders of a company that has so badly let down the travelling public. He will be badly letting down taxpayers if he now uses more of their money to provide compensation for the shareholders—because however he seeks to wrap up the £300 million, that is exactly what it is.

Despite the confusion in the Secretary of State's statement, will he make it absolutely clear that only Railtrack plc is in administration, and that Network Rail seeks to purchase the assets of that part of Railtrack Group only? If so, can we be absolutely assured that Network Rail will focus solely on activities that are directly related to improving the running of our railways, and that it will not be bidding to obtain further of Railtrack Group's assets and turn itself into the multi-headed monster that was the Railtrack Group?

Will the Secretary of State explain the basis on which Network Rail has made its bid? On what basis has he apparently given it his full support? As he admits in his statement, it is not the case that the administrators have not yet made available their analysis of the assets or liabilities of Railtrack plc or their method of sale. Can we therefore be absolutely sure that Network Rail has had no access to information that has not been available to other potential bidders? Given the latest revelations to which the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) referred—that the Secretary of State has given written letters of comfort to potential London tube bidders to the effect that they will have to accept little or no liability for future problems—can we be absolutely assured that no such letter has been given to Network Rail by the Secretary of State?

Finally, given that the new chief executive of Railtrack plc has said that he is not yet in a position to judge the financial robustness of any replacement company, on what basis is the Secretary of State so confident, and on what basis can the public be confident? Given that the Secretary of State agrees that the Conservative party sold off Railtrack far too cheaply, is he not in danger of buying it back too expensively?

Mr. Byers: The hon. Gentleman has raised a number of points. He is right that Railtrack plc is the body in administration. Railtrack Group is not in administration; it is the parent company and is still functioning. Network Rail has put in a bid for Railtrack plc and wants to operate the licence. I welcome that for the same reasons as the hon. Gentleman—it can be focused on the maintenance renewal of the network, which is crucial if we are to improve punctuality and reliability. I am sure that the administrator has treated everybody who is interested equally, as he would be bound to do. I am sure that he has provided all the appropriate information to any interested party and that he will have discharged his legal responsibilities. Network Rail has brought forward a robust business plan and it is on that basis that the Government have today been able to indicate this level of support. As I said, we believe that a company limited by guarantee would be a good successor body as far as the railway network is concerned.

The letters of comfort can hardly be described as a revelation—I know that not many people read *Hansard*, but I replied to a parliamentary question last week to make that point. The £300 million will be made available only if there is an early exit from administration. If that does not happen, the money will not be made available, and will therefore not be available to Railtrack Group. We are making that grant available on the basis that we and the travelling public would receive benefits as a result of administration coming to an end earlier than would otherwise be the case.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): Does my right hon. Friend agree that we on the Back Benches deserve a rather fuller explanation of this volte face in

[David Taylor]

relation to the £300 million bail-out of shareholders than he has so far given? Is it not the case that it appears to many that the cosy relationship with the City seems to involve the development of a risk-free zone on transport projects? As my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) suggested, such projects include the public-private partnership for the tube and the plans for National Air Traffic Services and Railtrack, but why should we cushion speculative investment on public projects from any form of risk whatever? Is that not a disgrace?

Mr. Byers: When my hon. Friend has had the opportunity of reading the detail of what I have said this afternoon, I think that he will recognise that that is simply not the case. The reality is that the shareholders wanted £3.60, and they will reflect on what now might be possible. They will look carefully at the basis on which we are prepared to make available the grant. It will be available only if there is an early exit, because we will receive savings as a result of that. No other transport project will be adversely affected

I ask my hon. Friend to think of where we are today as a result of the action that was taken. Six months ago, the railway network was operated by Railtrack, a company with private shareholders as the paramount concern. We are now talking about our railways being operated by a company limited by guarantee, a body which has one overriding priority—the interests of the travelling public and not private shareholders. I happen to believe that we have come a long way in six months. The Conservatives do not accept that, but we do because we know that we now have in place potentially a successor body for the railway network that will make a real difference, turning away from Railtrack and embracing the interests of the travelling public.

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch): Why is the £300 million not being made available as a grant to other bidders on an equal basis? Everything that the Secretary of State says increasingly suggests that the £300 million is effectively a bribe to a stooge company that is being organised by the Government and on which he will stand in judgment when the rival bids come in. If £300 million of taxpayers' money is available, should it not be made available to all the bidders?

Mr. Byers: The £300 million is being made available for the benefits of an early exit. If someone else or another proposal can deliver that early exit, that money will, of course, be available. We have been very clear that there is no favouritism. If another proposal offers an early exit, that sum of money could, of course, be made available provided that the benefits are achieved that we believe would be achieved from Network Rail.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): My right hon. Friend refers to Network Rail aspiring to engineering excellence. Given that there is the real problem of a shortage of engineers, with poaching from one company to another taking place, what will be done to increase the total pool of rail engineers? They are crucial to any advance.

Mr. Byers: My hon. Friend is right to stress the importance of skills in the industry. That is why I was particularly pleased that one of the first acts of John Armitt as the new chief executive of Railtrack was to double the number in Railtrack's graduate intake. It has also increased the number of engineers, and it has set a target of having 1,000 engineers in Railtrack. I believe that, as we move away from the short-term approach to the industry to a more long-term one, the skills deficit will need to be addressed. One of the ways in which that will be done—this was stated in the strategic plan—is through the development of a national rail academy. That offers the opportunity of developing skills in the industry so that we do not have the problem that we face at the moment of not having the skilled engineers, the drivers and the people to make the network operate well. That will change not through the short-term approach that has handicapped the industry in the past, but through a longer-term approach that will deliver the skills that the industry needs for the future.

Mr. Gregory Barker (Bexhill and Battle): On 15 October, the Secretary of State, in respect of paying taxpayers' money to shareholders in Railtrack, said:

"We believe that it would be wrong to make new money available, and we will not do it."—[*Official Report*, 15 October 2001; Vol. 372, c. 955.]

Has not he completely shot any credibility that he had? Would it not be fair to the travelling public and taxpayers if he did the decent thing and resigned?

Mr. Byers: Once people have had an opportunity to see the context of what I said on 15 October—it was in relation to the £3.60 that was being claimed by the Railtrack group—they will see that we are not compensating shareholders. We are putting the interests of the travelling public first. When people have the opportunity of seeing the big change that we are making to the network, as a result of the prospect of a company limited by guarantee taking responsibility for the railways, they will be able to compare what happened with Railtrack with what will happen with the company limited by guarantee. When they can see that and compare the difference, they will know that today's developments are good news for the travelling public.

Hugh Bayley (City of York): As a representative of a great railway city that has hundreds of skilled engineers working for the train-operating companies and a wide range of infrastructure companies, may I say that what the railways need is a clear future for infrastructure, which this statement gives, and it will be widely welcomed in my constituency? *[Interruption.]* Conservative Members have forgotten that the failure to grant a long franchise extension for the east coast main line was a result of Railtrack's failure to bring forward its costed proposals for the infrastructure renewal. Railtrack was dragging the railways down—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. The hon. Gentleman must ask a question.

Hugh Bayley: Will my right hon. Friend emphasise the importance of Network Rail bringing forward costed proposals to use the great increase in investment that the Government are putting into the railways?

Mr. Byers: My hon. Friend is right to point out the devastating consequences of rail privatisation for the

people and the city of York, where literally thousands of jobs were lost as a result of the programme implemented by the Conservatives when they were in government. My hon. Friend is also right that Railtrack failed as far as large infrastructure projects were concerned. The east coast main line was one example; the west coast main line is probably the other major example of that. That is why we want the successor body to concentrate on renewals and maintenance of the network and not to be involved in those large infrastructure projects, where we feel a different mechanism is needed. We are learning from the mistakes made by Railtrack to ensure that Network Rail concentrates on running the network for the benefit of the travelling public. That is what Network Rail wants to do and what we want to happen.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): The Secretary of State will be aware that one of the very interested observers of his antics over the railways has been the rail regulator, in whom the Government used to say they had huge confidence. Can the Secretary of State explain why the rail regulator, speaking to the all-party railways group last week, said that he had severe concerns about a company limited by guarantee? Will the Secretary of State explain how his company limited by guarantee will improve on an equity model that would provide a buffer against poor performance, as the rail regulator has put it? While we are talking about the buffers, has not the Secretary of State hit the buffers in a terminal way?

Mr. Byers: The rail regulator will have his own views about the company limited by guarantee. I have not heard a report of his comments at the all-party group, but he has not raised with me any difficulties with the idea of a company limited by guarantee. As far as the equity model is concerned, it became clear that Railtrack's difficulty was that it had to put the interests of shareholders first; it had no choice, legally. There was a great conflict between the needs of the travelling public and the interests of shareholders. In the end, legally, Railtrack always had to put the interests of the shareholders first The Conservatives may still believe that that is the right model to pursue; we do not agree. We believe that a company limited by guarantee, which puts the interests of the travelling public first, is far better.

Mrs. Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside): What would the speedy setting up of Network Rail mean for west coast main line modernisation in contrast with the abject failure of Railtrack? How much taxpayers' money did the failed Railtrack cost the people of this country? How much would it cost to keep the administrators in being for every additional month after they are required, as that seems to be what the Opposition want?

Mr. Byers: The costs of administration are not borne by the Government. Ultimately, they are borne by the shareholders, so it is not in their interests for the situation to go on.

I know that my hon. Friend is concerned about the delays and lack of progress on the west coast main line, which will go down as the most tangible illustration of Railtrack's failure to manage major upgrade projects. There are many meetings taking place to resolve the difficulties around the west coast main line. That is being pursued irrespective of the position on administration, so in a sense, the issues are separate. Nevertheless, my hon. Friend makes an important point about learning the lessons of the difficulties surrounding the west coast main line and ensuring that the company limited by guarantee or any successor body to Railtrack do not repeat those mistakes.

Mr. Howard Flight (Arundel and South Downs): How can the Secretary of State say that the Government are entirely neutral towards the decision to be taken by the administrator when today's statement to the House is clearly intended to support and prejudice a decision in favour of Network Rail? Is that not yet another case of "Animal Farm" language, which we have seen throughout the Railtrack saga?

Mr. Byers: We have been consistent about saying that the model of a company limited by guarantee is attractive, and that is the point that I have been making today. Network Rail has put forward such a proposal, and I think that we should welcome it. However, the point that I made in my statement is that the administrator has made it clear that if there are other proposals, they will be considered. The administrator will look carefully at the proposals and will then make a recommendation to me if it is a transfer scheme. *[Interruption.]* For the benefit of the House, the Railways Act 1993 is not the basis on which Network Rail has made its approach to the Railtrack group. *[Interruption.]* No, the House needs to be aware of this. The proposals made by Network Rail are not under the 1993 Act. Its proposals will be voted on by Railtrack's shareholders; they are not for the administrator or the Secretary of State to determine.

Mr. Kelvin Hopkins (Luton, North): My right hon. Friend rightly received unanimous support on this side of the House when he put Railtrack into administration. We thought that that was the right thing to do as a significant step back towards public ownership. The whole railway industry is now in trouble—the train operating companies require extra money, the maintenance companies are in chaos and we know about Railtrack. Given that the railway industry is a natural monopoly, providing a vital public service, and that the ultimate risk is always taken by Government, is it not about time that we seriously considered bringing the industry back into public ownership?

Mr. Byers: That is a point of view, but it is not shared by the Government. We believe that the company limited by guarantee model, which has been put forward today and has the interests of the travelling public at its heart, is the best way forward. The benefits that we will get from a company limited by guarantee may not completely convince my hon. Friend but I hope that they might go some way towards convincing him that this is real progress and will benefit the railway industry.

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): Has the Secretary of State approached the European Commission to seek state aid approval for any of the support that he is giving to the company limited by guarantee, and if so, what was the response?

Mr. Byers: It would be premature to do that, but the hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to say that any proposals would need state aid approval.

Mr. Jim Murphy (Eastwood): Like most people in our party and in the country, I welcomed the Secretary of

[Mr. Jim Murphy]

State's decision to take Railtrack into receivership. Can he confirm that his announcement represents the end of the line for public financing for the shareholders, notwithstanding the fact that the Tories are still demanding further handouts for them? In his discussions with Network Rail, will he ensure that on the agenda is not only the modernisation of the west coast main line but the integration of the rail network in the north-west of the United Kingdom, and in particular the link between Glasgow airport and the modernised west coast main line?

Mr. Byers: Ultimately, it will be for the Railtrack shareholders to decide whether to accept Network Rail's proposal. If they do, there will be a speedy exit from administration and Network Rail will operate the licence, which will bring real benefits. On integration, there is clearly an issue about the interface between wheel and track, and that is the subject of a Strategic Rail Authority inquiry. On the specifics of developing the rail network in Scotland, there are several major projects that would make a significant difference, one of which is developing the links with Glasgow airport. I know that the SRA is examining that closely, as a result of representations that have been made both by Labour Members and by the Scottish Executive.

Pete Wishart (North Tayside): We have paralysis on the tracks, a rail industry in Scotland that is riven by strikes, a Department that can only be described as bizarre and chaotic, and now we have this astonishing U-turn. Given that the Government were elected on the basis of the song "Things Can Only Get Better", can the Secretary of State think of a time when things were worse for the railways?

Mr. Byers: We were never going to improve significantly the quality of rail in the United Kingdom with Railtrack as the operator of the licence. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will agree with that. We had to make big decisions about Railtrack and its successor body. Those big decisions are not easy and are bound to be criticised, but they are the only way in which we can secure real improvements. In the end, we will be judged on whether the punctuality and reliability of our rail network have improved. I believe that the changes in hand will produce real improvements in punctuality and reliability in Scotland, as elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Ivan Henderson (Harwich): Is it not a fact that the previous Government were warned several times that the privatisation of our railway infrastructure would be a disaster, and did not the Conservatives privatise it as an afterthought, because our country's finances were in such a mess that they were scratching around for extra cash? Is there any other country that privatised its railway infrastructure in the same way?

Mr. Byers: It is true to say that it was a pretty unique form of privatisation. On the £300 million that the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) is so excited about, hon. Members should read the excellent report published by the Public Accounts Committee when the current chairman of the Conservative party was its Chairman. The report shows very clearly that Railtrack was floated and sold for less than £2 billion, and that within 18 months the value of the shares was up to about £8 billion—a £6 billion shortfall for the taxpayers of this country. Conservative privatisation brought a shortfall of £6 billion, as well as worse service on the railways. Our proposals will make a real difference and improve the quality of rail travel.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): I remind the House of my interests in Railtrack, Eurotunnel and First Group.

I know that the Secretary of State does not drive, but he has performed a U-turn, and so has the Prime Minister. Why? Is it because he feels that he should not after all have put Railtrack into administration and that he should have taken the advice of the independent rail regulator and granted an interim review, or is it because he is frit of a legal action that would force him to give evidence on oath? This offer is time barred. What happens if Railtrack does not come out of administration, the offer fails and the shareholders get nothing? May I remind him that 90 per cent. of Railtrack employees hold shares? Why has he changed his mind?

Mr. Byers: Railtrack could have applied for the interim review; it had the power to do so, but it failed to do so. Its representatives sat in court and did not oppose the petition for administration. The £300 million is available only if there is an early exit from administration. If that does not happen, it will not be available to the shareholders. That is why it is not compensation; it is money that is being made available for the benefits that we, as a Government, will get from an early exit from administration. If the shareholders do not support the proposal, they will lose the benefits and we will not get the benefits, so the £300 million simply will not be available. We will then go through the competitive process, which the administrator will put in place. That will take time, so we will not get the savings of an early exit, which is why the £300 will not then be available.

Mr. Gary Streeter (South-West Devon): In relation to transport, will the Secretary of State please tell the House what part of his job he thinks he has done well since he was appointed last year?

Mr. Byers: The taking of Railtrack into administration was absolutely right for the simple reason that Railtrack was at the heart of all that was wrong with our railway network and many of the problems. Conservative Members will disagree with the action that I took in relation to Railtrack—we can all understand why—but I firmly believe that that action was necessary. Railtrack was put into administration because it could not pay its debts or was unlikely to pay them. Most importantly, we are now putting in place a new structure for the railway industry that will provide us with the opportunity to bring the industry together, to get away from the fragmentation and to put the interests of the travelling public first. That is what a company limited by guarantee will do, and I hope that the hon. Gentleman, who is concerned about transport to the south-west, will recognise that those real improvements will be delivered for the south-west as well as the rest of the country.

Bob Russell (Colchester): May I congratulate the Secretary of State on his impeccable timing? He chose to

make his statement on the very day when the problems on the Colchester to Liverpool Street line were so bad that my constituents took up to five hours to complete a one-hour journey. I was lucky; my journey took only three hours. Does he agree that, despite the fact that the previous Government caused the problem in the first place, after five years of Labour Government, the situation is worse now than it was in 1997? Who does he blame—himself or the former Transport Secretary, the Deputy Prime Minister? Has he stopped digging, or is he going to fill himself in?

Mr. Byers: I have been very clear with the House in saying that we have to take responsibility, and I will take responsibility for the performance not being as good as it should be, which is unacceptable and we must move forward. However, we will never see the sort of improvements that the hon. Gentleman and I want by tinkering around at the edges and playing around at the margins. We have to take the big decisions that will make a difference to our railway industry, which we are now doing. Some people find that uncomfortable, but it has to be done if we are to achieve an improvement in the service from Colchester to Liverpool Street—a line that I know very well—as well as elsewhere in the country. I honestly believe that we can do that, and I think that the measures that are being taken and today's developments will lead us to a far better future for our railway industry.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): Will the Secretary of State tell us precisely from which part of his Department's vote will the £300 million come? Will he be more specific about the savings that he mentions? He says that the costs of administration will be borne by the shareholders, so there appears to be doubt about where the Government will get their savings from. Finally, will he agree to the National Audit Office making an early inquiry into his proposals to ensure that the taxpayer gets good value for money?

Mr. Byers: Of course we always co-operate with any National Audit Office inquiry. The savings will not come from the costs of administration to the Government. As with every other administration, those costs are borne by the shareholders, so it is not a call on the Government. The savings to the Government will come about because Network Rail's proposals are designed to be produce greater efficiency than Railtrack. It will have lower financial costs and no dividends to pay, so it will be easier and cheaper for it to raise money. There will be a quicker realisation of efficiency savings and a reduction in performance penalties, which will come about as a result of a company limited by guarantee and the fact that Railtrack is no longer responsible. Those are all benefits and savings that the Government will get, from which we will be able to fund the £300 million without that being a claim on another part of the railway budget.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): Can the Secretary of State answer the questions repeatedly asked by a number of my hon. Friends? What has changed since his original statement that has led him to make a U-turn on compensation for shareholders?

Mr. Byers: I repeat that the £300 million is available only if there is an early exit. If that does not happen, it is not available, so it is not compensation for shareholders. It is linked to an early exit from administration and the savings that the Government will obtain as a result. There is no change. It is absolutely consistent with the statements that I have made since 15 October last year.

Richard Ottaway (Croydon, South): In response to a question on how the grant is self-financing, the Secretary of State replied that Network Rail will be able to get money more cheaply. Is not that the real reason why he introduced the package today, because if he had not, the City would have charged him higher penalising interest rates for future infrastructure projects?

Mr. Byers: No. If hon. Members look at the refinancing deal of some £4.1 billion announced by the administrator this afternoon, it is clear that no premium is being charged by the City. The City makes a clear distinction between the position of Railtrack, a company quoted on the stock market, with all the risks that arise from that, and the public-private partnership approach in which the Government enter into contractual obligations. That is the difference, and it is understood by the City. As a result, no premium has been charged.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): Before conjuring up the £300 million that every newspaper describes as compensation for shareholders, what legal advice did the Secretary of State receive on the impending shareholders' action? Was he led to believe that he might easily lose a legal action? Was he told that he might be found to have acted illegally by taking Railtrack into administration without providing compensation and, indeed, to have acted in a manner akin to theft?

Mr. Byers: The proposals by Network Rail have been produced because it thinks that this is the right time for it to make this approach. It has nothing to do with any action or threat of action by Lovells on behalf of the shareholders of Railtrack.

Miss Julie Kirkbride (Bromsgrove): The Secretary of State has given an unclear and confused picture of who takes the decisions from hereon in. Can he clarify what he said? Who is going to take the decision to remove Railtrack from administration and go forward with the new company—is it the Secretary of State, the administrator or the shareholders, because he told the House that they, too, will take that decision?

Mr. Byers: There are two possible routes to get Railtrack plc out of administration. One is to use the Railways Act 1993, which allows the administrator to propose a transfer scheme to me as Secretary of State. Network Rail is pursuing a different approach, however. It involves a bid for Railtrack plc in which the shareholders decide the outcome. There are two separate routes, one under the 1993 Act and one that has been adopted by Network Rail, which is to make a straightforward bid for the shares of Railtrack plc.

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): Is not the simple fact of the whole matter that the Government and the Secretary of State in particular forced Railtrack into administration prior to Christmas and that the same Government are now proposing to spend £300 million of taxpayers' money to bring it out of administration? Some trains in my

[Mr. Mark Francois]

constituency were delayed by up to four hours coming into Liverpool Street this morning. My constituents are utterly sick and tired of the shambles over which the Secretary of State presides. They dearly hope that he will soon depart and that the problems are put right.

Mr. Byers: The problems that Conservative Members are referring to have come about because of Railtrack's failure to invest in its assets—that is the truth of the situation. We need to get Railtrack out of administration and get the benefits that will come from that. The Network Rail proposals will do precisely that. We will get benefits and the hon. Gentleman's constituents will get benefits from having a railway network that is far more efficient and effective than it is at the moment.

Mr. David Cameron (Witney): Will the Minister confirm that if an offer is made that does not involve spending £300 million of taxpayers' money, it will be accepted? If not, will he confirm that he will have to issue an instruction to his permanent secretary to accept a deal that does not represent good value for money for the taxpayer?

Mr. Byers: If that were done under the Railways Act, an approach would be made to the administrator, and it would be for him to consider it. Today, Network Rail has adopted a different approach, which goes to the shareholders, and I hope that that has clarified matters for hon. Members.

Sir Robert Smith (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine): Following his earlier answers about who will make the final decision, will the Secretary of State provide clarification? If Network Rail's bid is successful, will not it still need a licence to operate? Is not the licence decision for him to make, and therefore does not he make the final decision?

Mr. Byers: I will need to go to the court to apply for the administrator to be discharged from his responsibilities. I will then have the responsibility of allocating the network licence.

Points of Order

Angus Robertson (Moray): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am afraid that I must draw your attention to one more case of Parliament being bypassed on a very serious matter. A press conference was held at 3 o'clock this afternoon at the Ministry of Defence at which massive job losses at the Clyde naval base and others in England were announced as part of the warship maintenance review. Journalists were also informed that thousands of other naval workers will have their jobs privatised.

Members of the House received only limited official notice of that devastating news by letter from the MOD half an hour after the media were briefed on the subject. This is not the first time that I and other colleagues have had to bring such matters to your attention; Madam Deputy Speaker. Under the powers available to you, can you do anything to bring home to the Government their responsibilities to Parliament and to make a full statement to the House?

Mr. Mike Hancock (Portsmouth, South): Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. May I point out that as a constituency MP, I still have not received any written confirmation from the Ministry of Defence of its action, but I have a copy of the planted question that was asked at 3.30 this afternoon? Although I can accept that the reason for us not having a statement is to shield the Minister from hostile Labour MPs, I find it deplorable that the House and I as a constituency MP have not been given the chance to question the Secretary of State about the 350 job losses in my constituency and the way in which the matter will be handled.

I would hope that, following the Speaker's pronouncement that he was against this sort of thing, you, Madam Deputy Speaker, would seek advice as to whether the Secretary of State could be asked to come to the House tonight to explain his actions and to answer the questions put to him by Members on behalf of their constituents.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Mr. Speaker has made it clear on a number of occasions that he expects important announcements to be made in the House first. He has, however, also said that it is for Ministers to determine whether such announcements are made by oral statement or written answer. In view of the information that I have just received, I certainly think that this is a matter that the Speaker would want to look into.

Orders of the Day

State Pension Credit Bill *[Lords]*

[Relevant documents: The Minutes of Evidence taken before the Work and Pensions Committee on Wednesday 27th February relating to the Pension Credit, HC 638-i.]

Order for Second Reading read.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): I should inform the House that Mr. Speaker has selected the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition.

5.28 pm

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr. Alistair Darling): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

I want to set out the purpose of the Bill and how it fits with the wider pensions reforms that we have made. The pension credit marks the end of a fundamental unfairness in the social security system. Right from the early days of the modern welfare state, if people did what successive Governments asked them to do and made provision for themselves, the state could penalise them for their efforts. That was wrong.

Every one of us has met pensioners living on modest incomes who often struggled to put aside money for their retirement and who feel that they were let down. They have found that they are little or no better off than those who had saved nothing. To oppose the Bill is to perpetuate that unfairness and to deny extra help to around half of all pensioners. When we vote tonight, we should remember that through the Bill, 5 million pensioners stand to gain an average of £400 a year, with some gaining up to £1,000 a year.

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon): Will the Secretary of State confirm that the minimum income guarantee was introduced and the rates announced without the benefit of the State Pension Credit Bill, that the rates of the minimum income guarantee are therefore independent of the Bill, and that the only thing that the Bill introduces is a savings credit that will benefit nothing like the number of people he has just mentioned?

Mr. Darling: The minimum income guarantee and, as I shall show later, the guarantee element of the pension credit are essential parts of the policy. The hon. Gentleman is right that we introduced the minimum income guarantee first; we did so because in 1997 we had to tackle the fact that the Conservatives had left a whole generation of vulnerable people and vulnerable pensioners living in poverty. However, the pension credit has two elements: the guarantee element and the reward for saving.

The hon. Gentleman appears to have been seduced by the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts), and they have climbed into the same political bed—at least in terms of pensions. Just so that the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) is clear, let me repeat: if he gets his way when he votes against the Bill tonight, he will deny half the pensioners in this country an average of about £400 a year. That is the position that the professor has got the Liberal Democrats into, and good luck to him—and to the rest of us if that is what they want.

During tonight's debate, we will hear arguments that rather than individually assess people's income and ensure that we get help to those individuals who need the help most, it might be better to focus on groups. On that point, the Opposition should pay attention to what the Bill would achieve. Of those who will gain from the Bill, about two-thirds are women, half are over 75, and more than a quarter are over 80. Those who want to help older pensioners in general, as well as those who are less well off and those who have modest savings in particular, should realise that the Bill achieves both those objectives. The Bill will ensure that for the first time pensioners who have saved for their retirement are rewarded for their thrift and effort, which does not happen under the system that we inherited.

We need to put the pension credit in the context of our wider policies on pensions. I will explain how it builds on the partnership between the state and the funded sector, and how it builds on the reforms that we have already made. I will then show why the Bill is necessary and why the reasoned amendment tabled by the Conservatives—and, it appears, their new friends—is wrong and unfair.

With the pension credit, the poorest third of pensioners will gain on average an extra £8.20 a week. By contrast, the same money spent on increasing the basic state pension across the board, as proposed in the amendment, would result in a gain of only £3.20 a week—£5 a week less. That is the difference between our proposals, which will help those who need that help most, and the misconceived approach adopted by the new alliance of the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats. With the pension credit, the least well-off pensioners will gain more than two and a half times more than if the money were spread thinly by raising pensions across the piece.

Critical to the long-term success of pensions in this country is the partnership between the public and private sectors—partnership between what the state will do for a person and what a person should do for himself. I do not believe, as some have suggested and may well repeat this evening, that relying wholly or mainly on the state would be right. Apart from anything else, the demographics are against us. Such a strategy would impose on our children and grandchildren a burden that they would not be able to pay. Furthermore, I believe that people must have the right to choose funded provision in addition to their state pension, if that is right for them. The fact that more people are retiring with good second pensions explains why over the past few years pensioner incomes have risen faster than incomes of those in work.

On the other hand, it would be wrong to adopt the approach favoured by the Conservatives of moving to a private system in which one's entire pension depends on the uncertainty of the stock market.

The problem with that plan is that, by the Conservatives' own admission, it creates an immediate funding gap of £5 billion, with a cumulative debt of £600 billion in 35 years' time. It places on one generation the burden of providing entirely for themselves and of supporting current pensioners.

I expect that we will hear a great deal from the hon. Member for Havant about increasing the basic state pension. That argument will be advanced—and by the Conservatives of all people. We saw through that ruse when the hon. Gentleman made a similar proposal two years ago. He believed that the winter fuel payment was

[Mr. Darling]

an unnecessary complication and wanted to get rid of it, but he now wants to pay it to people in hot countries as well. Whatever he says, we should bear it in mind that, in effect, he still wants to privatise the basic state pension, as we saw from last week's newspapers. Strangely, the reasoned amendment is silent on that aspect of Government policy—perhaps to keep his new friends on board tonight.

The pension credit builds on the partnership between what the state does and what the funded sector does; that partnership is absolutely right. The system that we inherited in 1997 had too many gaps in that partnership, and too many people were missing out. The necessary incentives in the Bill were not in existence. The first problem, as I have just explained to the Liberal Democrat spokesman, was that more than 2 million pensioners in the fourth largest economy in the world relied on inadequate levels of income support. The minimum income guarantee has increased the incomes of 2 million of the poorest pensioners by at least £15 a week over and above inflation. Clause 2 sets out the way in which the pension credit will build on that approach and lift pensioners out of poverty.

The second problem that we had to tackle was that too many people were heading for poverty in retirement, either because they could not afford to save or because they did not have access to a good second pension. We therefore introduced the necessary long-term reforms to make saving possible, helping more people to build up a good second pension on top of their basic state pension. The Bill ensures that such additional saving pays. People on moderate and higher incomes tend to do better in the longer term in funded pensions. For those without access to company schemes—about half the work force—we wanted to increase choice in the funded sector, which is why we set up stakeholder pensions, nearly 700,000 of which have been sold.

Clause 3 makes it clear that the pension credit will complement stakeholder pensions by rewarding people who save even modest amounts, which has been warmly welcomed by the pensions industry. People on lower incomes are generally better off in state provision. From 6 April this year, the new state second pension will enable 18 million people on low incomes to build up far better pensions than under the state earnings-related pension scheme. That figure includes 2 million carers and 2 million disabled people who will benefit for the first time.

Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): My right hon. Friend said that his proposals have been warmly welcomed by the pensions industry. It welcomes the extra assistance for today's pensioners to reward them for their saving, but there is concern that the proposals do not send a clear message to pensioners of the future that it always pays to save. Is that not the major flaw in the Bill? It does not give a clear message or provide the certainty of a stable system for younger people. The system is so complicated that—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Interventions must be brief.

Mr. Darling: As my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Lynne Jones) knows, I hate to disagree with her but, however much it pains me, I must do so. When I said that the pensions industry welcomed the measure, I meant it. I had in mind the Association of British Insurers, which said:

"The ABI welcomes the Government's proposals for a Pension Credit as an important step in addressing the issues which may currently discourage those on modest incomes from saving for their retirement".

Scottish Widows, Legal and General and the National Association of Pension Funds have all said something similar.

It is true that some people in the industry take the view that rather than have something like the pension credit, which rewards people for every pound they save, depressing the amount the state gives will force them to go and buy pension products. I am sure that my hon. Friend does not subscribe to that view; if she does, she has moved her ground substantially. I always thought that she took a dim view of the pensions industry; it will find it very odd indeed that she is attempting to gallop to its rescue.

The important point is that the pension credit removes for the first time—this has been widely recognised—the disincentive in the present system whereby someone with moderate savings can find that they are no better off than somebody who has made no effort whatsoever. That is why I find it odd that perhaps not my hon. Friend but many Opposition Members are against the Bill.

Linda Gilroy (Plymouth, Sutton): Does my right hon. Friend recognise that one of the most powerful messages that young people hear comes from their family—from their grandparents, who tell them that it does not pay to save? As from October 2003, every grandparent who has been thrifty enough to save will be rewarded and will be able to tell their grandchildren that it definitely pays to save.

Mr. Darling: That is an important message. Many people at the moment can find that, if they save only modest amounts, they get absolutely nothing for it. That cannot be right.

I always hesitate to quote people who support the Conservative cause, but I was struck by the words of Lord Fowler, who was of course a Secretary of State for Social Security for—if I remember rightly—some six years. He said:

"To be frank, I should have preferred it if my government had introduced the pension credit."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 18 December 2001; Vol. 630, c. 165.]

He knows a thing or two about social security, and recognised something that most Secretaries of State in that Department have recognised: that there is something fundamentally wrong with a social security system if doing what the Government ask means a kick in the teeth. I find it odd that this generation of Conservatives seems to be reverting to type, especially since most of those who will gain from the pension credit are what one might call vulnerable people. The conversion in Harrogate to the cause of the dispossessed and poor does not appear to have lasted very long.

Paul Flynn (Newport, West): My right hon. Friend prayed in aid the briefing supplied by the Association of British Insurers. Has he read page 3, which says:

"Most importantly, under the current proposals it is not true to say 'the Pension Credit will make sure that it always pays to save'"?

When the Bill is considered in Committee, will he address clause 3, which seems almost incomprehensible and does not guarantee that future pensions will be respected and of good value?

Mr. Darling: If I remember rightly, one amendment that the ABI wants to be made in Committee concerns changes to disregards and capital. However, for somebody who receives the basic state pension but saves more than that, it will pay to save. That is a big leap forward. I am not saying that the Bill cannot be improved and that we cannot do even better. Indeed, a number of those who made representations, such as Age Concern, asked us to do a lot more. Age Concern is a bit like the Liberal party: whatever one does, one can never do enough.

Mr. Webb *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Darling: That is the case; the hon. Gentleman knows that, for reasons of which he is certainly aware. Although it is nice that Age Concern has welcomed the Bill, I hope that it recognises that we have done a lot for pensioners. A balance must be struck when deciding how much can be spent on any measure, but the general principle behind the pension credit is right. I find it odd that Opposition Members should be against a measure that removes what I regard as a fundamental unfairness of the social security system.

Right on cue, my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak intervened as I was about to talk about redistribution, which might cheer her up. I was talking about the state second pension, which is of course also creditable under the Bill. I was about to make the point that, when it is introduced, it will benefit some 18 million people on low incomes. I find it difficult to understand how people who claim to be concerned with helping low earners and those with broken work records can be against the state second pension. It is one of the most redistributive measures that any Government have introduced.

Let us be clear about what the state second pension does. Somebody who, for example, takes five years out of the labour market to care for their children or an elderly relative can be credited with the state second pension as though they were earning £10,800 a year. That never happened in the past. People who take time out to do the right thing by their children or an aged relative will be assumed to be earning £10,800 a year—yet the Conservatives and Liberals are against that. People on low earnings who build up 40 years of state second pension will get at least double what they would have received under SERPS. That is a long overdue redistributive measure.

We have implemented reforms to tackle poverty, we are making saving possible, and we are building on the partnership between the state and the funded sector. We now need to ensure that it pays to save—and that is what the Bill does. As I said, the pension credit will address a fundamental unfairness in the system. For the first time, we will be able to say to people that even if they save modest amounts above the basic state pension they will be rewarded for their efforts.

I want to explain briefly how the pension credit will work. The detail is set out in the consultation paper that was published in November and, of course, in the explanatory memorandum to the Bill. The Bill works in two ways. First, it replaces the minimum income guarantee as the means to provide a floor beneath which we believe pensioner incomes should not fall. The pension credit will bring pensioners' entitlement up to a guaranteed minimum next year of at least £100 a week, or £154 a week for couples. Clause 2 provides for a higher guarantee for carers and for pensioners with severe disabilities.

Secondly and critically, the pension credit will provide an additional top-up to reward pensioners aged 65 or over who have saved for their retirement. Clause 3 will ensure that pensioners aged 65 or over who have a modest occupational pension or modest savings in the bank will get more as a result of their thrift. Those with income from paid work will also be rewarded for their efforts. The pension credit provides the incentives that are missing from the present system. Pensioners will generally qualify if their incomes are up to £135 a week for single people or £200 a week for couples. On any view, many pensioners are among the vulnerable and least well off in our society.

Mr. David Kidney (Stafford): I have no doubt that the new savings credit will be very popular with my constituents, but let us return to the comments of the Association of British Insurers and of the National Federation of Post Office and BT Pensioners. Both have raised with me the assumption that the savings credit will cut in only once the full basic state pension has been reached, and that those with a lesser entitlement—often women—will lose the first bit of their savings in reaching that level. Is any change in prospect in Committee to address that criticism?

Mr. Darling: We believe that it is right that people should first use their money to pay contributions to the basic state pension. It would be curious if somebody who had chosen not to pay all such contributions then asked us to apply those they had paid to a pension credit, rather than in the first instance to the basic state pension. The basic state pension is of course contributory, but that is the argument.

I am glad that my hon. Friend recognises that the main thrust of the Bill is to reward saving among very many older people, especially those whom he rightly identifies as likely otherwise to be poor in retirement. Let us remember that the majority of the beneficiaries under the Bill will be women, who particularly benefit from the minimum income guarantee. I suspect that many Members will have met women at their surgeries who have paid a half stamp, for example, and have found that their pensions are a lot lower than they expected. For such people, the minimum income guarantee is very helpful.

Such people are vulnerable, so given everything that the hon. Member for Havant said on television yesterday to Sir David Frost, it is very odd that as soon as he gets

[Mr. Darling]

back from Harrogate he reverts to type. Liberals in my constituency will certainly find it odd that their party has jumped into bed with such a disreputable crew.

Mr. Paul Goodman (Wycombe): Will the Secretary of State explain why he has not yet mentioned the take-up of pension credit? Will he confirm that up to 750,000 pensioners did not receive the minimum income guarantee? What firm evidence does he have that the take-up of pension credit will be higher?

Mr. Darling: My speech has a beginning, a middle and an end, and I have not yet reached take-up. I shall do so shortly, when I will deal with the point. Suffice it to say that I have never regarded the figure of 750,000 pensioners as realistic. I note that the authors of these findings warn the reader to treat them with great caution. There is a huge variation in the findings on take-up. I shall deal with take-up and the important point that the hon. Gentleman has either deliberately or inadvertently stumbled upon.

I shall deal with the criticisms that are made in the reasoned amendment. *[Interruption.]* I thought that the hon. Member for Havant liked a debate. Did I not read in the newspapers last week his assertion that if he, the hon. Member for Northavon, who is the Liberal Democrat spokesman on these matters, and my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) were the first three speakers in the debate, the intellectual argument would be won. That is rough on the rest of us. I am sure that the rest of us have something to say. The hon. Gentleman is being touchy if he gets upset when we engage in a robust debate.

James Purnell (Stalybridge and Hyde): My right hon. Friend mentioned events at Harrogate and the conversion of the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) to the cause of poverty. Does he remember the hon. Gentleman saying only two years ago:

"The tax guarantee goes to the heart of what we Conservatives believe. . . Cutting back the growth of social security must be at the heart of the agenda for the next Conservative Government"?

Does that not show that the real agenda for the Conservatives is to cut benefits for pensioners?

Mr. Darling: The Conservative spokesman is famous for having two brains. I think that the Conservative party speaks with two voices on pensions. It tells us that it wants to increase the basic state pension, yet we know that it is committed to privatising it. Look at what happened. *[Interruption.]* It always upsets Conservative Members when they are reminded of their true policy.

Andrew Selous (South-West Bedfordshire): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Darling: In one moment. I should like to make a wee bit more progress.

I shall explain why the criticisms made in the reasoned amendment are wrong and why I believe that our approach is better and fairer than the Opposition alternative.

Let us remember that the pension credit gives the least well-off pensioners an average of £8.20 a week, whereas the amendment would give them about £5 less. The Conservatives and their new friends raise three main arguments. They say that the pension credit will extend means-testing, increase complexity and undermine saving. I shall deal with each of those matters briefly.

First, let us confront the argument about means-testing head on. If we are serious about tackling individual pensioner poverty, we must undertake some form of income assessment. That is how we help vulnerable people. I turn again to Lord Fowler. He said:

"In making policy on pensions . . . there are two broad choices that any Minister and any government can make. One can give general benefits to everyone irrespective of need. The disadvantage of that is that one obviously gives benefits to many people who by most—virtually all—definitions do not need them . . . Alternatively, one can try and target benefits to those who need them . . . we should get away from the emotiveness involved in describing that process as means testing."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 18 December 2001; Vol. 630, c. 164.]

He went on to regret the fact that it was our Government rather than his who introduced the measure.

I think that Lord Fowler has a point. If we want to tackle pensioner poverty and ensure that people who need help get it, we must have an individual assessment of that person's income. There is nothing new about that. The tax system does it, as does the benefit system. I do not believe that the argument stands up that we can more effectively tackle poverty by targeting extra help on the over-75s or the over-80s.

It is true that on average pensioner incomes decline as people get older. However, as I have said, half of those who gain from the pension credit are older than 75, and a quarter are older than 80. It is a fact that there are poor 67-year-olds, just as there are better off 82-year-olds. The only way we can be sure that we help the people who need help is to have some form of assessment of somebody's income.

Mr. Andrew Dismore (Hendon): Half the population of the Burnt Oak ward of my constituency are on means-tested benefits already. Within a mile, there are wards where there are more millionaires than anywhere else in Britain. I have often heard people in Burnt Oak complain that they worked all their lives, put some money aside and have nothing to show for it, compared with those who were on benefit. I have yet to hear that complaint from people who live in millionaires' row. Does my right hon. Friend accept that the pension credit will provide extra assistance for people who live in Burnt Oak, who need it, and that there is little point in helping the millionaires in Mill Hill?

Mr. Darling: There is a fairly straightforward argument, and I expect that again my hon. Friend and I will part company. If there is a limited amount of money to spend, the question arises whether it is better to spread that money thinly regardless of whether people need help, or to do more to help people. This year, for example, the state pension will increase for everybody by £3 a week. It will increase by £6 a week for some pensioners on the lowest incomes. It is worth bearing it in mind that 80 per cent. of gains in pension credit will go to pensioners with incomes of less than £149 a week. These people are by no means well off.

That illustrates what a progressive measure the pension credit is. It is doing more for people. Those who are concerned about whether we should assess people's incomes are not squeamish when it comes to the tax system, and they should not be squeamish when it comes to the benefits system.

Lynne Jones: Given what my right hon. Friend has said, have the Government abandoned their initial aim when they embarked on welfare reform, which was to reduce means-testing?

Mr. Darling: Our objective, throughout the time that I have been responsible for this policy, is to get help to those who need help most. I say in the nicest possible way to my hon. Friend that that is one of the reasons why I joined the Labour party.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff, West): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is absurd to use the emotive imagery of the means test of the 1930s and the National Assistance Board poking into families' and pensioners' business after the second world war? We are talking about the pension credit, for which a pensioner will be assessed every five years.

Mr. Darling: My hon. Friend is right.

When Conservatives say that they are against means-testing, we must understand that they are against giving money to poor pensioners. Despite everything that we heard at Harrogate this weekend—I dare say that compassionate Conservatives will be among us for some time to come until there is a move to the next phase—we must bear it in mind that if the House is serious about doing something for pensioners on low incomes, it is necessary to identify those people in the first place, and then, critically, to ensure that we have the resources and the means to help them. The Conservative party is still committed to reducing the share of public spending to about 35 per cent. of gross domestic product. The two approaches do not square.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Darling: I seem to have struck a raw nerve. I shall try to give way to as many hon. Members as possible without abusing my position. I give way to Lord Fowler's successor, the hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr. Mitchell), who I understand is working even as we speak on the half-baked policy to privatise the basic state pension.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield): Does the right hon. Gentleman recall saying in his 1998 Green Paper:

"People who have worked all their lives should not have to rely on means tested-benefits when they retire"?

Does he think that the Bill takes him nearer or further from that goal?

Mr. Darling: The hon. Gentleman will know, if he read the rest of the paragraph, that that statement was in the context that I believed—I still believe—that not enough people were saving enough towards their retirement because they did not have the means to do so. That passage led to our doing two things—extending the basic state pension and introducing the state second pension.

I understand that the hon. Gentleman will be going along to the next Conservative party team meeting. These meetings are held on Tuesdays at 10.30 pm. If anyone wants to go along, I should say that no doubt the professor—the hon. Member for Northavon—will be there, and maybe others. They will find out more. *[Interruption.]* They are all flocking in. It will be an extremely crowded telephone box.

Surely it is the policy of all Governments to encourage people who can save for their retirement to do so. We should make sure that that happens. It should surely also be an objective of the Government to put in place incentives to encourage people to save. We do that through the tax system. The hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield will know that there is tax relief for saving towards pensions. The Bill introduces a further incentive. If someone goes that extra mile and saves money, he or she will get an extra incentive for having done so. As the hon. Gentleman has taken over the seat formerly represented by Lord Fowler, perhaps he should have a word with the noble Lord, unless he thinks that his views are completely misplaced and misconceived. I would be surprised if he did.

David Cairns (Greenock and Inverclyde):: My right hon. Friend is right that a five-year assessment is infinitely preferable to the weekly means-testing assessment that was carried out until recently, but can he guarantee that as people's circumstances change in the course of the five years, they will be entitled to a reassessment, which it is to be hoped will lead to their being given even more generous sums? Can he confirm that it will be offered to them not grudgingly but as part of the pension service after their initial assessment?

Mr. Darling: Yes, I can. I shall shortly come to take-up and how we will deal with it. As hon. Members have said, five-year assessments will apply from the age of 65. People whose circumstances have changed and who are entitled to more will be able to come back, but as the vast majority of pensioners' circumstances do not change, I am reasonably confident that most people will not be troubled that often.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Darling: The hon. Member for Havant, who speaks for the Conservatives, has been urging me not to take any more interventions. I will therefore give way to perhaps two more hon. Members and then make some progress.

Mr. Mark Simmonds (Boston and Skegness): Is not the real issue about means-testing the fact that many pensioners find it demeaning to go through the process, and that there is a direct causal link between means-testing and a lack of take-up?

Mr. Darling: With respect, that is complete rubbish. I do not find it demeaning, any more than I hope the hon. Gentleman does, to fill in a tax return once a year. A calculation is made of how much money we have and how much we are due to pay in tax. The new system,

[Mr. Darling]

which I shall set out shortly, will be very easy for pensioners. When they apply for the basic state pension, we will calculate their entitlement to pension credit at the same time.

What is clear from this debate—it has been clear for some time—is that the Conservatives are not against means-testing per se. It has been about in the social security system ever since it was started. What they really object to is a measure such as this, which puts more money into the majority of pensioner households. They have made it clear that they and their friends, the Liberal Democrats, are against this measure. That is great from our point of view, but it is very unfortunate for pensioners.

Mr. Tom Levitt (High Peak): On the same topic, it is probably true that some pensioners have perceived the process of applying for benefits as intrusive and bureaucratic. They have believed that it is very difficult to get benefits and that there is a high risk of being turned down, but in future they will surely see that if they have a state pension and any amount of modest savings, it will be in their interests to make their circumstances known in order to claim their entitlement. Does my right hon. Friend look forward to the time when the pension credit can be paid automatically, based on income tax data?

Mr. Darling: That would be a very happy situation, although given what I had to tell the House last Wednesday about information technology systems we may be further away from that than I would like. It appears that there is some common ground in the House because both the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats accept that there is a correlation between age and people becoming poorer. They accept that something needs to be done to help pensioners on low or modest incomes. The difference between us is that I think we have to treat individuals as individuals. There are poor 67-year-olds and better off 82-year-olds. All of us know the difficulty that we would get into if we decided that people can be poor only once they reach the age of 80. What would we say to a poor person who was in their mid-70s—wait five years and it will be all right? That seems a nonsense position.

Another argument that we will no doubt hear from the hon. Member for Havant relates to complexity. When someone claims to have a simple solution to pensions, people should watch their wallet. People lead complex lives. They may change jobs several times. They may take time out of the labour market to care for children and so on. Pension provision is necessarily complex to meet the complex individual circumstances of people's lives. Even the basic state pension, which some people think is a simple concept, is based on a complex set of rules and calculations.

What is important is that there are choices and options. A one-size-fits-all policy to pensions would not work. Many of the people who claimed to have found a simple solution often found that it was neither workable nor affordable in the long term—two essential ingredients of any pension policy.

Tonight, the Opposition position on the pension credit is ridiculous. They say that they would keep the pension credit for people who have already retired, but bring back the savings disincentives for people saving for their future. That is not just complex—it is absolute nonsense.

That brings me to another argument that the Opposition advance. The Conservatives, and their new friends, are setting themselves against the very reform that will make saving pay. Their approach would do nothing to remove the disincentives in the present system. Somebody with savings that took them above the basic state pension, but below an income of £100 a week, would be no better off than their neighbour who had not saved at all. That seems absolute nonsense.

I want to say a brief word about the pension service because the question of entitlement has been raised on many occasions. The pension service will provide a better way of delivering services. As I have said, when people apply for their pensions, we will find out whether they are eligible for the pension credit. Once they reach the age of 65, when their incomes tend to be fairly stable, we will set the awards for up to five years. That is a real change, which will be widely welcomed.

Mr. Bill Tynan (Hamilton, South): Is there any way in which the pension service could be used to identify those who are on pensions at present and whether they would be due for pension credit? If not, they are going to escape through the net, which suggests that there will be a difficulty with take-up.

Mr. Darling: I certainly agree with my hon. Friend. People who are now retired will also be entitled to the pension credit. As he is aware, one of the improvements that we are making is to move to a system that is more telephone based, which appears to be more popular with pensioners, who can get in contact with people far more easily. We certainly do not want to have to force them to go to old DSS-style offices, which they would not particularly want to do.

The final stage of the reforms is to strip away some of the regulation and red tape that has built up over the years. The House will know that we will have the Pickering and Sandler reviews in the summer. We plan to publish proposals later this year to make it easier for people to save.

The pension credit is a substantial reform. As I have said, it will benefit around half of all pensioners. It complements the reforms that we have made to make saving possible, by rewarding people for their thrift. It puts right a long-standing grievance. The result is that it is fair and promotes saving.

The House has a choice between our approach and that of the Conservatives, and their new friends. Our policies are workable and affordable. They build on the partnership between the state and funded sector. Be in no doubt that the Conservative policy is to privatise the basic state pension.

Our policy is fair and tackles pensioner poverty, whereas the Opposition—all of them—will vote against a measure that helps vulnerable people. Our policies will remove once and for all the unfairness in the current system. The Tories and their new friends want to keep that unfairness.

This Bill is essential to tackle poverty and to reward thrift. It will benefit 5 million pensioners by an average of £400 a year. That is what Labour Members will vote for; that is what Opposition Members will vote against. I commend the Bill to the House.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind all hon. Members that Mr. Speaker has imposed a 12-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches.

6.8 pm

Mr. David Willetts (Havant): I beg to move, To leave out from 'That' to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

'this House declines to give a Second Reading to the State Pension Credit Bill *[Lords]* because it involves a further move towards the mass means-testing of the pensioner population; believes that it will greatly increase the complexity of the pension system both for today's pensioners and for future generations, will result in many pensioners missing out on their entitlements, and will serve to erode incentives to save; and believes that the additional expenditure would have been better directed towards the basic state pension, particularly for older pensioners.'

The reasoned amendment is in my name and in the names of hon. Members from a range of other political parties.

The purpose of the debate on our reasoned amendment is to try to get the House to address what I think is the historic significance of the proposals that the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions is bringing before us today. He is announcing the end of the basic state pension as a determinant of the income of pensioners. In future, the amount that a pensioner receives will be determined by the minimum income guarantee, now renamed the guarantee credit, and the formula for determining the savings credit above that.

Throughout most of the 20th century, there was a belief in all parts of the House that the basic state pension would be an important part of provision for people in their retirement. The Secretary of State's measures today say farewell to that. I thought that his speech could have tackled that central issue with rather more seriousness than he was willing to demonstrate, especially given his party's history on the subject.

Under the strategy proposed by the Secretary of State, more than half of all pensioners will find themselves facing marginal rates of benefit withdrawal of 40 per cent. or more. It is important that the House has the opportunity to take a view on that strategy and to consider whether there might be a better alternative that nevertheless tackles the needs of poor pensioners.

Kevin Brennan: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that a far more significant date in the development of pensions was when his party broke the link between the basic state pension and earnings, which put us in the position that we are in today?

Mr. Willetts: If the hon. Gentleman is so worried about the breaking of the earnings link, why does not his party reinstate it rather than move towards means-testing?

Mr. Levitt: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman can grasp the intellectual difference between an income guarantee and a pension guarantee. The pension guarantee will remain universal to pensioners, but those who have as their income only the pension, or the pension and a very small amount, will be rewarded for the thrift that has produced a little bit extra. It represents an acceptance that the pension is not by itself sufficient for somebody to live on.

I remind the hon. Gentleman that both the minimum income guarantee and the pension credit will indeed be index-linked, so more and more people's pensions will be put back on to that basis.

Mr. Willetts: I am afraid that I did not entirely grasp the hon. Gentleman's point. He seems to be trying to say that there is a big difference between the pension credit and the minimum income guarantee, but the figures given by the Secretary of State, which, he claimed, showed the marvellous effects of the pension credit, included the effects of the so-called guarantee credit, which is the old minimum income guarantee. Labour Members cannot have it both ways.

James Purnell: Some Labour Members found the remarks that the hon. Gentleman made over the weekend difficult to stomach. He claimed to be on the side of the poor, yet from 1979 to 1992, when he advised Conservative Governments, the income of the bottom 10 per cent. fell by 17 per cent. in real terms—not a relative, but an absolute, fall. Will he apologise for that?

Mr. Willetts: No, and I do not recognise the figures that the hon. Gentleman quotes.

I want to talk about the problem that has been created since 1997 as a result of the extension of means-testing under the minimum income guarantee. It has created a gap in that the value of means-tested benefits is now much higher than the value of the basic state pension. That is why the Secretary of State goes on about all the people who find themselves being penalised for having saved. It is a consequence of the increase in the value of the minimum income guarantee relative to the basic state pension. Now, apparently, the problem created by the extension of means-testing is to be solved by even more means-testing. I invite hon. Members to consider whether there is an alternative strategy that nevertheless targets help on poorer pensioners.

Paul Flynn: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Willetts: Yes, because the hon. Gentleman has a long record of concern about these issues.

Paul Flynn: Indeed, and a long memory of the hon. Gentleman. He will not remember, but in 1948 the basic pension was 24 shillings and there was an occupational disregard of 10s 6d and an employment disregard of 20 shillings. The system continued in those terms for a long time, with some modifications, until the occupational pension disregard was abolished in 1980. That is the reason for the Bill. Does the hon. Gentleman recall who abolished it, and will he give us a mea culpa?

Mr. Willetts: The reason for the Bill is the spread of means-testing that has taken place since 1997, and that is the point on which I want to focus. The consequences of

[Mr. Willetts]

means-testing are clear from the evidence around us. Before we rush into yet more, let us consider the problems caused by that which already exists. I should like to consider first the impact of existing and proposed means-testing on present-day pensioners and then its impact on pensioners in the future.

David Cairns: On the extension of means-testing, can the hon. Gentleman confirm that it is Conservative policy to keep the winter fuel payment as a universal benefit; or does he agree with his hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) who, on 27 November, told the all-party disability group that it would be better to target fuel poverty by doing away with the payment and moving towards means-testing? Would not that be an extension of means-testing?

Mr. Willetts: My hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell), who speaks powerfully on these issues, assures me that his comments were misinterpreted. When he speaks at the end of the debate, he will have an opportunity to make clear exactly where we stand.

I accept, however, that means-testing will be part of the social security system—as it has always been. I do not pretend that we can suddenly get rid of it. I invite Labour Members to contemplate the implications of moving to a regime where almost 60 per cent. of pensioners will be on means tests. The question is whether we should embrace such a massive extension of means-testing. There will, of course, always be some means-testing.

I should now like to make some progress with my speech and consider the implications of the Government's proposals for pensioners. One of the problems with means-testing is that it breeds complexity, and complexity means declining and low take-up. The Secretary of State dismissed the figures on take-up, but his Department produces them annually. I shall not go to extremes but simply take his estimates for the mid-point in the number of pensioners who are entitled to the minimum income guarantee but do not claim it. The number was 500,000 last year, while the latest statistics suggest that it has increased to almost 600,000. That is the mid-point in the range.

The figures that we are given by Ministers always assume 100 per cent. take-up. In the real world, there is not 100 per cent. take-up, or anything like it. It is no good for the Government to try to sell us policies that assume 100 per cent. take-up. Every Member knows that that is simply not valid—that is not the situation for pensioners.

Lynne Jones: Does the hon. Gentleman also acknowledge that a problem of an over-complex system is that it would be easy for future Governments, who might be less generous to pensioners, to cut back on the benefits and pensions paid to elderly people? That is exactly what happened in the past.

Mr. Willetts: I certainly accept that one of the problems of a complicated system is that it is difficult to ensure its long-term viability. For example—to re-enter the debate that went on before the last general election—there are questions about all the special payments introduced by the Government. I think that pensioners would have been better off if those payments had been consolidated in the value of the basic state pension. That would have been a better way to help pensioners rather than creating a large number of special payments. Of course, those payments exist and we understand why pensioners do not want to lose them, but had I been in the Secretary of State's shoes, I would much rather have put the money into the basic state pension.

One of the things I regret is that the Government could have achieved much more were they not so preoccupied with gimmicks, special schemes and extra new payments. That is not the best way to help pensioners. In a recent report on the consequences of the Government's proposals, the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux states:

"CAB evidence is that both the benefit and tax systems are complicated and intimidating to those lacking in financial literacy skills . . . The complexity of benefits and the claiming process is one reason why millions of pounds worth of benefits go unclaimed by people on low incomes . . . more needs to be done to ensure that all low income groups can claim the credits or benefits to which they are entitled."

NACAB is telling us that the system is too complicated.

Furthermore, the Pension Provision Group, in a long and thoughtful set of comments on the Government's proposals, states:

"Ensuring take-up of Pension Credit is better than for existing means-tested benefits would be difficult."

The group acknowledges that there will be a problem of low take-up of the pension credit—it is a pity that Ministers do not.

We want the Government to address that problem. Charities for elderly people say the same thing: there is a problem of take-up of the minimum income guarantee, despite the millions of pounds that Ministers have spent on advertising it, and there will be similar problems in the take-up of the pension credit.

Mr. Tynan: On take-up, does the hon. Gentleman not accept that stigmatising pensions by regarding them as a means-tested benefit rather than a right is off-putting to those who need them most?

Mr. Willetts: I appreciate the sincerity with which the hon. Gentleman makes that point, but in the attempt to tackle the problem, income support has been renamed the minimum income guarantee, which will now be renamed the guarantee credit, and with the savings credit it will form part of the pension credit. The frequent renaming and re-badging of benefits does not help pensioners, and it is one of the main reasons why take-up is, if anything, getting worse. It is another example of the way in which this Government's Blairite preoccupation with renaming and new initiatives is not in the best interests of the people whom they claim to want to help.

I want to discuss the faith that Ministers put in the new pension service, which will be introduced shortly, and the five-year entitlement as a solution to the take-up problem. The Secretary of State briefly referred to the pension service, which I hope will prove to be a success. However, it will be concentrated in a relatively small number of centres, and we are told that pensioners will be supposed to communicate with it on the internet and by telephone. It will be difficult for pensioners physically to visit a local branch of their pension service, because there will be so

few of them. I doubt whether the pension service will be able effectively to increase benefit take-up, which is currently going down. I hope that it will succeed, but we need more evidence as to why it will succeed than the Secretary of State has so far provided.

The five-year entitlement, which is guaranteed once a person has claimed it, will not help if people do not like the prospect of claiming the benefit. It is no good saying that pensioners will be able to claim it for five years, given that it is the very prospect of providing the necessary detailed information that puts pensioners off in the first place. The Institute for Fiscal Studies said:

"There is little in the plans for the pension credit that suggest that less information will be needed to establish benefit entitlement than in the past."

The Secretary of State says that the entitlement will be held constant for five years, but pensioners' circumstances will not remain constant for that time. They will change all the time, and interest rates will go up and down, so the income from their building society accounts will change. Moreover, their personal circumstances and the value of their savings may change.

The right hon. Gentleman says that he will try to prevent changes in bureaucracy for five years, but he cannot prevent changes in pensioners' circumstances. If pensioners approach the pension service, detailed recalculations of entitlements to benefit will be necessary; if they do not, but their circumstances have deteriorated and their income is lower, they will get less credit than they are entitled to. I therefore fail to see how the five-year blanket fixed payment will solve the problem that the Secretary of State claims to understand. There is a problem with take-up now, and there will still be a problem under the pension credit.

The problem relates not just to pensioners today but to incentives to save in the future. Again, Ministers' claims for the pension credit's effect on the incentive to save are far too optimistic. I would much rather believe the Institute for Fiscal Studies, which says:

"Overall, the effect of the pension credit on the financial incentive to save is left unclear, for the relative magnitudes of the different effects we have disentangled are not known."

In other words, there will be no improved incentive to save for some pensioners, but for others such an incentive will indeed exist. The IFS is not willing to commit itself on whether the number of pensioners with an incentive to save will, on balance, increase, and I am surprised that the Secretary of State is quite so confident in that regard.

Mr. Chris Pond (Gravesham): On future savings and pensions, I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman can offer some independent financial advice to my nine-year-old daughter. In the event that there were to be a Conservative Secretary of State for Work and Pensions by the time she reached retirement age, and given the hon. Gentleman's current policy of replacing state provision with private provision, how much does he recommend that she start saving weekly now to ensure at least the equivalent of today's basic state pension by the time she reaches retirement age?

Mr. Willetts: The hon. Gentleman is straying into dangerous territory. He will know that one of the main groups of people taking out the stakeholder pension—which was supposed to tackle pensioner poverty—is gra[illegible]rents, who buy them for their nine-year-old grandchi[illegible]en, for example. If he regards that as a serious contribut[illegible] to the improvement of pensioner poverty, I suggest [illegible]he study the subject in rather more detail.

The ques[illegible] whether the pension credit will reward pensioners who have saved is a subject on which the IFS is unsure, and on which the Financial Services Authority has given a clear warning. In the context of stakeholders—the point is relevant to pension credit as a whole—the FSA says:

"The economics of stakeholder pensions are predicated on their sale without the need for personal investment advice."

The hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Pond) is interested in encouraging us to give such advice, but we are not registered to do so. The FSA continues:

"Whilst the introduction of Pension Credit does not of itself make these (simple) products more complex, it does have the effect of making the decision whether to buy more complex. This could mean more people needing to take advice before reaching a decision. But this advice has to be paid for and many who may need it may be disinclined to be prepared to do so."

The FSA is warning that, because of the complexity of the pension credit's impact, it cannot be sure that people will be better off buying a stakeholder pension, and recommends that they seek advice. The IFS and the FSA offer the same warning: that matters are not necessarily as straightforward as Ministers like to claim, and that the pension credit will not necessarily provide all pensioners with an unambiguous incentive to save more.

Mr. Levitt: If a pensioner has an income from investments or an occupational pension, it will surely be sufficiently high to take them above the pension credit level. If not, the pension credit will supplement that income. In both cases, there will be an incentive to save, and those whose income is below the pension credit level would also have an incentive, because they will qualify for extra help on reaching that level. Who has the disincentive?

Mr. Willetts: The subject is not as simple as that, which is why the FSA is warning people to take advice. We hear about the 40 per cent. rate of pension credit withdrawal—the higher rate tax level—but once housing benefit and council tax benefit are included, pensioners could face marginal rates of up to 91 per cent. People might well think that a 9[illegible] per cent. rate of benefit withdrawal does not offer much of a reward for saving. Labour Members need to contemplate the impact of those measures, which would extend such marginal rates up the income scale.

Miss Anne Begg (Aberdeen, South): When the hon. Gentleman began his working life, did he decide that it would probably be in his best interests to save for his retirement, not knowing that he would reach the heady heights of Government office, earn lots of money and thereby be able to save? Like most of us, he probably decided at that early stage that it was probably sensible to save, not knowing whether he would be able to continue to do so, or to save as much as he anticipated. Most people in that situation would decide that it was better in the long term to save—either because they will be able to save a great deal for their retirement, or because they will be able to save a bit and therefore benefit from the pension credit.

Mr. Willetts: Again, I wish that matters were as simple as that. The savings gap—the gap between the amount

[Mr. Willetts]

people are actually saving and the amount that they need to save to enjoy a reasonable income on retirement—is estimated at a massive £27 billion a year. That is the problem that we have been debating—with the notable exception of the Secretary of State, who has remained silent as occupational pensions for new members have closed. We pressed Ministers on this issue for years, on the introduction of the stakeholder pension. For example, we asked how much money one needs to build up in a stakeholder fund to be confident that it will yield an income sufficient to get above the minimum income guarantee. That straightforward question—it is the $64,000 question—is one of the first that any independent financial adviser would want to consider, but we have never received a straight answer from Ministers.

The answer could be $64,000. It could be even more. If means-testing spreads further up the income scale, it will affect the behaviour of the next generation. It is no good arguing that nobody will be affected and that people will carry on as if nothing has happened. Ministers cannot claim that this is a massive change in the way in which pensioners are helped without also recognising that it might have an effect—not always a desirable one—on the behaviour of the next generation of pensioners. That is what I ask Labour Members to consider.

Mr. Jim Cousins (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): If the hon. Gentleman wishes to sweep away all the complexities and rely on the basic state pension, what relationship does he think that that pension should bear to average earnings, now and in the future?

Mr. Willetts: Let me turn to that issue, because I now wish to set out a possible alternative approach. We would begin by acknowledging the most powerful point that the Secretary of State makes, although he did not put it especially succinctly today. He says that in the old days the basic state pension was well targeted on poverty because most pensioners were poor. However, he argues that pensioners now have a greater diversity of incomes, so the basic state pension is less well targeted on poverty. That is the kernel of the argument that the Secretary of State uses against those of his colleagues who wish to restore the earnings link and in favour of means tests. That point reflects the reality of greater diversity of income among pensioners and it is the challenge to us to think afresh about the problem.

Beveridge's great insight was that if one could define categories of benefit recipient carefully enough, measures could be well targeted on poverty without means-testing. In his day, the basic state pension was well targeted, but now it is less so. The Secretary of State says that means-testing is the only alternative, but we know that, by and large, older pensioners tend to be poorer pensioners. The correlation is not perfect, I accept, but it is broadly true. The figures are striking. Couples who have recently retired have, on average, an income of £384, compared with the under-75s on £359 and the over-75s on £283. Similar figures apply to single pensioners—those who have recently retired are on £210; those aged under 75 are on £184 and those over 75 on £158.

The hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb)—my new friend, as the Secretary of State described him—made the fair point, sotto voce, that those figures are the reason why the Government introduced free television licences and restricted them to the over-75s. The Government argue that that provision was well targeted because older pensioners tend to be poorer. The reasoned amendment does not propose a precise age range, because that would need to be decided, but if we paid a higher rate—not to all pensioners, as the Secretary of State claimed, but to older pensioners—it would be reasonably well targeted on poverty without more means-testing.

Despite the imperfections in that scheme, which I freely admit, we could at least be confident that all pensioners would receive the payment. I am not confident that all pensioners will get the pension credit. The Government cite a load of figures for the pension credit, but they all assume a 100 per cent. take-up. That is a bogus assumption.

Mr. Cousins: That is interesting, but I am still waiting for an answer to my question. What should be the relationship between the basic state pension—if the hon. Gentleman wants to rely on that as a means of delivery—and average earnings? Should it be 25 per cent., 10 per cent., or perhaps 4 per cent.? That is what we need to know.

Mr. Willetts: I do not propose that we bring back the earnings link. I propose a significant increase in the basic state pension when people reach an age at which we know they are likely to have a lower income. That is what Members on both sides of the House propose as a better way to tackle the problem than yet more means-testing, and it has much to recommend it.

Mr. Dismore: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Willetts: No, I wish to make some progress. There is a logic to the reasoned amendment and I invite the House to consider that alternative strategy. I hope that it will win the day in the Division at 10 o'clock. However, if the pension credit is implemented despite our concerns, I would not take it away from pensioners—

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Maria Eagle): Ah.

Mr. Willetts: I am pleased to get a hum of approval from the Minister. I would not take the pension credit away, but I wish that we had the alternative strategy that I have outlined.

I would now like to consider three particular points on the proposal. The hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Kidney), who is no longer in his place, made a valid point about incomplete contribution records. I asked the Secretary of State a parliamentary question on that point nearly a year ago and I was told that some 2.9 million pensioners were in receipt of a partial pension. Many of those are women. We should remember, when we hear the claims of how marvellous the pension credit will be for pensioners, that 2.9 million pensioners—nearly a third—do not get the full value of the basic state pension. For them, their savings will have to go towards increasing the basic state pension to the full value and they will not get the 60 per cent. top-up—or whatever Labour Members fondly hope that those pensioners will get.

We have not yet discussed the interaction between the pension credit and nursing homes. One of my frustrations with the Secretary of State and his Department is that they

have a blind spot about nursing homes and their costs. That is why the Government got into a muddle over the winter fuel payment, which they wrongly claimed was being paid to all pensioners when it was not paid to pensioners in care homes. We need to know how pensioners in care homes will be affected by the pension credit. The Minister in the other place said that

"people in residential care or care homes will enjoy both the savings element and the guarantee element"—

of the pension credit. That was a good start. Unfortunately, she continued:

"Whether local authorities go on to recover all or part of that in increased charging will be for them to determine in consultation with the Department of Health."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 18 December 2001; Vol. 1858, c. 191.]

So the Bill is a device to enable local authorities to extract more money from pensioners in receipt of the pension credit. The Pension Provision Group made that point clearly when it said:

"Unless changes are made to the existing Department of Health guidelines, the immediate beneficiaries of Pension Credit paid to pensioners in residential care could be local authorities."

That could also include any pensioner who receives any assistance with care costs, including domiciliary care. Any income that they get from the pension credit will be taken into account by local authorities when deciding how much to charge those pensioners. The Secretary of State did not mention that point and I hope that the Minister will do so later, because it is very important.

We are all waiting with bated breath to know what decision the Government will reach on another aspect of the pension credit—the treatment of earnings. Considerable confusion still exists on that point, even after days of debate in the House of Lords. We thought that the Government believed it to be important to encourage people to carry on in work, if at all possible, with new flexibility. However, let us consider the case of two pensioners, both aged 67, who live side by side in a block of flats. One has a £30 a week pension from Tesco to boost the basic state pension and the Secretary of State claims that that person will get help from the pension credit. The other pensioner has only the basic state pension and goes out to work at Tesco and earns £30 a week. Is the pensioner who works to earn £30 a week to be entitled to the same level of support as the pensioner with the occupational pension? That is a point on which we have regularly pressed Ministers in another place. We have not yet been told whether the calculation of the pension credit will treat earnings in the same way as it treats income from savings.

Mr. Darling: That is an important point, and I specifically said that we propose to treat income from work in the same way as money from occupational pensions or savings. I mentioned that, although, clearly, the hon. Gentleman may have been distracted at the time.

Mr. Willetts: I welcome that. We shall want to check the detail in Committee, but it seems that the only logical position is to treat earnings in the same way as one treats savings. I presume that that means that pensioners will not claim the working tax credit. There is no upper age limit on the working tax credit, and I am sure that the interaction of the working tax credit and the pension credit—one of the many credits that the Government regularly throw in front of us—will be considered by the Committee in great detail.

I want to return to the issue of whether the pension credit will tackle the pension crisis that confronts us as every day passes. That crisis is caused by a number of factors: the closure of occupational pension schemes to new members; a catastrophically low level of saving; a spread of means-testing; increasing complexity, which means that financial advisers are more and more reluctant unambiguously to advise people that it is in their interests to save; and stakeholder pensions not reaching their target group—sales are very low, and very few of them are to people in the £10,000 to £20,000 income range. The Government's advertising campaign to increase people's knowledge and awareness of the stakeholder pension might be thought of as a success. We know from research, however, that the only consequence of people knowing more about the stakeholder pension is that it leaves them even more confused and uncertain than they were before they started.

We have a low level of saving, and the only solution from Ministers is more means-testing. I invite the House to consider whether means-testing is helping to get us into this mess, and therefore whether more means-testing is really the best way to get us out of it.

6.42 pm

Mr. Jim Cousins (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): I thank you for calling me, Madam Deputy Speaker, although I am a little surprised to be called at this point.

I am happy to support the Bill on the basis that it will add to security and increase fairness, particularly for the many pensioners—or, as I ought to say, for the many people over 60—who have now and will have in the future small savings and small pensions other than the basic state pension. They in particular have not benefited fully from the introduction of many of the Government's measures in the minimum income guarantee, because their small savings, earnings and work pensions take them above the limit. The fact that this state pension credit proposal will vastly extend the coverage and reach of the pension credit compared with the minimum income guarantee illustrates how many of those people there are.

I am also encouraged to support the Bill on the basis of the failure of the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) to answer my question. If the alternative to the state pension credit and the minimum income guarantee will be the basic rate of state pension, we need to know what will be the relationship between the basic state pension and average earnings. The fact that the hon. Member for Havant could not answer that point illustrates the need for the state pension credit proposals.

Mr. Willetts: We do not know that about the pension credit either. We do not know what the long-term uprating formula will be for the pension credit.

Mr. Cousins: That is a very interesting point, which I intend to try to address.

My difficulty with the Bill relates to whether it forms a permanent part of the pension system. Is it something on which people can rely, that they can plan for, and that they can build in to their expectations, or is it a short-term fix to deal with the limitations of the minimum income guarantee that I have just set out? One of the most important aspects is the uprating system. The Government have made it clear that the guarantee element of credit

[Mr. Cousins]

will be uprated in line with earnings for this Parliament. The crucial question, however, is the relationship between the savings credit and the guarantee credit. Because of the way in which savings credit is placed on top of the guarantee credit—if that were calculated as we currently understand it—there would rapidly be an enormous increase in the number of people who have an entitlement to pension credit. The reach of savings credit—because of the way in which it sits on top of the guarantee credit—would advance faster than the rate of increase in earnings. If that were sustained and built into the pension credit as a permanent feature, it could be an enormous strength, but it could also be a source of enormous weakness, as it is very vulnerable to future changes in assessment and eligibility.

One of the objects that we ought to seek to achieve with the pension credit is to make sure that the relationship between the savings credit and the guarantee credit is in the form that is now proposed. Unless we can secure that, there is a danger that the benefits of the pension credit system would be rapidly changed by a future Government. Conceivably, it could rapidly change even if there were not a change of Government, because these schemes are vulnerable to changes in policy.

The big protection against a change in the way in which the savings credit is assessed would be a scheme of such robustness and popular support that no future Government—whether of the Labour party or another party—could seek to change it. That is precisely what has happened to the winter heating allowance. It was introduced and it has now become embedded in our system. Pensioners understand it, it carries huge popular support, and it cannot now be changed. The official Opposition have given up on their attempts to change it.

Lynne Jones: Is not the problem with the winter fuel allowance that there is no built-in annual increase in its value? Is there not a danger that the same thing will happen to the winter fuel allowance as happened to the pensioners' Christmas bonus if it is held at £200 or not increased every year?

Mr. Cousins: My hon. Friend is right, but it is a matter of fact that it has gone up like a rocket. If we could achieve the same for the pension credit, I would be tremendously happy. Let us look at the some of the elements of the state pension credit proposal in the time that I have left.

The state pension credit is a sort of third way proposal. People have argued for many years about means-tested benefits on the one hand and universal benefits on the other. The state pension credit is a huge breakthrough in thinking. It is an income-tested benefit that, from the start, will cover more than half the population, and if the relationship between the savings credit and the guarantee credit continues in the way that I have described, it will rapidly cover most of the pensioner population. It is a third way measure in that respect. It breaks through the arguments that we have had for many years in relation to universality and means-testing. However, it has some unfortunate deficiencies. The rate of the benefit is linked to 40 per cent. so these proposals will levy a withdrawal rate on relatively low-income pensioners that equates to the higher rate of tax. That worries me, because it will cause problems and will reduce pensioners' enthusiasm for the credit.

The maximum sum is capped in a way that many pensioners will find confusing. Unlike tax, the pension credit will continue the systems of attributed income. It will be a much better system of attributing income than the ones that we have had hitherto, but it will be a continuation of them. That fact will also undermine the credit's credibility and popularity. Most important, the minimum income guarantee attributes income even from small private sector pension plans of which there will be many in the future. The state pension credit will continue such attribution, so I see little point in the House having a huge argument about what age people should be able to keep their private pension funds without the need to draw down the pension if the lowest income pensioners with the smallest private pension funds are to have income from those pensions attributed to them from the outset.

If the state pension credit could integrate tax and benefits in the way that many of us have hoped for for many years, that would be a huge step forward. Unfortunately, my noble Friend Baroness Hollis made it clear on Second Reading in the other place that that would not occur and that a crucial difference between tax and benefits was to be maintained. The pension credit will be subject to a household measure of income whereas tax is subject to an individual measure of income. That difference will particularly affect women who have smaller pensions both in their own right through the state and through work. I hope that we will be able to change that feature of the Bill. The issue of women who have incomplete contributions that bring them a pension that is smaller than the basic state pension has been mentioned already. I hope that it will be pursued.

During the passage of the Bill, the Government could introduce a savings disregard to the pension credit. Such an important measure could lift people through some of the difficulties that I have described. If the Government were willing to conceive of the pension credit as free standing from the payment of pensions so that the savings credit could be paid from the age of 60 to both the men and women who are entitled to it, that again would be a huge breakthrough in establishing the pension credit as a permanent feature of our system.

The Government must seek to embed their pension reforms so that future Governments cannot tamper with the benefits. The discussion on how that can be achieved goes far beyond this debate. However, I wish that the national insurance fund were a proper trust fund that was defended by trustees with a statutory responsibility to protect it from being raided in the way that it has been by successive Governments. We should do much the same for the state pension credit. It is an important and potentially powerful innovation, but it will be compromised if the benefits cannot be embedded in the system.

People will support the pension credit if they understand it and know that the benefits are embedded in the system. For it to become popular, it must, as far as possible, be a tax-like benefit and not like a traditional means-tested benefit. The Government's proposals have not yet achieved that aim, which would be consistent with their plans. If we could go further and embed the benefits

in the system, the credit would become popular and enable the Government to secure their objectives in a way on which people could rely.

There is little point in a constant stream of innovations for pension products and pension planning devices—whether devised by the state or the private sector—if people cannot rely on their being permanent features that will enable them to plan over 30 or 40 years. Our objective must be to make the state pension credit proposals in the Bill into something on which people can rely in the longer term as a permanent feature of pension planning. I hope that we will succeed and—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

6.55 pm

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon): It might be helpful to the House if I clarify what we shall vote on and describe what is and is not in the Bill. The State of State's speech might—I am sure inadvertently—have misled the House into thinking that certain provisions are in the Bill when they are not.

The Secretary of State said that a typical pensioner would be £8 a week better off, and he seemed to imply—I may have misunderstood him—that that was because of the Bill. From April, the minimum income guarantee will be £98 and the promise is that—as a result of inflation or, possibly, earnings indexation—it will be £100 from April 2003. Even if one puts a charitable interpretation on the difference between the two figures and counts it as a gain, it involves an increase of £2 for pensioners on the minimum income guarantee. The Secretary of State said that the increase would be £8, so something does not quite add up. I think that he is counting things that have already happened, and including the increase in the minimum income guarantee from last April when it was £92—or possibly even the increase from the April before that.

The minimum income guarantee has gone up significantly, but the Bill has had nothing to do with that. The £98 and the £100 for next year have already been announced. Whether we pass or ditch the Bill, the figure for next April will still be £100. None of the gains and none of the figures for the minimum income guarantee that the Secretary of State quoted are attributable to the Bill.

I may be wrong but, as I understand it, the Bill does not contain the stuff about the capital limits. All that the capital limits stuff does is change the imputed rate of income on savings through the income support system and that can be done by regulation anyway. That provision is not in the Bill. So if we got rid of the Bill or had never had it, what would we lose? The answer is the savings credit.

I want to focus on whether the savings credit will achieve the two things that are claimed for it. Will it reward today's pensioners for having saved in the past and will it encourage tomorrow's pensioners to save for their old age? Both claims are fundamentally questionable.

First, and most obviously, the savings credit will not reward those people who have been thrifty if they do not claim it. The Secretary of State poured scorn on his Department's figures for non-take-up of the minimum income guarantee. I accept that they are estimates, but Baroness Hollis told the other place that one in three pensioners entitled to the pension credit would not take it up when it is introduced. If half of all pensioners—that is 5.5 million—are to receive the credit, 1.5 million or more will miss out on their entitlement in year one. What sort of scheme is it if it rewards people according to the lottery of whether they take it up? It will not be an entitlement like the pension. If we delivered the cash with the pension, we would guarantee that it reached the people who are entitled to it, but these proposals are a lottery, and one in three of those who have saved will not receive the credit.

As the hon. Members for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins) and for Stafford (Mr. Kidney) pointed out, women with incomplete contribution records will not receive the credit in full. Not only are they penalised for having brought up children by receiving a grotty pension, but they will be penalised again through receiving a grotty savings credit. The first part of any savings that they have been able to muster will be used to bring them up to the basic pension, and they will receive a reward only on what is left thereafter. The system will penalise not only the one in three who do not claim, but women who have taken care of children.

The modern social security system provides benefits for having cared for children, but it did not begin to do so until the late 1970s. Women retiring now had their child-bearing years before such protections were introduced. When the hon. Member for Stafford intervened on the subject of women with incomplete contribution records, the Secretary of State gave a rather feeble response and asked, "What if they did not choose to contribute?" It is not a question of not choosing, because those women brought up their children when the social security system did not value child rearing. Not only are those women punished by receiving a grotty pension when they retire, but they will punished again by receiving a poor savings credit.

James Purnell: The hon. Gentleman is doing a good job of trying to get his party off the hook as regards what will be a popular measure. What will he say when faced on the doorstep by a 67-year-old with a basic state pension who earns less than the minimum income guarantee, if he is going to oppose the pension credit? It seems to me that the hon. Gentleman is supporting the MIG and the increases, but if he does not support the savings credit, those concerned will lose all their private income from a pension or earnings. Would he continue to take that away, pound for pound?

Mr. Webb: We have never at any point opposed the MIG, or said that the additional support for low-income pensioners is not welcome. However, if we are to spend the £2 billion implied by the Bill and by related measures, is the best way to do so through a lottery—with a one-in-three chance that those who need it will get it—and by penalising women with incomplete contribution records, or is it better to guarantee the money to the people who need it most and who may, indeed, have saved as well: the older pensioners? It is a question of priorities. Who would be the better person to get it?

Mr. Dismore: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Webb: I will in a moment, but I would like to make some progress.

The proposed pension credit, or savings credit, is not a reward for saving at all. People who have not saved a penny voluntarily get the pension credit. How can that be,

[Mr. Webb]

if it is a reward for saving? The state second pension—as the Secretary of State has called it—is creditable. In other words, if people do not make any voluntary savings at all but accumulate a state second pension or SERPS pension, they get a top-up; not for voluntary or additional saving, but because they are automatically in the system.

When the legislation was proposed, we said that the basic state pension and the state second pension were not adequate because they did not keep people clear of the basic means-tested poverty line. At the time, the Government said that that was nonsense and that the proposal was quite enough. However, before the pension had even been introduced, it was reformed. That has to be some sort of record; pension schemes normally last about 10 years before they are reformed. The Government said that a top-up was needed—in other words, "The second pension is not good enough; we need a third one." People will get a basic pension, a SERPS or a state second pension or perhaps a graduated pension. However, all of that is not enough and the Government will give them a pension credit on top.

The sense that the Government's pensions policy is being made up on the back of a fag packet is irresistible. They make it up as they go along, spotting the blunders one year and trying to amend them for the next. The savings credit is a lottery for those who will not get it; it penalises women; and it gives people money who have not saved in just the same way as it does those who have. In what sense is that an incentive to save?

Mr. Tynan: Does the hon. Gentleman not realise that some people cannot afford to save money and that their full income is used to survive? The pension credit will mean that if they have a small occupational pension scheme, they will be given extra money so that they can improve their living standards.

Mr. Webb: I do not disagree with anything that the hon. Gentleman has just said. The savings credit is not a significant reward for those who have saved; more fundamentally, it is not an effective incentive to those currently of working age.

The House should consider the sort of person at whom the Bill is aimed. Let us suppose that someone has just turned 40. Life, perhaps, has just begun, but that person has also begun to panic about pensions. What effect will the scheme have on someone who is 40? He has 25 years—a relatively long time—to think about saving for a pension. He is on relatively small earnings but could, if he sacrificed something, put perhaps £50 a month into a pension—although as the hon. Member for Hamilton, South (Mr. Tynan) says, a lot of people could not afford that.

According to the Secretary of State, the 40-year-old is supposed to ask what he will get for £50 a month. First, he must assume the return on the fund. His adviser says that he will get 3 per cent. above inflation, through a mix of equities and gilts. In 25 years' time, he will have about £22,000. What sort of annuity or pension can he get with that? The second thing he must do is guess what the annuity rate will be in 25 years' time. It might well be lower than today, if one thinks that today's 65-year-olds will not live as long as those in 25 years' time. However, let us assume that the rate is the same; so he will receive 6 or 7 per cent on a £22,000 pot.

What sort of pension will that give? The answer is £1,400 a year, or £27 a week. The 40-year-old has done all these calculations, but then remembers that there is a pension credit or savings credit. He must guess what his pension will be, without knowing what the minimum income guarantee will be in the future or whether it will be price-indexed or earnings-indexed. We know the situation until the end of the Parliament, but the Government's own forecasts do not assume necessarily that the MIG will be earnings-linked or indexed beyond then. He must guess about indexation and work out the difference between the two things.

For the sake of argument, let us assume that the provision is the same as at present; between £77 and £100. That is a gap of £23. Our 40-year-old has a £27 pension, the first £23 of which gets him 60p in the pound, or £13.80. However, the last £4 takes money off, at 40p in the pound. That is £1.60 off, so he will get a £12 pension credit.

At the age of 40, this person is supposed to consider whether to save £50 a month in the hope of getting £12 a week above income support. How many people will do that calculation, make all those guesses and assumptions and sacrifice £50 a month? To give a concrete example, £50 a month could pay for a subscription to a nice sports club. For the next 25 years, that person could go swimming, or to the gym. He has a choice between doing that, and putting that £50 a month aside for 25 years in the hope of receiving £12. Does anybody seriously think for a minute that people will do those sums and, because of the Bill, save more? It is complete and unutterable nonsense to suggest that this Bill is an incentive to save.

Mr. Cousins: Could I press the hon. Gentleman in the way that I pressed the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts)? If the blue-yellow front amendment is carried tonight, what can that same 40-year-old assume about the relationship of the basic state pension to average earnings when he retires?

Mr. Webb: I will come to that point; if the hon. Gentleman feels that I have not addressed it, I encourage him to intervene again and I will do so.

All of this assumes, as the hon. Gentleman was hinting, that the scheme is still there in 25 years' time. Typically, second-tier pensions last about 10 years or so. The graduated pension lasted 10 or 15 years, while SERPS lasted about 10 years before the Conservatives cut it. The state second pension was reformed by the Government before it had even come in.

What chance is there that the state pension credit will even be there in 25 years' time? What chance is there that any sane person in middle age will plan for their retirement on the basis of a scheme that is so complicated that they cannot work out what they will be entitled to? It is simply nonsense. *[Interruption.]* The heckling from Members sitting behind the Secretary of State shows that they have lost the substantive argument.

The Secretary of State is fond of saying that the Bill proposes "a 60p in the pound reward for saving". It is a 60p in the pound reward for small saving, or for £23 a week of saving, to be precise; the gap between the pension and the means test. If people save more than £23, they will not get a 60p in the pound reward. Someone who saves £40—£2,000 a year of pension on top of the £3,500 basic pension, which is not much to live on—will not get 60p in the pound of pension credit; they will get 15p in the pound. That is the effect of this system.

Unless one is clever enough to calculate one's pension to match exactly the gap between the pension and the means test and get the maximum credit, one does not get 60p in the pound at all. It suits Ministers to imply to people that when they save, they will get a 60p in the pound top-up. But they will not; if they save £40, they will get a 15p in the pound top-up. As ever, the measure has been grotesquely oversold.

Lynne Jones: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the only way to get complete security is to have the basic state pension set at the same level as the minimum income guarantee? In that way, people will know that they will keep everything that they have saved.

Mr. Webb: I have a lot of sympathy with that point. Let me come back to the point made by the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central about our proposals. At the last election, when we proposed the 50p income tax rate on those earning more than £100,000 a year, the Treasury estimated a yield of well in excess of £3 billion. From that, and with money to spare, we proposed raising the pension in tiers according to the age of the pensioner. For those over 75, we proposed putting £10 a week on the pension. The Government are spending £2 billion on the Bill and related measures, and have told me that they could have put £15 a week on the pension for every person over 75. If we add our proposed £10 to the Government's £15, that £25 would bring the pension for everybody over 75 up to the level of the minimum income guarantee. As the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Lynne Jones) rightly says, that is the incentive to save. Every penny saved on top of the basic pension that brings people up to the minimum income guarantee is pure gain. It is not taxed at 40 per cent.—it is not taxed at all That is the incentive to save.

Kevin Brennan: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mrs. Annette L. Brooke (Mid-Dorset and North Poole): Will my hon. Friend give way.

Mr. Webb: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman and then to my hon. Friend.

Kevin Brennan: I shall be grateful when the hon. Gentleman eventually answers the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins) as to whether it is the policy of Liberal Democrats—the Tories' little helpers tonight—to link the pension to earnings over time.

Mr. Webb: Earnings indexation of perhaps a couple of per cent. a year more than inflation—*[Interruption.]* Of course we do not know what it would be, but we have to make an assumption. If that figure were added to a pension of, say, £75 a week, that would be £1.50 a week in the first year. I am talking about a rise proposed in our manifesto not of £1.50 but of £10 a week, and the £2 billion that the Government are spending would be another £15 a week on top of that. That is vastly in excess of earnings indexation.

We are not proposing across-the-board earnings indexation—we did not in our manifesto and we are not tonight. We are proposing something that goes much further, and would achieve what the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak referred to for the over-75s. I freely admit that that would not apply to all pensioners. One reason why that is so difficult is the chasm that the Government have opened up between the basic pension and the means test. There is a huge and growing chasm, and our priority is to get the pension up, particularly for the over-75s, to the level of the means test. The critical advantage is that people's savings would not be taxed at 40 per cent., as the Bill proposes—it would not be taxed at all. They would get the full benefit, and that is the real incentive to save.

There is one other incentive to save built into our proposals and the amendment.

Mr. Dismore: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Webb: I did promise to give way to the hon. Gentleman in a moment, and also to my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Dorset and North Poole (Mrs. Brooke) but let me first pursue this point.

Suppose that, as the hon. Member for Hamilton, South said, someone cannot afford to save a lot, but can save a small amount. At the age of 65, if they convert that money into an annuity, it has to last the rest of their life. The insurance company has to cover itself against the possibility that that person will live to 90 or 95, so annuity rates are very poor at present. However, if that annuity had to last someone of 65 not for the rest of their life but until they were 75, at which point a decent basic pension at the rates we are talking about cut in, it would be worth double what could be bought under the present system. Instead of people saving and then buying an inadequate annuity that would not lift them clear of the means test—in which case they would not bother—they would have the opportunity to save for an annuity of twice the size. That is another savings incentive built into this scheme.

Mr. Dismore *rose—*

Mr. Webb: First I will give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Dorset and North Poole.

Mrs. Brooke: I thank my hon. Friend for giving way. Does he agree that the very best way to help pensioners is to have a system that is clear, easy to understand and sufficiently generous? Labour Members claim that if the Bill is not supported tonight, pensioners will suffer, but the Government are not proposing the best way in which to help our pensioners, particularly the most vulnerable.

Mr. Webb: My hon. Friend is right. The sums that we are talking about, added to the basic pension for the over-75s, would make a real difference and would give thousands and thousands of pensioners the opportunity to be clear of means-testing altogether.

Mr. Dismore *rose—*

Mr. Webb: In a moment.

I can guarantee Labour Members that, given the choice between tapers, thresholds and credits or a decent pension, I know which every one of my constituents would want.

Mr. Darling: Some time I must find time to visit the academic institution from which the hon. Gentleman

[Mr. Darling]

comes—he seems to be making up his policy on the hoof. Can he explain one thing to me? He says that by taking the £2 billion from the pension credit and adding it to another £3 billion that has been conjured up from somewhere—we know not where—he would tell the over-75s, "Have another £15 a week." I understand that part of his argument, but what does he say to someone who is 67 and is poor?

Mr. Webb: As the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) said, we all agree that there must be a continuing role for a safety net. There is no disputing that—there must be a continuing role for means-testing. I hesitate to use a new Labour phrase, but we are talking about whether means-testing should be for the few and not for the many. That is the difference between us.

Mr. Dismore: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Webb: Yes, the hon. Gentleman has been very patient.

Mr. Dismore: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way to me at last. Under his theory, a millionaire in Mill Hill would get an extra £25 a week but someone on minimum income guarantee in Burnt Oak in my constituency, where half the people are on means-tested benefits, would not get one penny more—even though the paperwork might be clearer. How can the hon. Gentleman justify giving so much more money to people who do not need it while the people who really need it do not get a penny more because they are on minimum income guarantee?

Mr. Webb: The hon. Gentleman has not been paying attention. The minimum income guarantee does not come under the Bill, so rejecting it will not take a penny off his pensioners who claim the minimum income guarantee. They would continue getting whatever they got under the previous arrangements. The millionaires in his constituency pay 40 per cent. tax so we would claw that back from the richest pensioners.

Mr. Dismore *rose—*

Mr. Webb: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman would do me the honour of listening to my reply before he intervenes again.

What does the hon. Gentleman have to say to the one in three pensioners in his constituency who have been promised largesse by the Government but will not claim it because the system is so complicated? That is the question that he has to answer.

We have heard that this is means-testing with a human face. People aged between 60 and 65 will be subject to means-testing, as at present, every week. Any change in circumstances has to be reported, so for 60 to 64-year-olds, it is business as usual. However, the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central referred to the over-60s. The savings credit does not apply to the over-60s. Hundreds of thousands of women will have heard the Secretary of State saying on television or on radio that the Government want to reward thrifty pensioners. Some 62-year-old women might think of themselves as pensioners and they might think of themselves as thrifty, but the Secretary of State does not count them until they are 65. That is another group missing out on the Government's proposals.

As for whether these measures are an incentive to save, the House does not have to take my word for it. The Pension Provision Group is an organisation set up by the Secretary of State's predecessor, consisting of the great and the good of the pension world, to provide independent expert advice on pensions. The group, to which the Government apparently listen, said of the pension credit:

"The Government's wish to reward savers through the Pension Credit scheme could have the unintended effect of reducing . . . the amounts some people save."

Help the Aged said:

"In terms of promoting independence and dignity . . . a Pension Credit is no substitute for a decent state pension."

The Minister was quite rude about Age Concern although he has representatives of the organisation on his taskforces. I do not know what they think about that. Age Concern says:

"For future pensioners, we are not convinced that the Credit, as proposed, is likely to do a great deal in terms of encouraging people to save".

That is what it is for—it is the only reason why it is in the Bill.

The Government have been known to speak well of the IPPR, which said:

"In theory, the Government strategy has some merit"—

I love a good theory, and I bet the scheme looks very good on a whiteboard at the Department of Work and Pensions, but—

"In practice, it falls short of eliminating pensioner poverty and providing an environment whereby people can understand their entitlements, save and be rewarded for doing so."

The theory is lovely. The bar charts look great. The practice falls short.

We have been told that people will be reassessed only every five years, so that is all right, but it is not all right if they get worse off in those five years. Let us suppose, hypothetically, that their Railtrack shares are worth less—or worthless. Their capital falls, so their imputed income falls and their entitlement rises. They have to make a fresh claim to get all the money that they are entitled to.

The Secretary of State said that pensioners' circumstances do not change much—but if they have investments or the husband dies, they do. Earnings can fluctuate in retirement. The idea that people will be reassessed once every five years and be left alone between times is a myth.

If the Secretary of State wants to intervene to tell us what estimate he has made of the proportion of people who will have to claim again within the five-year period, I will be delighted to give way, but of course the Government have made no such estimate. This will not work in practice.

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): Does the hon. Gentleman—or my hon. Friend—agree that it is a remarkable thing that until now the benefit system has been predicated on a weekly need to be and the tax system on an annual capacity, but now the Government are overleaping both by suggesting that five years is the

appropriate period? Not only will people whose income has fallen get less than they should, unless somebody flags it up for them—as is to be done on the internet, apparently—but people who have received a windfall will not have it taken off them unless they choose to disqualify themselves.

Mr. Webb: The hon. Gentleman is right to point out the anomalies in the Secretary of State's proposals.

The Secretary of State touched on the new pensions service. I note that it is a pensions service, not a pensioners service, because it is driven by the Department's desire to save some money by doing as much as possible through call centres, although most pensioners would like to see a human being and do not want to talk about complex personal financial details down the phone or fill in a complicated form.

We have had no joy in getting a response from the Department to a serious question. The Department wants everything to be done by phone as first preference. There are to be some house visits, presumably for the infirm, which is fair enough, but what if someone wants to talk to a real human, face to face? Will that be possible, without notice, and if so where? The suspicion is that face-to-face interviews in the local benefits office will no longer be possible. If there is a monthly surgery at the local Age Concern or citizens advice bureau, that is okay, but it is not the service that pensioners want.

The Secretary of State had a bit of fun about my choice of bedfellows, but I could not help noticing that his bedfellow was Lord Fowler, who was Secretary of State for Social Security for many years under Mrs. Thatcher. The Labour party did not seem to have much time for his opinions then, and he is applauding the Government today only because they have adopted a mass means-testing, Thatcherite approach.

The savings credit neither rewards those who save today nor encourages people to save for tomorrow, and I urge the House to reject it outright.

7.24 pm

Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Like all hon Members, I am familiar with the problems that the Bill is intended to solve. We have all had bewildered pensioners at our surgeries saying that they saved and made sacrifices to pay into a small works pension all their working lives, on low incomes, but find that in retirement their pension is not worth a penny to them because it is at a level that does not allow them to take an income from it but disentitles them to other benefits. There is clearly a problem, and the Government are to be congratulated on trying to solve it, but there are clear arguments against the Bill.

I warmed to what my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins) said about national insurance. It is one of the rewards of being in this place that if we keep saying the same thing year after year, eventually people will listen. It was heartwarming to see the IPPR report, "A New Contract for Retirement". To our astonishment—and its own—it advocates raising the basic pension to the level of the minimum income guarantee.

The minimum income guarantee was a piece of branding. All Governments have indulged in that, as with national assistance changing to supplementary benefit and then income support. They have always found new labels that they hope will be more acceptable. The minimum income guarantee is the old income support, topping up the basic pension, but it was a good presentational move. If we have a criticism of the Bill, it is that it errs on the side of presentation. I dread the future, when pensioners come to our surgeries because the presentation made them think that they would get the true benefit of all their pensions but they have found that the true position is very different.

The head of the IPPR said:

> "An enhanced basic pension is the best way to tackle pensioner poverty and to provide an environment in which people can plan with confidence and be rewarded for saving."

He also said:

> "These conclusions were as much a surprise to us as they will be to others who believe that as a centre left think tank we would support targeting of resources on those in most need."

In general, we do support that, but targeting resources is an imprecise activity. The winter fuel payment is targeted on those of us of an appropriate age, as it arrives in royal palaces and elsewhere. It is difficult to get targeting right.

We should consider the state of the national insurance fund. My hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central asked why on earth it is not a fund that is separately run, with managers who can invest and be paid according to the fund's profits. That would be far better. If the national insurance fund were a true fund, so that the pensioners who had paid in could get their reward, we would be in a very different situation. At present, people on low incomes are being defrauded of their money. The basic unfairness is that those on the lowest income pay the largest proportion in.

Furthermore, there is another new wheeze. Although Conservative Members complain a great deal about the effect of green taxes, in fact £1 billion has been lost to the national insurance fund because of allowances made to industry by cutting their national insurance contributions to compensate them for those taxes.

Let us consider the state of the national insurance fund. Is it on the rocks? Is it in trouble? In fact, it is in a very healthy state and has been for some time. The balance at the end of 2000 was equivalent to 41 per cent. of the benefits payments throughout the year. There is an in-built safety level of 16.7 per cent. of the contributions made, which has to be guaranteed in case there is a slump, with rising unemployment, but in 2000 the figure was 41 per cent. and things have improved steadily since then.

The 2002 report shows an opening balance of £19 billion and an income for the year of £59 billion, or £2.4 billion more than the estimate, but the closing balance is expected to be 47.7 per cent. of benefits payments, or £24 billion—a huge surplus again. The 2002 report gives a forecast for next year and states that receipts are expected to exceed payments by almost £3.4 billion, producing a closing balance that would be 52 per cent. of benefit payments—a surplus of £27 billion. We are entitled to ask about that enormous unneeded surplus, which would be enough to make a substantial increase in the basic pension.

Some of my hon. Friends have objected and said that the means test is okay, that it is a relic of the past that has no effect, but it has a profound effect. As has been said,

[Paul Flynn]

between 500,000 and 600,000 people are put off, presumably by the means test. That figure is robust and has not been denied. It has been around for a long time, and there is a very good reason for it. This is a generation thing that might not be easily understood, perhaps, by those of a different generation who have not experienced the ignominy of claiming benefits.

A generation of people are proud to say that they have worked from the time that they left school at 14 and have never been on the dole or claimed any benefit. When they get to retirement age, they say, "I've paid my dues and done everything that I should", and they view claiming for income support as the act of a scrounger. In their view, those who claim it humiliate themselves. That view is deep-seated. They will not take such a step, having spent a lifetime of self-respect on their own earnings. A large group of people are in that position.

I have heard no one deny that the Bill will result in an increase in the number of people who claim means-tested benefit to 5.4 million, which amounts to half the pensioners involved—a very high figure. We should not regard that as trivial or automatic. There will be great resistance to claiming the pension credit, however it is given.

I have been impressed by the evidence from the various bodies. In particular the National Pensioners Convention has made a serious case. Although it supports many of the wishes expressed in the Bill, it wants the Bill to be simplified and changed in many ways. I hope that, in Committee, the Government will show a little humility about the Bill's deficiencies.

It was heartening to hear tonight that earnings will be taken into account as a disregard. That is profoundly important because pensioners now aged 60 or 65 seem a great deal younger than those of their parents' generation and, to have a healthy time, the most beneficial and therapeutic thing that they can do is work, but there is an enormous disincentive in the scheme to stop that happening.

The official Opposition are in a position of great weakness because of their atrocious period in government. I reminded them tonight that much happened in 1980. Lord Fowler, who has been mentioned, was the man who wanted to wreck the state earnings-related pension scheme, but could not do so because the insurance industry did not want the low earners to be landed on them. That Government encouraged people to leave very good-value occupational pension schemes and to enter the extremely poor-value private personal pension schemes.

I vividly remember Baroness Thatcher telling me, when I asked her a question when she was in government, that I was against personal pensions because, as a socialist, I was against choice. Unfortunately, people had to make a choice under a bribe; they were told to leave the scheme and that they would have £5,000 if they remained in SERPS. They were told, "Don't be a SERP" and not to accept that amount. How many of those people now bitterly regret that they abandoned their good-value occupational schemes to enter money purchase schemes?

Mr. Boswell: I thought that the hon. Gentleman started well, but was beginning to deteriorate. Even if he did not like everything that was done under the Conservative Government, in view of what he said about the need for older people to work if they want to, I invite him to remember that we abolished the earnings rule, which was a major disincentive to their doing so.

Paul Flynn: The Conservative party must have done some things right in its 18 years in power, but they were rare events. I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman was in the Chamber when I said in an intervention that the main reason for the Bill was the very generous disregard that applied from 1948, when the pension was 24s—this may date many hon. Members—and people could have 10s 6d in their pension while earning £1, which is a vast amount in today's money. That disregard was built into the pensions system and continued for a long time, until it was abolished by the Conservative Government in 1980. That had a profound affect on the attitude towards pensions and savings.

I have grave doubts whether the Bill will have an effect on savings, as has been suggested. Clearly, there is a great argument for simplicity in our pension scheme, such as that found in France, where people seem to understand the point of their pension scheme. I find some clauses completely incomprehensible, and someone could earn a fee by translating the meaning of clause 3, which sounds like poor quality gobbledegook. I believe that, in trying to—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. The hon. Gentleman has had his 12 minutes.

7.36 pm

Mr. Howard Flight (Arundel and South Downs): Hon. Members are aware that the reason for the Bill is, in truth, not suddenly to offer substantial incentives to people to save for their own pensions, but because the Government introduced the MIG and stakeholder pensions and suddenly realised that, for a lot of people, there was no point taking out stakeholder pensions because of the MIG. Indeed, people could be misadvised to take out a stakeholder pension if their earnings were very modest.

The Bill provides that those modestly above the MIG level should have this benefit, and it is hoped that there will be no obvious disincentive to save for those at the lower end of the stakeholder market. As other hon. Members have said, the arrangements, in essence, involve a 40 per cent. tax charge, and its impact can be much greater if people save a lot. The arrangements will really only benefit those who save up to £23 a week.

There then appear all the categories that the Bill does not address, where it will not help and where it leaves disincentives. It will not help those with less than the full basic state pension entitlement and, for the reasons that the Minister explained, this will particularly damage women because, in the past at least, many have not worked for part of their younger lives while bringing up children. As has been said, the Bill will not apply to women in the 60 to 64-year-old age range. It will not apply to the self-employed, who are often the least well provided for in old age; nor will it benefit those who have saved for a limited time—for example, up to 12 years—who will receive no benefit from the credit as a result.

I am still not entirely clear what the earnings rule will be, but the point is that the Bill has been spun as a great pension credit and incentive to save, but it will do nothing

at all for many people and it may represent a major disincentive to save for many people. We need to dig deeper to solve many of the problems that have been unleashed by the principle of the MIG and its extension. Many people have pointed out not only that the credit will be too complex, but that the Government assume there will be only a 67 per cent. take-up.

Miss Begg: The hon. Gentleman mentions the problems caused by the minimum income guarantee. On reflection, would he get rid of it?

Mr. Flight: I hope to suggest the solution in the few minutes allotted to me.

There is nothing about the cost of the credit. Hon. Members will be aware that estimates by the Department for Work and Pensions have put it as high as £20 billion by 2040 and £26 billion by 2050 if it continues and depending on the qualification rules.

The approach makes a nonsense of the Government's target to change the 60:40 relationship. In addition, I find it disturbing that at a time when occupational final salary schemes are being abandoned and alternative money purchase pension provision is going to be less generous, the Government are laying down the principle that the state will make good the lack of provision in people's savings for their retirement. That runs the risk of taking us down the economic path that is damaging the economies of Europe so much, where inadequately funded pension provision has led to taxation on employment, which damages economic growth and, above all, employment.

The Government should think again. A pensions crisis is engulfing the country and we should be cautious, albeit with the best of intentions. Although we want to help those in need in retirement today, if the policy takes us down a wrong and irreversible path, it will not do future generations any good. Both my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) and the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) made the point that it is crucial to target those age groups that need assistance.

People who are 75 today are fitter than those who were 65 some 40 years ago. Most people will want to work certainly to 65 and possibly, as far as I am concerned, to 75. It is the older people who are in the greatest need and a significant increase in the universal pension for those over 75, which would lift everyone off means-testing, would solve many problems. It would provide security for people when they really need it, such as when the nursing home bills start to arrive or an annuity is worth only half of what it was when purchased. It makes sense to address those problems. Although it leaves certain difficulties for those who are under 75, more of them will work in the future and they will be able to use their private sector pension savings in a more focused way during that time.

Mr. Tynan: If someone is in poverty at 65 or 66, does the hon. Gentleman think that we should not apply a measure to take them out of that? Should they have to wait until they are 75 before the problem is tackled?

Mr. Flight: My hon. Friend answered that. No one is denying that means-tested benefits will remain in the welfare system for such people, but we need a pension system that works. We do not want to give people the wrong incentives. The system must be targeted on groups of people who are most in need. The problem with the proposed measures and the MIG is that they send the wrong signals on pension accumulation. They will end up costing more than will be deemed affordable and do not provide the pension saving incentives that the spin attached to the label implies. At worst, they lock us into a path that will cause us to have the same problems as continental Europe. We want to achieve an affordable and workable compromise. The Liberals and the Conservatives have joined together on this issue to offer a practical path that makes sense for a community in which people will live and work for longer.

7.45 pm

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): When this measure was first thought of, our constituents' views on their pensions and the pension promise were rather different from their current views on their pension prospects. It is beyond all doubt that when the Secretary of State rose to introduce the measure, he did so in support of a Government who have done more for poorer pensioners than any other Government in our history. However, I want to set out why I will not support the Bill in the Lobby tonight. There is a reasoned amendment, and I hope that we will vote on whether the Bill should receive its Second Reading. I believe that it should not.

I agree with the Secretary of State that in speaking thus, one allies oneself with people with whom one would not normally agree. It is true that when I was on the Opposition Benches, I spent all my energy, as did other Labour Members, in opposing the Governments of 1979 to 1997, who extended means-testing. I will continue to vote that way tonight. Of course we must be careful with people who push one line of policy in office and another in opposition. However, if the Government can change their mind, presumably Oppositions can do so as well.

Although there might be a dispute about whether anyone understands the Bill or what its likely effect might be, there is agreement on both sides of the Chamber that taxpayers need to spend more money on supporting retired people. We have not had that point of agreement for many days, and it is much more significant than divisions over the Bill itself.

There are four reasons why I oppose the measure. First, it breaks a manifesto commitment. In 1997, our general election manifesto highlighted the rising number of pensioners on means-testing, which had increased to one in three under the Tories. We found that an appalling state of affairs and promised to reverse the trend. Early in the life of our Government, we set the aim that when all our pension reforms were complete, the number of means-tested pensioners would fall from one in three to one in five. As has been pointed out, we will not achieve that objective if the Bill becomes law. Instead, the objective will be to increase the number to two out of three of our retired constituents. So breaking a manifesto pledge is the first reason why I will reluctantly vote against the Bill on Second Reading.

Secondly, we opposed means-testing not merely because we opposed the Tories; we had clear reasons for thinking that it was a damaging policy for the country as a whole. We did not oppose it only for the reasons that were given in the 1930s. In the last debate on this subject, my hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde

[Mr. Frank Field]

(James Purnell) quoted an essay, which I consulted, about people's fear of the means-test man, as he put it. That fear clearly operates in some instances, but that is not the only charge that one makes against means-testing. As the House has already been told, the Bill will design out of eligibility many of the pensioners whom we would like to gain benefit, so it will not even be an effective means test for targeting help on those in greatest need.

There was another reason for our opposition to means-testing, apart from our simply being bloody-minded and wanting to oppose the Government of the day. We began to see that means-testing had an effect on how people behaved, and not simply on those who learn to work the system, although one can hardly blame them for that if we design and put in place mean-testing systems, which encourage it.

As the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) explained to the House, people have a responsibility to try to calculate how they can make themselves and their families better off, and they change their conduct accordingly. Means tests undermine most of the attributes that we want from strong citizens, and that was one reason why we pledged ourselves in 1997 to reverse what seemed to be an ever-growing tide of pensioners on means-tested benefits. The Bill therefore goes against a manifesto pledge. We had specific reasons for thinking that means-testing was a bad policy.

The third reason why I oppose the measure is that I do not believe that it will last. Before you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, were chairing our proceedings, my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins) said that he was rather surprised to be called at that point in the debate. All I can say is that if surprise leads him to deliver a speech of the quality that he gave us tonight, I hope that he is surprised on many more occasions and engages the House as he did tonight.

If my hon. Friend was right, and the Bill could last, there could be a case for it, but I do not believe for a moment that it will be on the statute book in 10 years, nor do I believe it should be, given the issues that people who are trying to save for their retirement currently face. The Government's own projections of the cost of the measure show that, when it is fully effective, in today's terms it will cost 8p on the standard rate of tax. Does anybody think that future Governments will see this system grow and prosper with a tax bill of 8p in the pound for every taxpayer? Perhaps some people think that is realistic; I do not think that it is.

In a few weeks, in the Chancellor's Budget, we will cross a threshold when we debate with the electorate the need possibly to raise taxes to support the health service. That will be nowhere as easy to negotiate as some of my colleagues think, even though we will be fronting a tax rise on the service that this country cares most about—the national health service.

The fourth reason why I oppose the Bill, therefore, is that whereas people planning for their retirement want as much certainty as possible in the regimes that they have to negotiate, the Bill will add to uncertainty. It will not last. One has only to look at the record of previous Governments, let alone the record of previous Oppositions in responding to Government measures, to realise the likely fate of the Bill, no matter how noble its objective. Although we agree across the House about the voters' growing sense of unease about how pensions will be paid for and about how an increasing share of that will come from taxation, the Bill is not adequate.

I shall end my speech by suggesting how I hope the Government, through their programme, will shape the next move. The real weakness of our system is that people can work for 48 years and not get a pension that takes them out of poverty. The inadequacy of the first tier is the stumbling block to longer-term successful reforms. I hope that, at some stage, the Government will recast the state second pension. Instead of being a safety net benefit, it should be one of which everybody has membership. Instead of operating as a pay-as-you-go system, it should be funded. It should be bound up with the existing national insurance pension. At the end of the day, people participating in both schemes would have an adequate first-tier pension. That would simplify the system and there would be no disincentive to save. People would be able to make their own provision as they thought fit.

There would be a balance between risking the pension promise through investments and trying to deliver the crucial first-tier pension through a pay-as-you-go system. It does not take much to begin to reshape the Government's measures to give us the basis of long-term, sustainable and successful reform. The Government need soon to respond to people's increasing concern about whether there will be an adequate pension for them when they retire. I hope that they will do so not by throwing away all the measures that they have taken, but by recasting some of them, putting aside this measure and looking at the state second pension. They should realise the potential that it will have if it is funded, if everybody is included, if it is compulsory and if it is linked to the national insurance state pension.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Before I call the next speaker, I point out that there is a 12-minute limit on all Back Benchers' speeches, but an awful lot of Members are still trying to catch my eye. It would be extremely helpful if they could take slightly less than their allotted time, in which case fewer of them will be disappointed.

7.57 pm

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield): I start by drawing the attention of the House to my interests, which are laid down in the Register but which do not abut directly to the contents of the debate.

This is turning into a most interesting occasion. It has always seemed to me that the House has a duty, in pensions legislation, both to address the needs of today's retired people and clearly to lay down long-term plans because the effects of legislation last such a long time. The comments made about that by the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins) and the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) were particularly important.

I say to the Minister that although I shall certainly support the amendment, I have not yet decided whether, if the amendment is defeated, I shall support the Bill in the Lobby, so I will listen particularly carefully to her response to the debate.

James Purnell: I have great respect for the hon. Gentleman's views and, in particular, for what he says in

meetings of the Select Committee on which we both sit. If I remember correctly, last week he said that he thought that the pension credit had a number of valuable qualities. Does that determine that he will support the Bill? I hear that he has been supporting the pension policy of the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts), who seems to oppose the Bill.

Mr. Mitchell: The hon. Gentleman is attempting to lead me down a cul-de-sac, and if he listens he will learn why I am in some doubt about how I will vote on the Bill if the reasoned amendment, which I strongly support, is defeated.

The Bill is certainly muddled and complex, and in many ways it is a waste. That is why I welcome the reasoned amendment, which makes it clear that the Bill has a number of serious faults. It proposes a tremendous increase in complexity and means-testing, and the erosion of the incentive to save. In addition, we have to ask whether better use might be made of the money by targeting it on those who need support.

I shall deal first with the massive extension of complexity and confusion. The hon. Member for Newport, West (Paul Flynn), who knows a great deal about this subject, is confused, and I, who used to be a Social Security Minister, am pretty confused about the effects of the Bill. It does not begin to pass the doorstep test, nor to live up to the description offered by Baroness Hollis, who said that the Bill is the final piece of the Government's pensions strategy jigsaw. Personally, I prefer the judgment given by Sue Ward, of the Northern Pensions Resource Group, who said that it reduces the Government's strategy to incoherence.

My hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) referred to the Institute for Fiscal Studies, which says that it remains unclear how the credit fits in with the other parts of the Government's pensions strategy, notably stakeholder pensions and state second pensions. Andrew Dilnott said that he could not envisage the state second pension lasting much beyond the introduction of the pension credit. I shall pass over the interaction between the credit and housing benefit and community tax benefit. The Government say that no one will lose out, but the upper capital limits are still in place, so it is simply not clear how that would work. Gordon Lishman of Age Concern says that we constantly get into the position of saying, "We really don't want to start from here." On the ground of complexity, I have grave doubts about the measure.

Secondly, the reasoned amendment mentions the massive increase in means-testing. The Government should heed the eloquent words of the right hon. Member for Birkenhead. He is right: there will be great complexity and low take-up. Not one third, but two thirds of pensioners are to be drawn into the means-testing net. I cannot understand how anyone can argue that one targets through a means test that draws in two thirds of pensioners. Depending on what the Government choose to say about uprating, it is possible that more than two thirds of pensioners—up to 70 per cent.—will be drawn into that net before long. It is impossible to square that with the Government's commitment to a 60:40 funded pension policy.

Thirdly, the measure erodes the incentive to save. The highly respected Institute of Actuaries says that the Government's strategy of pension credit, second state pension and stakeholder pension means that it is impossible to provide savings advice to those on low to medium incomes. That point was well stated by the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb). How can serious pension advice relating to savings be given if we do not know by how much the pension credit will be uprated in future, nor whether there will be a consistent, long-term, sustainable result?

The Secretary of State mentioned the Association of British Insurers, whose members deal with 97 per cent. of insurance business in the UK. The ABI is concerned that pension credit may not encourage three specific groups who have been mentioned to save: the self-employed, those with small savings, and those without full basic state pension. The complexity is itself a disincentive to save. The Bill makes it more difficult to tell people that they will always be better off if they save.

I pass over the fourth point made in the amendment, which deals with whether the additional expenditure—of course we have no idea what that might be—might be better directed elsewhere.

The Government are getting into a terrible muddle with their pensions policy. There was some merit in the IPPR scheme in that it was clear, concise and would have put the money into the basic state pension, the advantages of which have been made clear by several hon. Members. I do not support the IPPR approach, but it is with a deep and growing sense of unease that I watch the way in which pensions policy is developing. I believe that we should to an increasing extent have funded basic state pensions for everyone. I want my party to commit to that, and I want the Government to do so as well.

Recently, the Secretary of State said that he thought that it was impossible to get young people to focus on providing for themselves—I think that he told the Select Committee on Work and Pensions that young people prefer to go clubbing. He may be right, but it is wrong and a conceit of politicians to believe that young people expect the state to look after them in their old age. They do not believe that now.

Some time ago at Cumberland lodge, I had the opportunity to speak to some Oxford PPE graduates about social security. They had had the pleasure of a visit from a new Labour Minister to talk about new Labour's approach to social security, and they invited me to talk about the old Tory approach. I discussed several aspects of social security, including pensions. For 45 minutes, every question asked by those young people, who were of an age at which I would have regarded anyone interested in pensions as a bit of an anorak, centred on pensions.

Young people today know that they cannot rely on the state to provide for their old age. It is right that, on as consensual a basis as possible across the House, we seriously reconsider the possibility of providing funded basic state pensions for everyone who is now entering the labour market.

Mr. Dismore: I have a straightforward question: is the hon. Gentleman advocating compulsory contributions to pension schemes?

Mr. Mitchell: I have not yet made up my mind finally on whether that is essential, but my instincts are that it should be compulsory.

[Mr. Mitchell]

I would not say it was a blueprint, but for all its faults the scheme launched by my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley) was a significant contribution to the debate. Unfortunately, it was launched during the run-up to the 1997 general election and so did not receive the cool and calm scrutiny it merited. The timing was not good and there were specific problems owing to the industry not believing statements about the tax position of the scheme, but it was a step in the right direction.

The scheme, worked up and refined, was also mentioned in the Conservative manifesto at the last general election, but I would like the debate to extend far beyond the Conservative party. Serious consideration should be given to the opportunities that would accrue were we to start funded pension provision for all those now entering the labour market.

Conscious of your injunction, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I shall draw my remarks to a close.

Lynne Jones: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Mitchell: No, if the hon. Lady will forgive me.

It would be in the finest traditions of spreading power and ownership widely throughout society—traditions that enthused my party to create a property-owning democracy and to sell council houses—to ensure that there were funded basic state pensions for everyone in future. I urge my Front-Bench colleagues to give serious consideration to a "pension plus mark 3" approach, which would ensure that considerable advantages are available to those who start work now and in future—advantages that have not been available to the present generation.

8.7 pm

Mr. Andrew Dismore (Hendon): I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr. Mitchell) because my starting point is the same as his. I should say first that I welcome the Bill, because it makes important provision for pensioners, especially the sort of people whom I encounter all the time in my constituency, who tell me that they have a small occupational pension or savings and feel that they have missed out on all the additional help that we have given to pensioners so far.

The hon. Gentleman spoke first about complexity—an issue that I think is greatly overstated. In the Chamber tonight are a few pensions nerds who are extremely interested in the minutiae of pension schemes. They sit on both sides of the House and include the professor who leads for the Liberal Democrats. To be frank, when I speak to pensioners' groups in my constituency, I find that they are interested not in the algebraic formulae, but in how much money they will get at the end of the day. When speaking to such groups, I give them a copy of the ready reckoner that appeared at the back of the White Paper and which is now found in the policy statement. They know how much money they have put away, or how much their pension income is, so they should be able to work out for themselves how much money they will get. Most are able to do so.

All the pensioners in my constituency who will be affected by the pension credit are not like those who are represented by some Conservative Members. They do not have enormous share portfolios or complicated trust arrangements. They have small occupational pensions, perhaps derived from the public services, or they have been able to put away the odd thousand pounds or two. They know how much money they have—they do not have great complicated problems. They are the people we are trying to help. People with great complicated problems are not those who will come within the pension credit regime.

Sandra Osborne (Ayr): I agree with my hon. Friend. Does he agree that those are the pensioners who are most aggrieved about the current position and who feel most strongly that they are missing out, and that they will warmly welcome the pension credit?

Mr. Dismore: I very much agree. One criticism of the alternative proposal advanced by the IPPR, the Liberal Democrats and now, I presume, the Conservatives, is that the position would be even worse for people who have paid national insurance; they would not benefit from having done so because those contributions would be equalised at the MIG level, whether the basic pension or the MIG is paid.

Lynne Jones: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Dismore: We have a limited amount of time, and I should like to make some progress.

There is also the question of the great evil monster that we are creating by extending the means test to more people. Frankly, if more people get involved in means-testing, the stigma will be reduced and greater numbers of people will claim. In Australia, the entire pension system is means-tested, but that is not a disincentive for people wishing to make a claim.

The Government's proposals are much simpler than present arrangements; we are not talking about weekly assessments and intrusive 40-page application forms which, I am pleased to say, have now been reduced. I can understand why people get concerned if, for example, they are asked whether they are pregnant; that question was on one of the old forms. We sensibly envisage a broad-brush approach with a five-yearly assessment and a pension stock-take with the first claim when someone reaches pensionable age. Most pensioners will find that much easier and more straightforward. The complications ascribed to the proposals are erroneous.

Claiming through a pensions agency will be easier than claiming under current arrangements. However, when replying to the debate, I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to consider the position of pensioners in the south-east. There is no pensions agency office in the south-east at the moment, which could create particular problems for ethnic minority pensioners. In London, 300 different languages are already spoken; if call centres are spread around the world and a call is re-routed to, say, Newcastle it may be difficult for Cockneys to understand the Geordie accent, never mind Geordies trying to understand the more obscure dialects and languages spoken in London. I hope that we can address that. I should also be grateful for confirmation that telephone calls will be charged at local rate; I hope that one day, it will be possible for calls to be free.

I am pleased that face-to-face interviews will still be possible for pensioners who prefer to deal with their pension arrangements that way. I am pleased that we are

adopting an outreach approach by going to libraries and pensioners' groups. However, how long will it take to arrange a personal interview if a pensioner applies for one? I am pleased that the Secretary of State, in introducing the debate, dealt with the question of part-time earnings, about which I am very concerned. If we take a more flexible approach to retirement and ask people to continue to work later in life, we must make sure that people are not penalised for working the odd day or two and can gradually ease into full-time retirement, if one can put it that way. I am a great believer in flexibility, but there could be problems with the means test if someone's employment patterns swing from one extreme to the other.

I am pleased that the Government have accepted the point about downrating for hospital stays to 13 weeks; it is important to adjust calculations in relation to that. We have been assured that housing benefit and council tax benefit claimants will continue to receive their full benefits, but I am concerned about the way in which the mechanics will operate. The Opposition spokesman made an important point about local authority care charges, whether for social services support at home or residential care. I urge Ministers to talk soon to the Department of Health to make sure that we can give clear guidance to people who say, "Well, you've put my pension up, but the council just claim it all back it back again through a council tax rise." They should not be left in that position. If they are in residential care or in receipt of personal social services for which a charge is levied, they should not be penalised through local authority means-testing. As has been said, that would simply mean that we would be transferring a penalty to local authority benefits, which should rightly go into the pensioners' pockets.

I heed your request, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to draw my remarks to a close. The one outstanding question to which I would like an answer is that of uprating. In the Select Committee, the Secretary of State was pressed hard on uprating; it is important that the Government say whether they regard uprating as the way to proceed.

8.14 pm

Mr. Paul Goodman (Wycombe): All Governments face the dilemma of trying to solve the trade-off between poverty and saving. This Government find themselves wrestling with that dilemma now. Obviously one could, if one concentrated exclusively on relieving poverty, create disincentives to saving; or one could, if one wanted solely to create incentives to save, end up with growing numbers of pensioners in poverty.

The Government's central claim for the Bill is that it will reduce poverty and increase saving; it is on those two claims that the Bill should primarily be judged. The most effective way to begin to make that judgment is to look at the main way in which the pension credit will be delivered—in other words, means-testing. I shall give the House a few simple figures. In 1979, approximately 57 per cent. of all pensioners were means-tested; by 1995, the figure had come down to 38 per cent. The Library estimates that by next year the figure will have returned to 57 per cent; by 2050, up to 70 per cent. of all pensioners could be on pension credit, if it lasts until then. I want to make an important concession to the Government, who contend that means-testing is the best way to help poorer people; their main argument is that that method targets people individually. That is right, and it is a strength of their position.

However, there is a difficulty. How do the Government's argument and all the abstract arguments flung around the Chamber this evening relate to the experience of the people in, say, my Wycombe constituency which, in places, is not particularly rich; people do not always have, to quote the hon. Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) "enormous share portfolios". Some of the people who come to see me find the forms that they have to fill in complex; they find the relationship between one benefit and another extremely complex and do not fully grasp it. Indeed, I am not sure that I or many other Members in the Chamber fully grasp those complexities either. People often do not have a family member close at hand to advise them and are entirely reliant on professional advice. They are therefore experiencing genuine problems in dealing with increased means-testing.

Moving on to the link between increased means-testing and take-up, I want to quote some of the Government's own figures. The Secretary of State, if I understood him correctly, did not seem to have great confidence in all his figures, although the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) shrewdly pointed out that in the House of Lords Baroness Hollis appeared to have great confidence in the same figures. I am therefore curious to know whether the Government's approach is consistent. The key figures for the minimum income guarantee are as follows. In 2001, about 1.7 million pensioners took up the MIG; the highest estimate is that 750,000 pensioners did not take it up. I want to make another concession to the Government for the moment and assume that that figure was in fact not 750,000, but about 500,000. By my figures—perhaps I am wrong—that is almost a third of those who took up the minimum income guarantee. So we are not talking about a small number or a small proportion. To nick, if I may, a phrase from Baroness Thatcher and apply it to Labour Members, we are talking about people who the Labour party likes to think of as its own—yet up to a third and certainly more than a quarter are not benefiting from the MIG.

The key point is that there is no hard evidence that a larger proportion of those entitled to the pension credit will take it up. The Government estimate—this is their aim—that 67 per cent. of those eligible will take up the pension credit by 2004, but even they admit that that target is "ambitious". Even if they reach the target, by definition, at least 33 per cent. will not take up the pension credit and therefore not benefit at all.

If I correctly understand the Government's approach from what the Secretary of State said earlier, their basic argument is that they do not want to consider the alternative of targeting by age because that would create anomalies—I agree; it certainly would—and that they are content to carry on means-testing and means-testing, regardless of the proportion of pensioners who do not take up pension credit. That is a huge hole in the Government's argument, and it is where the pension credit fails the first of its two tests—whether it will relieve poverty. For those who take it up, it surely will, but what about the third or quarter of those entitled who will not do so? I do not believe that the Government can or will carry on like this.

[Mr. Paul Goodman]

The evidence on saving is ambiguous. Many figures have been bandied around the Chamber during this debate, but like my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts), I am content to rest on those from the Institute for Fiscal Studies. It says:

"Overall, the effect of the pension credit on the financial incentive to save is left unclear, for the relative magnitudes of the different effects we have disentangled are not known. So whether the pension credit will encourage or discourage saving is an empirical question on which future research may be enlightening."

In other words, the IFS simply does not know. I tend to think that if it does not know, the Government cannot say with certainty that the pension credit overall will boost savings. It is therefore perfectly clear that the Government's pension credit has failed one of the two tests, as we have no reason to think that the quarter or third of pensioners who do not take up the MIG will take up the pension credit. It is also clear that the Government have not really hit their target on saving.

My hon. Friend the Member for Havant made a series of telling points about the increasing crisis in pensions, with which the Government will now have to deal. Watching the Secretary of State, I got the feeling that he was digging himself deeper and deeper into the pension credit and more means-testing without being able to guarantee that that approach would stand up in the medium term, let alone the long term. The Government have put all their eggs in the pension credit basket.

The Government like to say that the pension credit is the final brick in the architecture and that, once it has been introduced, the whole Government pensions building will be secure and will stand. However, Conservative Members have very good reason to vote for the amendment, and will do so, as will the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) and the hon. Member for Northavon.

As the hon. Member for Northavon said, the pension credit has been rushed in even though the Government are not yet clear about the consequences of the minimum income guarantee. Therefore, it is hard to see the pension credit as completing a perfect whole. It is far easier to see it as a sign of a Government whose pension strategy is in deep confusion. I urge the Government to think again about going down this road before they find themselves in a hole from which they cannot get out. That is why I, my hon. Friends and others will support the amendment.

8.23 pm

Miss Anne Begg (Aberdeen, South): I am delighted to be called in this debate and I am aware that many Members still wish to speak.

I was interested in the comment of the hon. Member for Wycombe (Mr. Goodman) that the pension credit had been introduced with such high speed. Four years is hardly very quick. I say four years because I spent the summer recess of 1999 not swanning off on some foreign holiday, as the popular press seem often to paint Members of Parliament doing, but going round most of the sheltered housing complexes in my constituency, holding a large number of pensioner meetings—I held about 20 in total—and speaking to pensioners about how they felt about the Government's pensions policy.

The summer of 1999 saw the height of pensioners' unhappiness about this Government's pensions policy. The 75p rise had just been announced, but pensioners had not yet received it. Going to speak to large groups of pensioners—they turned out in some force—was like entering the lion's den. However, there were some things about the Government's pension policy that they liked. The first was, of course, the introduction of the minimum income guarantee.

It was important that the new Labour Government, having come to power in 1997, tackled pensioner poverty, especially poverty among women pensioners, who were losing out because the pension system was based predominantly on a contributory principle. These women had not paid any contributions, or only very few, or had broken work records. Many working women had paid only the small stamp and therefore did not have full pension contributions.

The MIG was crucial. The Government should not make any apology for dealing with pensioner poverty by introducing it. It was a good measure that was extremely well liked. People still come up to me to thank the Government for what they have managed to do, although they often do that on the quiet. It is rare at a large meeting of pensioners to find pensioners who have benefited to the tune of sometimes £20 or £30 a week as a result of the MIG. That is not admitted at such gatherings, but pensioners will come up quietly afterwards to admit that they have benefited greatly from the measure.

There is also the winter fuel allowance, a free television licence for the over-75s and increases in the basic state pension. Obviously pensioners are slightly happier now than they were during the summer when I was talking to so many of them.

One major problem was identified. There was huge resentment among pensioners whose income was just over the MIG, those who had worked very hard all their lives and perhaps had a small occupational pension or a small income from some savings. They felt—resentment is not too strong a word—aggrieved that their hard work and thrift was not getting any reward.

In some instances, these pensioners did not understand why the Government should give money to people who had not saved and who had not invested in the future. I was keen to emphasise that that was the right thing for a Labour Government to do and that it was right that we should tackle pensioner poverty. The fact that they felt that somehow they were losing out was not a reason why the Government should not act, and the MIG was absolutely the right approach.

Obviously there was a problem that needed to be addressed. It was interesting that the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) talked constantly about the problem caused by the MIG. I think that all Labour Members accept that there are problems caused by it, namely the resentment that many pensioners have felt. I am not quite sure what the hon. Gentleman's solution is. He said that he would tell the House what it is, but I do not think that he did, or else it was so confused that I could not follow it.

Perhaps the hon. Gentleman's solution was that we should still give means-tested benefit to some people, but I am not sure whether it was to the level of the MIG. He suggested that the Conservatives would give lots of

money to the over-75s. That is not an answer. It is not a reply to those pensioners who felt that they were being let down and left out because their income was just above the basic MIG levels.

The Bill is the solution to the problems caused by the MIG. It answers the questions that many pensioners in my constituency were putting to me. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore), I feel that it passes the doorstep test. An Opposition Member claimed that it failed to do so, but it is easy to explain on the doorstep to those who have saved a little and who feel that they are being let down because they are not getting anything back that, with the pension credit, there will be some reward for their saving.

The real challenge and the big problem with the Bill will be whether there is proper take-up of the pension credit once the Bill is enacted. It will be an incredible challenge to the Government to persuade people that the credit is something for which they qualify and not something of which they should be ashamed, and is something that they will get as of right. It will be doubly difficult if the Opposition continue to harp on, as they have tonight, about how complex it is. If pensioners are told, "This is such a complex measure", of course, they are not going to apply.

David Cairns: My hon. Friend is being harsh on the Opposition. At least they have turned up and made a contribution. When she is on the doorstep in Aberdeen talking to voters in her constituency, will she undertake to point out to them that not one member of the Scottish National party bothered to turn up to take part in this incredibly important debate, or even sought to intervene

Miss Begg: I will be interested not only in how the Scottish National party votes tonight, but in how the Liberals vote, because the Liberals are the main opposition in my constituency. Liberals who fight elections for a Scottish Government in Aberdeen next year will have a hard job on the doorstep explaining exactly why their party has voted against the pension credit. I have no doubt that that in itself will undermine their case. If they continue to support the Tories in saying that this is a means test, and it is demeaning to claim the credit, obviously it will be harder and harder to persuade people that they should be claiming it and that it is not like the 1930s means test.

I support many of the things that my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon has already said. The credit can be sold on the doorstep. It can be sold to today's pensioners on the basis of the fact that it is their reward for saving. That is easy to understand. It is also easy for them to understand that they are getting something back. That is where the resentment came in: they felt that other people were getting something for nothing. They will feel that they are getting something back from the Government, but not in the form of a handout or of a demeaning means test. They will qualify because of their thrift.

If, as is projected, 70 per cent. of pensioners qualify for the pension credit, the stigma that the Liberals say will be attached to it will not exist. They have said, however, that there must still be some means-tested benefit. If a very small number receive means-tested benefit, there is a huge stigma attached to that—only the very poor get the means-tested benefit. However, if 70 per cent. of pensioners qualify for the credit, that stigma will not exist.

Another thing that will, I hope, help take-up of the pension credit—again, it is a challenge for the Government—is the new pension service, an agency dedicated to looking after pensioners and their needs, and ensuring that those who reach pension age are properly catered for and have their needs looked into. The hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) said that the pension is the easy option because everyone gets it, and the means test is difficult because not everyone is subject to it. I do not know what he would say to my constituent who told me that she had found that she did not get a pension because she had not realised that she had to fill in forms that were sent to her—she thought the pension came automatically. It is simply not true that people get the basic state pension as an automatic right. They do not if they have not made contributions or filled in forms as they approach their 60th birthday. Therefore, I believe that the pension credit can be sold to today's pensioners.

There has been much talk about whether the measure will give pensioners of the future an incentive to save. People I know do not behave in the way described by the hon. Member for Northavon. I do not know of anyone aged 40 who sits down and calculates to the nearest penny how much they will get in 20 years' time. Most people do not make those kinds of complicated calculations. They work on the principle that they hope—as did today's pensioners when they were younger—that it always pays to save. The introduction of the minimum income guarantee provided an incentive to save, but the introduction of the pension credit means that it will always pay to do so. It will pay to save a little, because people will qualify for the pension credit; it will pay to save a lot, because people will be so much better off than if they had not done so at all.

We cannot know at age 40, 18 or 22, when I started work, what wages we will have for the rest of our lives—or, indeed, whether we will work for the rest of our lives. A person may be hit by a bus and end up paraplegic or have a broken work record owing to continual ill-health or family commitments. We should remember that the pension credit is not the only thing—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

8.36 pm

Andrew Selous (South-West Bedfordshire): I welcome the Government's desire to tackle pensioner poverty, but, like many of my hon. Friends and, indeed, some Labour Members, I must put on record the fact that I do not believe that the Bill is the best way to do so. I reiterate the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts), who said that if the Bill is introduced, Conservative Members will ensure that there are no losers through any alternative proposals that we make.

The Bill introduces a significant increase in means-testing for our pensioner population, and we are entitled to fuller answers from the Government about why that is so. In 1993, the Chancellor of the Exchequer said:

"I want the next Labour Government to achieve what in 50 years of the welfare state has never been achieved. The end of the means test for our elderly people".

Only four years ago, the Prime Minister said that

"there are problems if you move to too much means-testing, as you can see with pensioners who do not take up income support".

[Andrew Selous]

So there has clearly been a seismic shift of opinion on the part of the Government about whether it is worthwhile to means-test, and they have not adequately explained the reasons for that.

Help the Aged estimates that 2.5 million people are entitled to the minimum income guarantee, but only about 1.7 million of those are receiving it. That is a take-up rate of only 68 per cent., which equates to about 800,000 pensioners. Due to the complexity of our benefits system, last year around 500,000 people did not receive the income support to which they were entitled; that has increased to 580,000. Similarly, 150,000 did not receive housing benefit—that has now increased to 210,000—and 1.07 million did not receive council tax benefit; that has increased to more than 1.2 million. Help the Aged drew attention to the Department for Work and Pensions' own research showing that some of the most newly qualified pensioners are some of the most reluctant to take up the minimum income guarantee.

We have heard about the problem of what is to happen to the poor 67-year-old pensioner. That is a valid question, and Labour Members are entitled to ask it. However, surely the bigger picture is that if large numbers of pensioners—perhaps hundreds of thousands—do not take up benefits as a result of the proposals, more pensioners overall will be worse off than would be the case if the needs of that 67-year-old pensioner were precisely met by this massive extension of means-testing.

The current figures are all the more disappointing, given that the Government have recently spent £15 million on an advertising campaign. I do not begrudge spending that money, but it is depressing to note that the results appear to be going in the wrong direction. In respect of certain benefits, take-up is falling rather than rising.

The Prudential Assurance Company estimates that some 3 million pensioners fail to claim about £1.2 billion worth of benefits each year—a situation that the Bill will make even worse. In May 2000, the then Social Security Committee—I am a member of its successor body, the Work and Pensions Committee—said that urgent steps should be taken to address pensioner poverty through non-means-tested methods, and called for the Government to take that route.

The Bill will vastly extend means-testing up the income scale, which will blunt the incentive to save for certain sections of our community. It is not true that people will be better off saving in all cases. About one third of pensioners will indeed be better off, but for a further third, the anticipated results are ambiguous; the final third will have a slightly reduced incentive to save. The National Federation of Post Office and British Telecom Pensioners—the headquarters of which is in my own, South-West Bedfordshire constituency—has pointed out that those who make less than a full contribution to the basic state pension will not benefit in any way from the savings credit. Women aged between 60 and 65 will not benefit, and because the self-employed are not eligible for the state second pension, they, too, will not benefit.

James Purnell: I hope that the hon. Gentleman accepts that such people will benefit through the minimum income guarantee and the guaranteed element included in the Bill.

Andrew Selous: Indeed, but I was referring to the savings credit, not the minimum income guarantee.

There is a savings crisis in this country. There is a £27 billion gap between what we as a country should be saving, and what we are saving at the moment. Indeed, it is a tragedy that, in many cases, today's generation of workers will retire on less than do current pensioners, who were lucky enough to enjoy a defined benefit contribution scheme. To fill that gap, today's generation will have to save significant extra sums.

We have heard today about younger people's attitudes to pensions. It is my personal belief that young people want a real sense of ownership of their pension assets. They want to feel that they own their pension in the same way that they own a house or a car—if they are lucky enough to do so—and that includes inheritability.

On pensions advisers, even Help the Aged has said that advice for the current generation of workers on saving for the future will be about as reliable as that given by horse racing tipsters, such is the complexity of the landscape at the moment. We salute the Government's intention to do something about pensioner poverty, but our proposals are simpler and clearer, would lead to far greater take-up and would be much more easily understood.

8.44 pm

Sandra Osborne (Ayr): I shall curtail my comments as much as possible, to let other hon. Members speak.

I believe that this legislation represents a promise kept to a very important group of people—those pensioners who have missed out because of modest pensions or savings. All of us should be aware of how aggrieved they feel—and rightly so—not because of selfishness or greed, but as a simple matter of fairness. However, it was right, as my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, South (Miss Begg) said, to tackle the needs of the poorest pensioners first—the 2 million who were living on or below the poverty line in 1998. That was an absolute disgrace, with a major gap between the richest and the poorest pensioners.

It was essential first to ensure that pensioners did not have to choose between eating and heating. My parents, who worked in low-paid jobs all their lives, often had to make that choice when bringing up five children. My mother, who is now a widow, has benefited greatly under this Labour Government, and that is as I would have expected. I would have been extremely angry if she had not been able to have that security in her retirement in the time of a Labour Government. It is also right to tackle the problem of the large group of pensioners who are by no means well off, but who deserve a reward for their efforts in saving on what was often a very tight budget.

I intend to dwell on the issue of fairness, because I felt a sense of déjà vu when my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, South was speaking. She talked about the doorstep test. I remember that test during the Ayr Scottish parliamentary by-election, when the pensioners of my constituency gave the Government a clear message about their feelings on the 75p increase. A simmering discontent boiled up into anger about the fact that that group of pensioners above the level of the minimum income guarantee felt that they had missed out on the benefits that they deserved under successive Governments.

Many hon. Members have mentioned take-up. I see advantages in the pension service, but I wonder how the link will be made between the national service and the local services. For example, the IPPR has referred to an "advice vacuum". What arrangements will be made to ensure that, for example, welfare rights advice will still be available at a local level?

I share the frustration of other hon. Members at the position of the large group of women who will miss out on the savings credit. A woman over 65 and one under may have exactly the same income but will end up with different benefits, even if they have the same savings. The same problem applies to those who have not acquired rights to a full basic pension but who have savings. There are 1.4 million people in that category, 1.1 million of whom are women.

The Government have introduced the state second pension for people with broken work records, and women will now have an entitlement to a pension in their own right. The important role of carers has also been recognised, as has the need for a work-life balance. That is a major breakthrough for women in this society. However, how does the Minister reconcile that recognition of a broken work record in relation to the state second pension, which is completely valid and most welcome, with the fact that so many women of this generation of pensioners who are in exactly that position will lose out under the savings credit?

I turn to the issue of public confidence in the market to provide an income in old age, because that confidence is rapidly being eroded. I have raised in Westminster Hall the plight of former United Engineering Forgings workers in my constituency who will not receive the returns from their final salary scheme because the company has gone into administration with an underfunded scheme. Those workers will now get nothing like the pension that they were expecting. They took the advice, as many others have done, of successive Governments and invested in provision for their old age. However, that has been ruined by the vagaries of the stock market. It has been said tonight that people do not feel that they can rely on the state for their benefits in the future, but many people are very worried about the ability of the private sector to deliver.

In the overall context of pension provision, the state pension credit is a big step forward. However, I worry about the overall context, especially in the private sector, and I hope that the Minister will be able to comment on that issue when she winds up.

8.49 pm

Hywel Williams (Caernarfon): The right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) broke the duopoly that has existed so far in support of this reasoned amendment. I add the support of the Scottish National party and Plaid Cymru, and I note from the names on the reasoned amendment that there are supporters from Northern Ireland as well. There is broad support for this reasoned amendment.

Plaid Cymru and SNP Members will support the reasoned amendment because the Government's proposals will involve extensive means-testing of the incomes of older people. That means-testing will become a long-term feature of our pensions system, which will lead to complexity in an already complex pension system. If we want more targeting on the basis of income, we must have a more complex testing system. After all, that was the argument in relation to the 1986 Act. The Secretary of State has referred to the noble Lord Fowler, and I seem to remember that when Lord Fowler introduced the 1986 Act one of the arguments that he deployed was that the means-testing system would be simplified by introducing premiums. I do not want to rehearse those arguments again, but that is the point—to be more sophisticated, we must be more complicated.

Means-testing will continue to have severe disincentive effects on take-up. Pensioners will therefore miss out on their entitlement, as many hon. Members have argued. The Government claim that the means test will take place every five years or up to every five years, and that, in some way, that negates the disincentive effect. Pensioners know better, however. They know that the hurdle of the test is the demeaning effect of the means test at the start of the five years. The Secretary of State might disagree with that, but pensioners know that that is the case.

David Cairns: The hon. Gentleman said eloquently that he does not like means-testing. If he rules out means-testing, what is the impact on the mythical 67-year-old—who has reappeared time after time in this debate—who is poor, who will gain under this system, and who, as the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) has said clearly, will not gain under the reasoned amendment? What is his answer to the 67-year-old in Greenock who will benefit under our system but lose out under his?

Hywel Williams: No one has said that means-testing will disappear. After all, the current system combines a pension that is a universal right and a certain amount of means-testing. There is no way out of that.

One of the effects that is claimed for these proposals is that they will help young people to realise that they should be saving. The hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Miss Begg)—who is sadly no longer in her place—seemed to be confident that a large number of younger people were considering saving or were already saving. I have no confidence about that. Younger people will see that it is not clear what the value of saving will be to them decades down the line. All that they will see is that the system is changing, that it is complicated, and that means-testing is increasing.

There are better ways to target help where it is most needed, to which the hon. Member for Northavon and other hon. Members have referred—targeting money on older pensioners. The hon. Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) mentioned that he had no qualms about 100 per cent. means-testing. The Government contend that this extension of means-testing is the best way to target help on those most in need, and they appeal for support to their friends in the pension industry. I refer, however, to my constituent, Mr. W. H. Evans, of Clwt y Bont, who is a veteran of the D-day landings and a tireless campaigner for the rights of older people and for a recognition that older people need to have a proper income. He called to see me at my surgery last week, and was outraged yet again by the miserly 25p increase in his pension as an older person. As he says, it is not enough to buy the first-class stamp needed to send a complaint to the Government. He was outraged, and he knows what

[Hywel Williams]

many hon. Members recognise. It is possible to target help effectively at some of the poorest pensioners by targeting money at older pensioners, many of whom are poor.

There will be more poorer pensioners in the future. In 2000, there were 584,200 people over retirement age in Wales—20 per cent. of the population. By 2016, the percentage is expected to rise to 23.5 per cent. and the most significant increase will be among the 80-plus age group who are often the poorest pensioners.

It is particularly apt that I should speak on this issue for Plaid Cymru and the Scottish National party given that I represent the constituency once held by David Lloyd George, the politician who introduced the retirement pension which has been hugely popular, successful and long lived. It is sad but hardly surprising that the recent Age Concern MORI poll shows that the majority of people have no confidence in the Government's strategy to tackle pensioner poverty. That contrasts with the opinion that they hold of the pension introduced by Lloyd George.

The Government say that their new system of means-testing does not involve means-testing as such. Perhaps it is soft testing or even third-way testing—I do not know what they would like to call it. At every turn these days, we are told that this is the age of the consumer. The customer is king, so what do the potential consumers of this new system say about it?

The Secretary of State told us a great deal about what the pension industry and Lord Fowler think, but I have a document launched for Welsh political parties at Plaid Cymru's spring conference in Swansea on 16 March. It is entitled "A Pensioners Manifesto for Wales" and it was produced by the Pensioners Forum Wales, which includes representatives of organisations such as the MSF retired members section, the Transport and General Workers Union retired members section, Unison retired members Wales and many other trade unions.

What do those consumers say of the Government's plans? In point 5 of the manifesto, they call on the National Assembly for Wales—not this august institution—to

"recognise the financial plight of many pensioners and press the Westminster government to address the provision of adequate guaranteed non-means tested basic income as a matter of urgency".

That is the opinion of the TGWU, the MSF and many other pensioner groups in Wales.

The Government's proposals take us further and further from a system intended to provide a universal basic pension and a safety net for those not covered to one in which means-testing is to become the norm. The gap between the minimum income guarantee and the basic pension is widening and it will widen further. The Secretary of State's answer to that is even more means-testing, but Plaid Cymru and SNP Members agree with Age Concern and the Pensioners Forum Wales.

8.58 pm

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff, West): One likes to support the institutions to which one belongs—whether it is one's team, one's alma mater or one's political party. Unfortunately, in my case, over the past weekend, the first two have taken a bit of a knocking, first with what happened at Twickenham and then with the revelation that my old college and that of the Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Garston (Maria Eagle), had sold places for £300,000. I assure the House that neither of us read law at that institution.

I am pleased that my party is honouring its manifesto pledge. On this, I part company with my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), because we pledged at the last election that we would introduce this measure, which is intended to meet the twin objectives of continuing to help the poorest pensioners while properly rewarding thrift. Tomorrow when I meet the healthy, wealthy and wise project—the grey power project—in Ely in Cardiff, West, I shall be delighted to stand before its members and outline the Government's record on helping pensioners, including the state pension credit proposed in the Bill. I shall also inform them—I am sure that they will be interested—of the new Opposition coalition against the introduction of the pension credit.

The Bill addresses an issue that all of us will have encountered on the doorstep, as I did while canvassing at the general election: the complaint that it is simply not worth having a modest occupational pension, because it leaves one no better off than someone who has not contributed to a pension at all, and that there is no incentive to save because of the limits on capital. As a candidate for Parliament for the first time, I was pleased to be able to say that we would be doing something about that if re-elected and that I would do all that I could to support that. I gave that pledge on the doorstep and it is in fulfilment of that personal pledge to voters in Cardiff, West that I stand here in support of the Bill on Second Reading, despite the traumatic blows at the weekend that I described earlier.

I support this Bill, even though I have traditionally taken the view that the best way to deal with the state pension is to link it to earnings and to eradicate the stigma of the means test, because all pensioners should automatically share in economic prosperity. After all, most of today's generation of pensioners believed that the state pension would provide adequate support without recourse to the indignity of the old-fashioned means test. They were, after all, a generation that sacrificed so much so that we could benefit from peace and democracy today.

I am thinking here of people such as my father—I know some hon. Members have similar backgrounds—an Irish immigrant to this country, who worked as a navvy and helped to build the physical infrastructure on which our current prosperity is based. Elsewhere, that generation has been called "the greatest generation", appropriately. But they are also the generation that remembers the dreaded means test. I think, too of my mother, a miner's daughter from Nantyglo in south Wales, and her stories of the harshness of the means test at the depth of the great depression of the 1930s. I am still attached, emotionally and philosophically, to the earnings-related argument.

One must give credit to the Government for the ingenious way in which they are approaching this problem and the ingenious mechanism that the Bill represents. In a way, it echoes many of the reforms that the Government are bringing in, which aim to reward work and thrift. The Government have gone some way to meeting an accusation levelled by the Opposition today by ensuring that once a pensioner's position has been established at retirement, there is not the need for a weekly means test, as with income support. Instead, there is a five-yearly

review of circumstances, with the minimum circumstances for pensioners in keeping with what is necessary for the protection of public finance.

Any comparison of that with the means test of the 1930s—or even with the post-war National Assistance Board, which poked its nose daily into every detail of a pensioner's personal circumstances—is an insult to those people who had to suffer the heartless indignity of that era. I hope—it may be a forlorn hope—that those who, properly, wish to oppose the Bill will not engage in scaremongering of that kind to try to sabotage the working of the pension credit. There is a case for considering whether, in practice, the name "pension credit" is the best way to describe the change. Pensioners' groups have expressed concern about this, as the word "credit" is associated by many pensioners with debt. That matter should be considered in Committee. I can understand the Government's desire to retain the term as it now applies to several flagship initiatives, but there may be a case for providing another term for use in publicity; perhaps "enhanced pension" to make it clear that it is not a loan that has to be paid back. That would help to change the culture of fear that some people are trying to build up about the credit being a new means test.

The Bill will bring real and direct benefits to people. An elderly widow with a monthly £100 pension—perhaps half the pension of her deceased husband—currently receives no benefit from that occupational pension. Under the Bill, she will be able to keep 60 per cent. of it. That is in addition to the other benefits that she will already have gained since Labour came to power, including the free television licence for the over-75s and the £200 winter fuel allowance—the Tories wanted to take that away—which is the equivalent of £15 a month tax free. If she lives in Wales, from next week she will have free local bus travel as a result of the policies of the Labour-led National Assembly for Wales.

Let us contrast all that with the approach of the last Tory Government. They halved the value of SERPS, abandoned the earnings link with the state pension and deliberately forced pensioners on to real means-tested benefits as a result of that decline in value of the state pension. To top it all, they generated the pensions mis-selling scandals of the 1980s. I was teaching at the time and can remember salesmen—they were no better than con men, really—coming into school staff rooms and telling young teachers that it was in their best interests to pull out of teachers' occupational schemes and take out a private pension.

Instead of responsibility and social conscience, which the Tories are trying to convince us they now have, they ushered in the era of the pensions spiv. For Beveridge, Jim Griffiths and Barbara Castle, they substituted Flash Harry. It is to the Government's continuing credit that they have tried to restore some fairness and sustainability to pension provision. This measure is a major step forward in that mission.

I look forward to telling the people at tomorrow's grey power meeting in Cardiff, West about today's debate. Some say the pensions credit is complicated, but I do not think that they will find the concept of 5 million pensioners benefiting by, on average, £400 a year a difficult concept to appreciate. The measure will be widely welcomed by pensioners, and I commend it to the House.

9.6 pm

Mr. Mark Simmonds (Boston and Skegness): I represent a constituency that contains many less affluent pensioners in urban and, in particular, rural areas. I did not appreciate the comment of the hon. Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) that most Conservative Members represent people with large share portfolios. That is absolute nonsense.

I warmly welcome any proposals that attempt to eradicate pensioner poverty. I have no objection to ending the current iniquitous paradox of the minimum income guarantee system that penalises thrift and saving. Indeed, I should like to see a system that encourages people to put money aside and rewards financial responsibility. I strongly believe in the independence of the individual and a reduction in the reliance on the state, enabling and facilitating people to make choices and take responsibility for their own life.

The current system, which requires ever-larger numbers of pensioners to claim moneys through means-testing, is considered, not just by hon. Members on this side of the House, but by the very pensioners whom it affects, to be demeaning and degrading. It carries a stigma for many pensioners. Many are frightened by the process. That is borne out by the figures that were discussed earlier. There is a tremendous variance, but if between a third and a fifth of those who are entitled to claim minimum income guarantee fail to do so, there must be something wrong with the system.

As always with the Government, there is a great divergence between rhetoric and action. As my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous), said, both the Prime Minister and the Chancellor have said that they wish to reduce means-testing for pensioners, if not eradicate it altogether. However, not only does the Bill fail to reduce means-testing or to make an attempt to reduce it, it vastly increases the propensity to means-test.

Between 1979 and 1995, the proportion of pensioners on means-testing fell significantly, from 57 per cent. to 38 per cent. Since 1997, it has increased significantly. According to the House of Commons Library, up to 60 per cent. of pensioners will be means-tested by 2003.

The two component parts of the pensions credit—the guarantee credit and the savings credit—extend the reliance on the state into the future, which will further act as a disincentive for pensioners to save.

It is my view that the endless and pervasive intrusion into and manipulation of people's lives by the state is a deliberate attempt by the Government further to weaken the individual's responsibility and enhance reliance on a centrally controlled state. Pensioners, like so many other responsible groups in our country, want to be self-reliant and to be treated with dignity. Extensive means-testing does not fit comfortably with that ambition.

The uniform criticism of the Bill, among everyone except Labour Members, is of its overriding complexity, which will deter claimants and lower take-up rates. I was astonished when the Secretary of State dismissed as nonsense the fact that there is a causal link between complexity and take-up rates. That is staggering, especially when one bears it in mind that the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux has said:

"The complexity of benefits and the claiming process is one reason why millions of pounds worth of benefits go unclaimed by people on low incomes."

[Mr. Mark Simmonds]

If the House is to attempt to help those on low incomes, we must surely be honest and look at why people who are entitled to claim benefits—whether the minimum income guarantee or the new credit—are not doing so. Just as the critical test of a successful tax is collectability, for benefits the measure of success must be simplicity and therefore take-up. The Government must take responsibility for increasing the complexity and exacerbating the problem via the contents of the Bill

I have four specific points that I want the Minister to address. First, I understand that the guaranteed credit will subsume the premium paid to carers and severely disabled people. Will she take this opportunity to make it clear that these very hard-working and vulnerable people will not be made worse off?

Secondly, in the Bill it is proposed to set up a pensions service, and I believe that there will be only 26 offices. To my mind, that will eradicate the personal contact that has been mentioned, with home visits allowed only in exceptional circumstances. I see the Minister shaking her head, and I hope that she will be able to tell me that I am wrong. Many people who currently have contact with pensions professionals believe that they will not be able to do so under the proposals.

Thirdly, the Bill contains a change in the analysis to a five-yearly rather than a weekly assessment. That may not eradicate bureaucracy but may make it easier for people to abuse the system. What safeguards and structures will be put in place to ensure that abuse of the kind that happened with individual learning accounts cannot take place?

Fourthly, what will the pension credit do to close the savings gap?

The Government's pensions strategy is at best confused. To be more blunt, it is in a mess, from the perfidious and pernicious tax on people's pension funds to the shambles of the stakeholder pensions and the Government's opposition to annuity reform. The Bill further complicates an already over-complex area and increases means-testing for the section of society that least wants it. The solution surely lies in increasing the basic state pension for the specific targets of harder-up pensioners.

9.14 pm

David Cairns (Greenock and Inverclyde): I shall endeavour to be brief. I welcome the Bill, and I believe that in my constituency, which is in the top third in the United Kingdom in terms of pensioner numbers, it will be welcomed for the reasons outlined by many of my hon. Friends, such as the sheer sense of iniquity that people have felt about saving all their lives and losing out under the current arrangements, which has been the perception. Those complaints are always accompanied by detailed descriptions of pensioners who live three doors down who have smoked and drank all their lives, but who seem to be better off than our constituents. However, our constituents will welcome the Bill, and so they should.

Much of this evening's debate, which I should like to respond to briefly, has focused on the role and nature of means-testing. I accept the Government's argument that the type of means-testing outlined in the Bill is quantitatively different to the means-testing that has gone before, as well as qualitatively different, given that it will not involve a weekly means test, but an assessment every five years or so.

I agree entirely with my hon. Friends the Members for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) and for Aberdeen, South (Miss Begg) that extending means-testing to the extent that proposed in the Bill will dilute the stigma—if a stigma can be diluted—so that it becomes less of an onerous burden on people. However, it has become abundantly clear during the debate that, far from abolishing means-testing, the Conservative party would maintain it and increase the stigma of the means test.

I make no apology for reintroducing our 68-year-old poor friend, who was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (James Purnell) and by the Secretary of State himself. Such people are not entirely invented; they exist in all our constituencies. Confronted with the reasoned amendment that suggests that people over the age of 75 should be given extra help, we have repeatedly asked what we should say to our 68-year-old poor pensioner. The answer is that he or she would be means-tested, so the poorer people who need the extra help would be means-tested. How on earth would that remove the stigma of means-testing? How would that progress beyond a time when reliance on means-testing was seen as a bad thing, when the very poorest people were told that they would have to put up with means-testing?

Under the new scheme, those who are not poor, but who are by no means rich, will be brought into a system that is akin to one that the Borrie report, on which the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) was an esteemed specialist adviser, referred to as the partial affluence test. I never liked that expression; it would not kid anybody about what is involved in reality, but the proposal is qualitatively different to the old means-testing, which involved rooting around people's houses looking for valuables to offset any income that they might have received.

I want to focus my remaining remarks on the pension service. Uptake is not just an issue used to scaremonger; it is a genuine concern, and Labour Members are as concerned about it as anyone else. It is important that the system has adequate take-up, and the key to that must be a pro active pension service, which goes out of its way to ensure that people get what they are entitled to. It has to allow people to interact with it in a broad range of ways by telephone, on the internet and by post. We know that the telephone is the Government's preferred route because they tell us that pensioners prefer it. I accept that, but I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, who said that if a freephone number were used, so much the better. The number of silver surfers on the internet will grow in years to come. Although I appreciate that there will not be a network of local offices, the opportunity to interact face to face is important. I would welcome the Minister's reassurance that face-to-face interviews will still be allowed to play a part.

The pension service must act as a gateway, allowing people to get quicker housing benefit assessments. As we know from the operation of the working families credit, particularly in the new Jobcentre Plus scheme, things all wander along absolutely marvellously until they hit the

brick wall of housing benefit assessments, when people are not any further forward. Although I welcome what has happened, such things have to be improved in future.

There was some confusion about the role of the call centres. There will be 26 call centres throughout the country, and it has been said that confusion might arise in understanding cockneys and geordies, so there is a good argument for locating all the call centres in Scotland because everyone understands a Scottish accent. I had hoped that Mr. Speaker would be in the Chair when I made that comment. In my constituency, there are two excellent call centres—those of One to One and the Royal Bank of Scotland—which shows that people are used to interacting with call centres and to the professional service that they receive from them, and there is no reason why they cannot work in the public sector as well.

I welcome the Bill. It makes an important contribution to those people who feel aggrieved. I hope that we reject the reasoned amendment and stick with the Government's proposals.

9.19 pm

Mr. Bill Tynan (Hamilton, South): I welcome the opportunity to participate in the debate and will be quick because other hon. Members want to speak.

I believe that life's experiences shape our character. People where I came from would find it difficult to compare their lives with people's experiences in the House of Commons. As a youngster, I was brought up in a tenement close. We had two rooms and a kitchen. There were five in the family. My mother waited for my elder sister to come in to get the tips so that she could feed us the next day. I experienced poverty at first hand. I was fortunate because I was the youngest in the family, which meant that I was able to serve my time as an apprentice toolmaker. That gave me a skilled trade, but I could achieve that only because of my family background and the fact that people were willing to support the family unit.

Hon. Members have expressed a very negative view of the proposition. It is possible to look at something and see it as being either half full or half empty. If two thirds of the people who will benefit from the pension credit manage to improve their standard of living, that is substantial progress. Like everyone else, I am concerned about the take-up, but the best way to deal with that problem is to stop talking about means-testing. Means-testing was used in the 1930s to ensure that people stayed poor. The new test will ensure that they qualify for additional benefit. That is an important distinction.

The Bill is part of the crusade on which the Government have embarked. There have been some interesting comments on what direction we should take and what we should do. The Leader of the Opposition said:

"A nation that leaves its vulnerable behind diminishes us all."

I agree, but we must remember that selfish individualism over 20 years helped to create a society in which our most vulnerable were left behind. The Opposition have reverted to type on this issue. If we support the reasoned amendment, the Bill will fall and those two thirds whose standard of living would improve will fail to benefit from it. That is an important consideration.

Poverty is not an academic debate; it is a reality for many of my constituents. During the election campaign, an elderly lady called my office. She had been targeted by South Lanarkshire council for arrears that she had accrued on her community charge. Those people who think that the proposals are complex should sit down with such individuals and talk about what is on offer because they would readily understand the position. I spoke to that lady that day. As she was on the old-age pension and had no other means of support, she qualified for the minimum income guarantee, which meant that she no longer paid community charge and went on housing benefit. That boosted that woman and her standard of living.

We must remember the beneficiaries when we discuss in a forum such as the House of Commons whether the academic debate is too complex or how a proposal can be implemented. It is important to support the Bill. It is a step forward. I ask hon. Members to recognise that there is poverty in this nation and that the Bill will improve the standard of living for more than 5 million people. If we achieve that, Parliament will have done its job.

9.24 pm

James Purnell (Stalybridge and Hyde): There are two points on which I should like the Committee to scrutinise the Bill. The first concerns foster carers who, as we know, provide a vital service for children in this country, many of whom have faced the worst that life can throw at a child today—sexual abuse, dysfunctional families, poverty and abandonment. However, foster carers do not get credit towards their basic state pension as they would if they were looking after their own children. If they take time off work to fulfil their fostering duties, they do not receive home responsibilities protection as they would if they were caring for their own children. I urge Ministers to look at that anomaly because it is unfair to an important sector of society.

Secondly, although I very much welcome what the Secretary of State said about the treatment of earnings, at the moment the amount of earnings that will be entirely disregarded is just £5. If we want to encourage people to have an active retirement, it is at least worth considering whether we should disregard a slightly higher level of income so that people could work for, say, a day a week after age 65 and keep all that income.

I am glad that the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) has returned to the Chamber because I am slightly mystified by his reasoned amendment and I am trying to understand the motivation behind it. I have noticed over the past few weeks that he is trying to position the Conservative party on the side of the poor. Of course the Opposition would say that they are on the side of the poor, but we have to ask ourselves what they would do if they were in government. To establish that, it is worth trying to remember what they did when they were in government.

Between 1979 and 1983 the Conservatives ended the link between earnings and the basic state pension and viciously cut benefits, while their monetary policy unnecessarily forced 3 million people on to the dole. Where was the hon. Gentleman when all that was happening? In the run-up to the 1979 election, he was advising Nigel Lawson, who was centrally involved in taking those decisions even though the policies were not mentioned in the manifesto. During that first term, the hon. Gentleman was in the Treasury, where he was private secretary to Nigel Lawson and an official advising on monetary policy, so he bears a direct responsibility for those policies.

[James Purnell]

After that first term, SERPS was cut, benefits for widows were halved, £10 billion was taken out of overall pension income and housing benefit was slashed by nearly 50 per cent. The result of all that was that on estates such as Easterhouse people could not afford to take jobs because they were trapped on benefit rates that meant that they would be worse off if they were employed. Where was the hon. Gentleman when all that was happening? First, he was in Mrs. Thatcher's policy unit, advising her on social security policy, and after that he was running her favourite think-tank, the Centre for Policy Studies, and acting as a part-time adviser to her.

It is worth remembering all that because although I welcome the Damascene conversion of the Leader of the Opposition and the hon. Member for Havant after their visit to Easterhouse, the rest of us know estates such as that and have been working on them for years. While the hon. Gentleman was driving past those estates on the motorway on the way to seminars with the hard right during the 1980s, the people there were being thrown into poverty and out of jobs by the monetary policy that he advised on and having their benefits cut by the Ministers whom he advised.

Those estates did not magically appear in 2001; they were the direct result of the unnecessary viciousness of Conservative economic policy and of the housing policy that turned them into sink estates. The poor on our estates have been suffering from those policies for the past 20 years. Where was the hon. Gentleman? At every single stage from 1979 to 1992, a time during which the income of the bottom 10 per cent. fell by nearly a fifth, he was advising on and constructing those policies—he was in the vanguard of those policies. Indeed, if one believes the biographies, the policies would have been even more severe if his views had been completely heeded.

I welcome the Bill because it will help the poor pensioners in my constituency. If the Opposition had any self-respect, they would apologise for what they did in those years before espousing the cause of the poor.

9.29 pm

Mr. Chris Pond (Gravesham): I support the Bill. I do not want to be as unkind to Opposition Members as my hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (James Purnell), but I am a bit disappointed that they will not be joining us in the Lobby tonight. We heard over the weekend about their new-found concern for the vulnerable—no doubt that is why they have taken the Liberal Democrats under their wing tonight. Like Victor Meldrew discovering the delights of skateboarding, the Tory party has discovered a passion for helping the poor.

I had therefore assumed not only that the Tories would support the Bill, but that they would utter a few words of apology for the £10 billion that they lifted from pensioner incomes during their 18 years in government. One reason why they might want to support the Bill is that it provides an opportunity to give back at least a fifth of the amount that they took away. Much of the remainder has been returned through other measures that the Labour Government have introduced—measures that even this evening the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) again described as "gimmicks".

The reasoned amendment suggests that the resources given to the Bill would be

"better directed towards the basic state pension".

I asked the House of Commons Library to tell me what would have happened had the basic state pension been indexed in line with earnings. The answer is that it would have resulted in a sum similar to the basic state pension today—but of course the pension credit and the other measures we have taken will result in a substantially higher level of non-means-tested income for pensioners on the basic state pension.

Earlier I asked the hon. Gentleman whether he could give financial advice to my nine-year-old on how much she would have to invest each year between now and her retirement to achieve what the hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr. Mitchell) described as a funded basic state pension, but he did not have the answer to hand. In fact, she would have to start now investing £10 a week until her retirement to achieve such a pension.

Many hon. Members spoke about means-testing. I am not enthusiastic about means-testing, not least because of its traditional impact in terms of stigma and loss of dignity. However, I have never been against targeting to ensure that those who are most in need receive the help they deserve. The proposals in the Bill provide an effective targeting mechanism, minimising stigma and maximising take-up wherever possible. They include the five-year assessment, simpler claim forms, help through the pension service to complete the application, and making use of information already available to make an assessment without requiring new forms to be filled out. All those measures mean that we will be able to target resources without imposing the traditional stigma associated with means-testing. For that reason, I support the proposals.

The decisions we make tonight are about long-term pensions policy. We have to make sure that the policies that we put in place can last the test of time. I am extremely disappointed to hear that the Opposition parties will not join us in a consensus to ensure not only that today's pensioners have a decent income, but that we provide some security for future pensioners.

9.33 pm

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): In spite of its delayed start, or perhaps because of it, the debate has proceeded at a cracking pace. I have recorded 20 speeches, all of which—even the Secretary of State's—have added something to the discussion. We do not always hear much of substance from the right hon. Gentleman, but today he made the welcome announcement that earnings will be treated broadly like savings under the legislation. We look forward to hearing the details of that and to discussing other points in Committee. Even those other Labour contributors who might be regarded as trusties all had something of interest to say. My hon. Friends and our newly acquired associates in the reasoned amendment also made telling contributions.

There is a degree of mutual understanding of the fact that there are some problems, even if only of complexity. I suppose that in his daily life the average, not very well off, older person has quite enough to deal with in terms of difficulties with transport, hospital appointments, local law and order and so on, without worrying too much about the theology of pensions—whether the pension he

receives, or hopes to receive if he has not yet retired, is sourced primarily from the state and the taxpayer or from private provision. As has been said this evening, what people want is an adequate income. The signs are that they are not getting it now and the position of those who will retire in future may be worse rather than better, which nobody in the House wants.

I am surprised that the Government have not claimed any credit for the 4.1 per cent. increase in the basic retirement pension this year, or claimed it as absolution from the error of the 75p increase in the past. They are committed to a minimum annual increase, even if it is above the inflation rate. While the increase seems substantial, it is interesting how quickly it is absorbed in my county where, for example, council tax is to rise by about 12 per cent. It is well known that the number of pensioners who fail to claim the council tax benefit for which they are eligible is even higher than those who do not claim the MIG. Those examples put the state pension increase in context.

I am not sure how often Ministers are let out to talk to ordinary people, but I could not help but be struck when I attended a meeting last week in the House with the Greater London Pensioners Association—not my natural soul mate—by the intensity of its members' feelings about their situation. Words like "betrayal" were bandied about, and were not being applied to the Opposition. One lady gave a trenchant summary:

"If the Government can give us this pension credit, it can afford to pay us a decent basic pension."

That was said some time before we tabled our reasoned amendment.

Let me say, almost at the outset, that we have no problem with the Government's objectives or motives. They have a good stated objective of reversing the proportions of 60 per cent. state provision for retirement and 40 per cent. private provision, although we have doubts about whether they will succeed. We recognise that the Bill would provide additional resources for pensioners of at least £2 billion in the first full year, no doubt mounting to an astronomic figure if the measure lasts the course. The essence of our amendment, however, is that the money could have been spent to better effect; it is being frittered away and is going in the wrong direction.

Ministers need to come to terms with the fact that not all is well on the pensions front. I happened to pick up the money section of *The Sunday Telegraph* yesterday. It is stuffed with problems; one article on the front page says that the Government's annuity reforms are "unworkable", and the main headline concerns a row about auditing stakeholder pensions. Turning the page, the personal finance editor on page 2 describes stakeholder pensions as

"about as useful to future generations of pensioners as a soluble bikini to a keen swimmer."

Then there is the implosion of final salary schemes under the searchlight of FRS17 and the general current advice that the level of contracting-out rebates on offer makes it sensible for many holders of personal pensions to opt back into the state second scheme. That is all the more reason for the Government to come clean about the function and purpose of the state second pension, created inadvertently through mistaken analogy with SERPS, which was set up for a different purpose, without crucial details about its future course, for example the date at which it becomes flat rate. Whatever we say about who is the friend of the pensioner, we can be sure that the Government are friends of a broadly friendless second pension system.

Of course, we do not mind Labour giving more money to any pensioner, but we do not accept the tangled and complicated way in which it is doing so. No doubt the Secretary of State rather prides himself on being an intellectual—he is not the only one in this place, of course—and no doubt he can understand how his new system works. I might be able to claim that my single brain drifts in and out of understanding of the system, but in terms of the system's basic intelligibility to the electorate on the doorstep, it is an absolute no-go area. The less intelligible the system, the less likely people are to make well-informed choices about their retirement planning, and the greater the shock that they may encounter, as the hon. Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) said.

The Government may well find that the costs of the system will escalate and become unsustainable. It is a very heavy price to pay for a temporary fix to the incomes of some but not all poorer current pensioners—those who manage to take up the benefit and/or who suffer no natural downturn in their income while enjoying the pension credit.

The operation of the pension service is of growing concern, which has been echoed not just on the Conservative Benches. I do not know whether the Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, the hon. Member for Liverpool, Garston (Maria Eagle), has any experience of fighting bush fires, but she now has a second one breaking out with the Public and Commercial Services union. In addition to the concern that it has expressed on security matters in relation to Jobcentre Plus, it has recently circularised members expressing concerns about the local accessibility of the pension service.

I note that the Trades Union Congress in its evidence to the House of Commons inquiry on pension credit emphasised specifically that the Government should take particular care to communicate the way in which the credit will work to all pensioners. With the greatest respect to Ministers, one cannot do that on the internet when only 10 per cent. of pensioners are silver surfers—although we hope that that number will increase. Pensioners need to be able to get through on the telephone, although they also need the opportunity of seeing a person who can give them advice and, indeed, reassurance on what is to happen.

Behind all this is a much more substantial fact. The spectre of the means test is being fattened up by the Government's new approach to it. Whatever the Chancellor of the Exchequer may have said in opposition, when means-testing was anathema, it has become the centre of Government pension policy. It spreads its tentacles: two thirds of pensioners very soon and perhaps three quarters in due course will be caught up in the system.

Mr. Levitt: If the hon. Gentleman believes that it is right to attack poverty by providing more means to those who are most in need, how would he go about identifying those who need the greatest help?

Mr. Boswell: I think that we have already discussed the fact that there will need to be a means-tested safety

[Mr. Boswell]

net, as there is provided by the minimum income guarantee already. The hon. Gentleman will appreciate that it is unreasonable to expect a detailed prescription in the three or four minutes remaining to me, but I can tell him and the House that we are convinced because of one simple fact that the Government are not going about this in the right way. If, even on the minimalist estimates, one in five of those who are entitled to the MIG are not claiming it, how much less likely is it, particularly when income changes, that pensioners will claim pension credit? Nearly everything in policy seems to be going the opposite way from the Government.

I find it striking that the recent IPPR report concluded after 18 months, though it was rubbished by the Secretary of State in 10 minutes, that

"a policy framework which relies heavily on means-testing retirement benefits is flawed."

It also indicated that it had not started with the assumption but that it would be recommending an increase in the basic pension.

I find it remarkable that so many Members of Parliament from different parties have associated themselves with our reasoned amendment. I cannot remember when that has happened before. I believe that it reflects a number of genuine concerns across the House. First, there is a pensions crisis. It is already apparent but has not come to a head. Secondly, means-testing is not the way to solve that crisis because it involves disincentives to save, and complexity is the greatest disincentive of all. Beyond that, there is the current pressure on funded pension provision: the reduction, for example, of employer contributions; the erosion of income by the Chancellor's pensions tax, and the decline in final salary schemes. The Government may end up with a huge and unsustainable contingent liability to support pensioners' incomes. There is also the issue of whether moneys could have been better spent.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) said, Beveridge understood that universal benefit, given careful targeting, can meet most specific needs. There is a real problem, especially for older pensioners, many of them female, in achieving adequate income. Help could be given to them without creating a cat's-cradle of means-tested incentive.

The final drivers to the amendment are perhaps more general. Pension provision, above all aspects of social policy, is long term. I think sometimes of my new granddaughter, who has not yet reached the age of one year. It might be sensible for me to take out a stakeholder pension for her. The signs are that she will have to work up to the age of 70 to provide herself with an adequate pension.

As politicians, we cannot allow our ego or our own pet nostrums, or political positions, to get in the way of agreed decisions that will affect the quality of life for the next few generations. We need to get on side people of good will, even including, if possible, the Government. We need to get them behind a programme of, preferably, agreed and well-targeted reforms. The Bill does not provide those reforms.

There is perhaps even one wider consideration that is worth mentioning briefly. The Opposition amendment, which has the support of other parties, is a reasoned amendment, and a reasonable amendment too. I have supported the Conservative party throughout my adult life because I believe strongly, as I always have, that the party of Wilberforce, Shaftesbury and Disraeli has had something worth saying on social policy. It has real achievements to its name in this as in other areas.

I am pleased that this side of Toryism is reawakening. I say to everyone in the House that when we reach out in the spirit of consensus to help disadvantaged people, I hope that they in turn will respond.

9.47 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Maria Eagle): I agree with the hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) about one thing, and that is that we have had an interesting debate that has illustrated, among many other things, a massive gulf between our own aims as a Government and the views of the ragbag of opposing parties that are supporting the reasoned amendment. In contrast to them, we are determined to provide all pensioners with a decent and secure income in retirement, by concentrating on promoting fairness, rewarding thrift and targeting the most help on those who need it most, the poorer pensioners. The widening income gap which was our inheritance from 18 years of Tory pension policy makes that the right thing to do.

Meanwhile the Tories—we have heard this again this evening—are committed to privatising the basic state pension and washing their hands of any obligation to ensure fair and adequate pensions for everybody in retirement. The hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr. Mitchell) called it pension plus mark 3. He is writing the policy, so he should know.

We have had the usual demonstration of rank opportunism from Liberal Democrat Members. That is familiar to all of us who encounter the cynical campaigning methods of Liberal Democrats at a local level. I am sure that Conservative Opposition Members will agree with me about that. They steal some Labour policies and add a dash of uncosted aspiration while agreeing with Tory criticisms. Yet again they are trying to appeal to everyone by claiming that they can conjure better outcomes out of the air with the same amount of money. That is the usual sleight of hand that we expect from them.

We had the most incredible flight of incomprehensible mathematical fantasy from the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb). Perhaps that is why the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten) says that the Lib Dems are positioning themselves to the right of Labour while Lord Ashdown bemoans them being stranded to the left of Labour. The right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Inverness, West (Mr. Kennedy) says that they are not left of Labour and not right of Labour. It will take all of the higher degrees of the professor, the hon. Member for Northavon, to sort that one out. Of course, the confusion is part of the trick. We still do not know whether they are committed to cutting tax or increasing it. How can anyone believe a word that they say?

Our approach is the correct one. We want to keep the basic state pension as the foundation of security in retirement but we want everyone who can save towards a second pension to do so. The pension credit assists us in achieving that aim by rewarding those who have saved,

instead of penalising them for saving. It is targeted on pensioners at the poorer end of the income distribution, but will none the less help up to 5.3 million pensioners by an average of £400 extra a year. It enables us to continue to redistribute resources to those who need them most. In short, it is fair.

That is in contrast with the Tories, who spent 18 years targeting billions of pounds to induce people to opt out of state provision, only to stimulate massive mis-selling of private pensions. It is not what I call looking after the vulnerable; it is more like looking after the wide boys.

I shall answer some of the points raised in the debate in a minute, but before I do I want to look at why we need to help poorer pensioners most; it goes to the heart of the points about the means test, and we have heard a lot about that. It is due to the record of the Tory party after its 18 years in charge of pension policy. We are still trying to right the wrongs that it created. Labour Members are not going to forget that it is an appalling legacy

Over those 18 years, the newly styled party of the vulnerable over on the Conservative Benches deliberately, and as a result of their smash-and-grab ideology, dismantled vast swathes of state support for pensioners. My hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (James Purnell) set it out excellently. The Tories impoverished one in three of our pensioner population—that was 3.5 million people.

That was not the accidental result of impersonal market forces and global economics. It was the deliberate choice of the Conservative party. It expected a pensioner to live on £69 a week. It cut the value of the basic state pension by £20 a week in real terms and offered no compensating measures. It slashed the value of SERPS not once but twice, while spending billions of pounds bribing people out of it and rewarding the mis-selling of inappropriate private pensions to almost 3 million people. It was responsible for slashing the value of inherited SERPS in half and then not bothering to tell anyone, a debacle that it has left us to put right. It left 10 million women who were without proper provision with no alternative but poverty in old age—not much help for the vulnerable there. It introduced VAT on fuel at 8 per cent. and tried to increase it to 17.5 per cent. As a result—

Mr. Goodman: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps the Minister will be so good as to tell the House when she will respond to the debate that we have had?

Mr. Speaker: The Minister is in order. Had she been out of order, I would have let her know.

Maria Eagle: By 1997, there was an ever-widening gap in pensioner incomes, with the bottom fifth of pensioners—*[Interruption.]* Conservative Members do not want to hear this, but Labour Members are not going to forget. The bottom fifth of pensioners saw their income rise by only 20 per cent. in 18 years, while the top fifth had a 70 per cent. boost, and they were better off to start with. The richest 10 per cent. of pensioners had five and a half times more income than the poorest 10 per cent.

Lynne Jones: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Maria Eagle: No. I do not have time.

It was not just pensioners who were impoverished by the last Tory Government. The number of people living in poverty trebled: it went from one in 14 of the population to one in four. The number of children living in poverty increased from one in 10 to one in three. It was the worst and most shameful record in the industrialised world, and I am not surprised that the Conservative party does not want to hear about it tonight. That was its record.

It is that disgraceful disparity that we are tackling. The pension credit is an essential part of how we do that for pensioners. That is why we make no apology for targeting help at the poorest end of the income scale. After the Tory years, it is the right thing to do. It is the only thing to do to help the vulnerable.

By next month, we will be spending an extra £6 billion a year in real terms to boost pensioner incomes and to narrow the income gap between pensioners. We are targeting £2.5 billion of that money directly towards the poorest third of pensioners.

As a result of our policies between 1997 and 2001, policies that the Tories opposed vehemently, the average pensioner household is now £840 a year better off. Those at the poor end of the income scale have benefited by even more.

The hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) has suggested doing things differently. He has tried taking money from pensioners before. During the last Parliament he condemned the winter fuel payment and the free television licence as gimmicks—just as he called the pension credit a gimmick tonight—and pledged to abolish them and consolidate the savings into the basic state pension. That was deeply unpopular with pensioners and within weeks he scuttled back to the drawing board, ending up with a complete hash of a policy. That was the policy on which the Conservatives fought the last general election—to keep the winter fuel payment and the free TV licence or to add them to the basic state pension, with each pensioner having to say which they preferred.

Having developed that policy, the hon. Gentleman complains about the complexity of our proposals. Maybe having two brains, as he is reported to have, simply means that he has to learn every lesson twice. Labour Members are more than willing to teach him the same lesson again. Going into the next election promising to take an average of £400 in pension credits from pensioners is unlikely to be popular with them. I was going to suggest, Mr. Speaker, that you should watch out for the U-turn, but I think that we have already heard it during the hon. Gentleman's speech.

I want to deal with some of the points raised in the debate. *[Interruption.]* At least I listened to the whole debate, unlike some hon. Members. On means-testing, what Conservative Members call means-testing I call making sure that people who lost out when they were in power get a decent pension. A five-yearly simplified assessment is hardly comparable to a complex weekly means test designed to cover all the variable circumstances of people of working age. The pension credit will abolish the intrusive weekly means test for pensioners. The Tory and Liberal Democrat proposals would not: that assessment would stay if their policy were to be implemented. The assessment that we propose is a decisive move away from treating pensioners in the same way as those of working age.

[Maria Eagle]

We heard a lot about complexity, but the system will be simpler, not more complex. For example, 85 per cent. of pensioners will not need to report the level of their savings or capital at all, because there is a £6,000 disregard and no upper limit. Pensioners will have to report only some income changes, and even then, in most cases, only once every five years. Housing benefit and council tax benefit will be ignored when working out pension credit and some of the smaller, sillier income rules in the MIG will go—for example, the remunerative work rules. Charitable and voluntary payments will be ignored, as will student loans and grants.

Many hon. Members talked about targeting. Opposition Members of both parties suggested that targeting by age is a proxy for poverty, but if we spent the £2 billion increasing the basic state pension for those aged over 75, only 32 per cent. of it would go to the poorest third. Paying £2 billion to the over-75s would still leave three quarters of them short of the current MIG level.

Hon. Members said that the pension credit does not benefit women and the very elderly, but it does. Two thirds of the gainers are women, half are over 75 and more than a quarter are over 80. So I do not accept that argument either. Hon. Members from both Opposition parties suggested that we should spend the £2 billion on the basic state pension, but the poorest third of pensioners will gain two and a half times more with the pension credit than with the equivalent spending in basic state pension.

Now we see that the Tories are trying to reinvent themselves as the party of the vulnerable, but the Leader of the Opposition opposed both the winter fuel payment and the minimum income guarantee. He described the winter fuel payment as "cock-eyed" and the minimum income guarantee as

"a huge rise in spending . . . I can think of nothing to recommend it."—[*Official Report*, 15 March 1999; Vol. 327, c. 740-41.]

The Tories' record clearly shows that they did not care about the vulnerable when they were last in office, and they do not care about them now.

After the wrecking job that they did on pensioners' incomes between 1979 and 1997, they went into the 1997 election campaign pledged to their pièce de résistance—to privatise the basic state pension. They suffered their worst electoral defeat since 1832. Having condemned all our measures to alleviate pensioner poverty and to put right the mess that they had left us in during the previous Parliament, they went into the 2001 election pledged to privatise the basic state pension. They made a net gain of one seat. They are still in favour of privatising the basic state pension—the leaked letter from the hon. Member for Havant to the hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield shows that they are working on that now. Their big new idea to help the vulnerable is to privatise the basic state pension. Can a leopard change its spots? Can the Tories stand up for the vulnerable? I think not.

The Bill is the right way forward, and any party that truly wants to help the vulnerable would support it. I commend it to the House.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 191, Noes 299.

Division No. 202] **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Barrett, John
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Cable, Dr Vincent
Cameron, David
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Donaldson, Jeffrey M
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Evans, Nigel
Fallon, Michael
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gidley, Sandra
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness W)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Price, Adam
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*

Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Wishart, Pete
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger–Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John Randall and
Mr. Julian Brazier.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Banks, Tony
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burnham, Andy
Caborn, Rt Hon Richard
Cairns, David
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Irranca–Davies, Huw
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Love, Andrew
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morley, Elliot
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry

Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Sloate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tynan, Bill
Vis, Dr Rudi
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Wilson, Brian
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Dan Norris and
Jim Fitzpatrick.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 62 (Amendment on Second or Third Reading), and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Order [28 June 2001],

That the following provisions shall apply to the State Pension Credit Bill *[Lords]*

Committal

(1) The Bill shall be committed to a Standing Committee.

Programming of proceedings

(2) All proceedings on the Bill (including any proceedings on consideration of Lords Amendments or on any other messages from the Lords) shall be programmed.

Proceedings in Standing Committee

(3) Proceedings in the Standing Committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion on Tuesday 30th April 2002.

(4) The Standing Committee shall have leave to sit twice on the first day on which it meets.

Consideration and Third Reading

(5) Proceedings on consideration shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at Nine o'clock on the day on which those proceedings are commenced or, if that day is a Thursday, at Six o'clock on that day.

(6) Proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at Ten o'clock on the day on which proceedings on consideration are commenced or, if that day is a Thursday, at Seven o'clock on that day.

(7) Sessional Order B (programming committees) made on 28th June 2001 shall not apply to proceedings on consideration and Third Reading.—[*Mr. Kemp.*]

The House divided: Ayes 354, Noes 134.

Division No. 203] **[10.15 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Bain, Vera
Baker, Norman
Banks, Tony
Bantt, John
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Rt Hon A J
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Bonnow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom
Breed, Colin
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burnham, Andy
Burstow, Paul
Cable, Dr Vincent
Caborn, Rt Hon Richard
Cairns, David
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael (Worcester)
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hancock, Mike

Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Harvey, Nick
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Heath, David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Irranca–Davies, Huw
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Keetch, Paul
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness W)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lamb, Norman
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laws, David
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Love, Andrew
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Michael
Moran, Margaret
Morley, Elliot
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Price, Adam
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Pugh, Dr John
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soley, Clive
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tyler, Paul
Tynan, Bill
Vis, Dr Rudi
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilson, Brian
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wishart, Pete
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wyatt, Derek
Younger–Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Dan Norris and
Jim Fitzpatrick.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Cameron, David
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Donaldson, Jeffrey M
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Evans, Nigel
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Gibb, Nick
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark
Horam, John
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor

Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prisk, Mark
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Streeter, Gary
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Julian Brazier and
Mr. Desmond Swayne.

Question accordingly agreed to.

STATE PENSION CREDIT BILL
[LORDS][MONEY]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 52 (Money resolutions and ways and means resolutions in connection with bills),

That for the purposes of any Act resulting from the State Pension Credit Bill *[Lords]*, it is expedient to authorise—

(1) the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(a) any sums payable by way of state pension credit;

(b) any expenditure incurred by the Secretary of State or other government department under or by virtue of the Act; and

(c) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable out of money so provided under any other Act; and

(2) the payment into the Consolidated Fund of any increase attributable to the Act in the sums which under any other Act are payable into that Fund.—*[Mr. Kemp.]*

Question agreed to.

WELSH GRAND COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That—

(1) the matter of the Budget Statement and its implications for Wales, being a matter relating exclusively to Wales, be referred to the Welsh Grand Committee for its consideration;

(2) the Committee shall meet on Wednesday 24th April at half-past Ten o'clock and between Four o'clock and Six o'clock at Westminster to take questions under Standing Order No. 103 (Welsh Grand Committee (questions for oral answer)), and to consider the Budget Statement and its implications for Wales, under Standing Order No. 107 (Welsh Grand Committee (matters relating exclusively to Wales)).—*[Mr. Kemp.]*

PETITIONS

Fireworks

10.29 pm

Dr. Howard Stoate (Dartford): I have pleasure in presenting a petition signed by more than 2,000 residents of north Kent, most of them pet owners, expressing concern about the recent increase in private firework displays throughout the year. They feel that the suffering that their animals are forced to endure from night after night of fireworks is wholly unacceptable and unnecessary and want legislation to be introduced as soon as possible to restrict the sale of fireworks to the general public to traditional festivals such as 5 November, new year's eve and Diwali.

The petition states:

The Humble Petition of the residents of North Kent sheweth

That the significant recent increase in private firework displays throughout the calendar year is causing considerable unnecessary distress to domestic animals and livestock and undue nuisance to residents.

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your Honourable House will take such measures as lie within its power to restrict the use of fireworks by the general public to New Year's Eve, religious festivals during which fireworks are traditionally used, such as Diwali, and the 14-day period around 5 November, and further request that the sale of fireworks by retail outlets be restricted to the same 14-day period around 5 November and religious festivals and to the five-day period up to and including New Year's Eve.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

To lie upon the Table.

Bolton Magistrates Court

10.32 pm

Mr. David Crausby (Bolton, North-East): I present a petition organised by my local newspaper the *Bolton Evening News*, and supported by my hon. Friends the Members for Bolton, South-East (Dr. Iddon) and for Bolton, West (Ruth Kelly) and myself.

The petition states:

The petition of residents of Bolton declares

That they deplore the recommendation of the Greater Manchester Magistrates Court Committee to close Bolton Magistrates Court; that closing the court would be a travesty of justice and prevent them from gaining full access to the law.

The petition also expresses concern that magistrates from other towns will hear cases involving Bolton issues that they may not understand. It says:

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Lord Chancellor to intervene on the Petitioners' behalf and block the planned closure of Bolton Magistrates Court.

To lie upon the Table.

Gerard Morgan

10.33 pm

Mr. David Cameron (Witney): I present a petition with 342 signatures on behalf of Mr. and Mrs. Morgan of 53 Queens road in Carterton.

The petition states:

The Petition of Mr. and Mrs. L. S. Morgan

Declares that on 14 December their son Gerard Morgan was convicted of rape at Oxford Crown court; that he was subsequently sentenced to four years' imprisonment; and that he has maintained throughout that he is innocent of the crime for which he has been convicted.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons take note of the fact that Gerard Morgan believes that he has been convicted of a crime which he did not commit.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Farming (Somerset)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Kemp.]*

10.34 pm

Mr. Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater): I am delighted to have secured this debate and even more delighted that four Somerset Members are here and that the fifth has sent his apologies—he could not make it.

Why the need for this debate? Last year farming almost stopped in Somerset. It was the year of foot and mouth, and it was a complete and utter disaster. Across Somerset, the whole fabric of rural life fell apart. Cattle could not be moved, tourists could not come to the area and the markets could not open. Nothing happened. Where are we going now?

Just before I came here to speak, I picked up a copy of the latest "Working for the Essentials of Life", which contains some interesting paragraphs, one of which states:

"Our task is now to carry forward those ideas in partnership with everyone who has a stake in farming and the food industries to ensure that English food and farming succeed. Together, we will define a lasting strategy".

It continues:

"The EU must determine its own negotiating stance by 2003",

so that, when we go to the World Trade Organisation, we make absolutely sure that British farming is at the forefront of our thinking. I wonder how we can do that, however, because one of our problems especially in Somerset, is brand awareness.

Somerset has an enormous amount to be proud of there is obviously our cider, and we make our own jam and we have our own apples and meat, including lamb. We have an enormous breadth of goods, but we cannot put brand awareness properly across because our co-operatives are not large enough. I ask the Minister whether the European Union co-operative money can now be made available to create co-operatives to develop brand awareness across Somerset, the United Kingdom and the world. As we have a winner, let us try to push it.

I want to talk about some of the issues facing farming that are causing problems for farmers, now and in future. The first is the tractor vibration directive. People may ask what on earth is a tractor vibration directive, but it states that tractors cannot be driven for more than seven hours because the vibration may cause damage to people's fingers. I checked with the National Farmers Union, which is also an insurance company, and it has not encountered that problem in 25 years. I wonder how people on Exmoor and the levels and throughout Somerset will deal with the harvest, seed time and lambing.

I was told that there is no way around the problem because of a lack of staff. Will farmers seriously be told to put tachographs into their tractors? Will they be told that they have to get off their tractors after seven hours? Who will police the directive? Moreover, why should vibration be a problem with new tractors? Before the directive becomes a law in the eyes of the British and something to be ignored in the eyes of the French, I urge the Minister to stop it as quickly as possible. If it reaches the statute book, I can see nothing but trouble from start to finish, as well as challenges from farmers and the NFU.

[Mr. Ian Liddell-Grainger]

The second issue, which has affected Somerset massively, is the collapse in the price of organic milk. Organic produce was the great hope for the future. After two years, farmers could take organic produce to the heights of farming. They would receive a premium for their goods, enjoy a continuity of supply and be guaranteed a good income. They knew that they had a saleable asset at the end of the day. What has happened? Milk prices are now 3p below the national average. People cannot continue to farm with those prices; they certainly cannot do so as organic producers.

Yeo Valley, which has sites in all Somerset constituencies, is the biggest producer of organic yoghurt, milk and cream. It is now buying milk at a price that suits it, but which is crucifying the industry. I am always happy to support the Soil Association, but purists in a cut-throat market will find that their throats are cut by the others involved. The supermarkets are now importing an immense amount of supposedly organic goods, and the Soil Association says, "That's fine; we'll okay it." Even though the produce is not organic in the eyes of the Soil Association in the United Kingdom, it is organic outside it. If we go down that line, we could find that the organic industry grinds to a halt because we are determined to remains purists and not to allow ourselves to keep pace with the French, Germans and others, who do certainly do not do as we do.

I want to move on to a somewhat contentious issue—badgers. Everyone understands why the Krebs testing had to stop because of foot and mouth disease. I am delighted to see the hon. Member for Torridge and West Devon (Mr. Burnett) because a lot of that testing took place in his constituency, and it was at the forefront of helping us to understand whether badgers carry tuberculosis. We do not know whether they do, and unless the testing starts again, the problem will be that people will start to take the law into their own hands, as has happened before. We want to prevent that from happening again.

The problem is that we know that something carries TB, but we do not know what it is. Regardless of what some people may say, if the testing is begun again, farmers will be given the hope that a resolution will be found to the problem.

We know that there is a major problem when the largest farms on Exmoor are shut down because of tuberculosis and cannot move their cattle. Tuberculosis is travelling in some form and I urge the Minister to consider that problem carefully. Unless he does that, the future on the levels, Exmoor and throughout Somerset could be bleak indeed. We know what it is like not to be able to move our cattle—nearly 3,500 cattle were stuck on Exmoor. The fact that we could not get the cattle off the land in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton (Mr. Flook) caused enormous damage to the welfare of many animals. I urge the Minister to reinstate testing.

Flooding affects all our constituencies in Somerset. None of us is in any doubt that last year was a disaster for farming in the county. Not only did we suffer the problem of foot and mouth but we lost a huge amount of land because of flooding. The Tone and the Parret burst their banks and an enormous amount of land disappeared under water.

Mr. Adrian Flook (Taunton): My hon. Friend is right to mention flooding and the Parret catchment area, which covers well over half of Somerset. I am sure he is aware of plans finally to do something about flooding in the catchment area, especially around the River Tone and the vale of Taunton Deane. Is he hopeful that the Government will put the money in to back those plans for the Parret catchment area?

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: I thank my hon. Friend for that complicated question. I agree that the money needs to come from central Government. It is interesting to note that the Parret catchment project proposes to create inland lakes. It is possible that we will have a 15,000 m storage lake that will cover parts of the constituencies of my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton and of the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) and will cost in the region of £75,000 to create.

I have two worries about that. The creation of deep flood-storage reservoirs off the flood plain by intercepting run-off, which is what the project will try to achieve, will affect all our constituencies in Somerset. The retention of shallow flood water in the flood plain through the construction of bunds will have the same effect. Although those are noble ideals, according to the document, the landowners have not agreed to those measures. They have said that they like the idea in principle, but who will fund the landowners? The £75,000 is for the work. At the moment the landowners get subsidies to farm the land in the levels. Who is going to tell them that we want to flood their land not just for a few weeks, but for months, especially in the case of last year, and that the barrage is not built and is unlikely to be completed in the next few years? Farmers in our constituencies will be unable to farm because of water. It is great for ducks—I know that the Minister is an ornithologist—but it is not so good for farmers who want to grow hay and put their cattle and sheep out to graze. That cannot happen if their land is covered in water.

We saw a prime example of that last year and the levels have still not dried out although we have had a good winter and spring. I am worried that although the catchment project is a marvellous ideal, in practice I cannot understand how it will take up the slack in the levels in the long term. The idea is to be eco-friendly. I am sure that the purpose of the project is not to destroy habitat. The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds is concerned that if the water level fluctuates too much, the project could damage wildlife rather than help it. I hope that the Minister will also take on board the fact that this has been a good year for foxes and badgers, which are not exactly kind to nesting birds, especially ones on the edges of lakes that recede. I want him to think about that carefully.

On imports, there has been an enormous restocking of cattle and sheep, for obvious reasons to do with events last year. This week, however, there have been problems. According to the NFU's "Farmer's Facts", which I believe all the farmers of Somerset receive, France has been helping with restocking, and we now have positive tests for tuberculosis. One animal was found to be positive in a routine test, and other results have been inconclusive. The problem is that animals being imported live to take up the slack have diseases that they are bringing into the UK. Surely after conquering and eradicating the frightful disease last year, with the enormous cost not only to the Treasury but to the industry and farmers themselves, we do not want any repeat of the outbreak as a result of people being able to bring animals into the country.

Cannot animals be tested in European countries before they are brought into the UK? Would it be possible for those tests to be made available to farmers and to the Department, so that there is no repeat of what happened last year? The scare is that we are now importing 10,000 tonnes of beef from Argentina to Europe, and we all know precisely what has been going on in Argentina. It is all very well to help a country that is bankrupt, but we should not bring in meat that may well be contaminated.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this important debate. He is ranging wide, and is correct to do so. Does he agree that there are two essential factors that the Government should consider in the interests of Somerset farmers? The first is biosecurity at our borders for live animals and meat, which he is addressing at the moment, and the second is the need to ensure the sustainability of the dairy industry by achieving an increase in the farmgate price of milk, which is crucial to the future of dairy farmers.

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: The hon. Gentleman makes an extremely useful point as usual, and I agree that our borders are this country's last bastion. Countries in Europe cannot guard their borders; we can guard ours. His marvellous intervention illustrates that the future will be very difficult unless we can control what is coming into the country.

I was sent a Meat and Livestock Commission briefing, although I did not flick through it until I came down to the Chamber. The MLC is looking to increase the share of the domestic market, which is laudable, to ensure that the competitiveness of the industry improves and to develop the market at home and overseas because we still have problems exporting. It also wants to signal to the industry the possible developments and implications beyond the medium term and to work with the Government in lifting constraints on British beef being exported.

That sums up the feeling in Somerset. We need those markets back. We need the Government's help in securing markets for the future. Somerset has always been a net exporter and it always will be. If we cannot secure markets, we will not be in a position to help ourselves to get out of this mess. I am asking the Minister to consider how the Government can help specific areas such as Somerset.

The Minister for Rural Affairs came to address the turning point conference in Minehead. I was interested to note that promotion for the conference and surrounding events to advertise food and other goods from the south-west cost £450,000. In Scotland and Wales such promotion is paid for centrally. Will the Minister consider making available finance from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to help the south-west to publicise our goods, rather than the funding coming out of our pockets?

The Minister should remember that agriculture in the south-west is bigger than that in Wales and Scotland. Agriculture in Somerset has increased enormously. The presence of four of the county's MPs, and the apologies of the fifth, who could not attend because of other duties, shows the strength of feeling about the fact that Somerset farming is recovering, but without the Government's help, it will not do so fully. The Minister must remember that if we cannot sell our goods, we will not have an industry.

10.49 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): I congratulate the hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. Liddell-Grainger) on the way in which he made his case. He has covered a wide range of issues, which I recognise are important to Somerset, its agricultural community, local people and the local economy. I shall try to deal with some of the points that he made.

I should say first that foot and mouth disease had a devastating effect in Somerset, as it did in many other parts of the country and in the country as a whole. The impact and consequences were far-reaching indeed.

I welcome the hon. Gentleman's attention to "Working for the Essentials of Life". It sets out clearly in the prospectus, the aims and objectives of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, in which I am proud to be a Minister, and it is an important vehicle in helping us to deliver improvements in rural life and the rural economy.

I strongly support the hon. Gentleman's comments about local brand awareness. There are some wonderful brands in Somerset, as there are in other parts of the country. We should celebrate and market those brands, and emphasise the quality of our regional foods. I hope to say more about that shortly.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned co-ops. In its report, the policy commission on the future of farming and food identified the need to encourage co-ops in this country. We lag behind Europe in co-ops in terms of their nature, sophistication and number, and how common they are in food marketing and agriculture. The commission also called for a food chain initiative—a call that the Government welcome. It provides an opportunity to give farmers more of the added value, bring them closer to the market, and give them a better share overall. More work is clearly needed on issues such as milk.

The hon. Gentleman specifically mentioned the vibration directive. I understand his arguments and I have followed the debate in the farming press. The directive is not yet law, but it is likely to be adopted by the Agriculture Council. However, it might reassure him to know that farmers will have a 12-year transition period before the full application of the directive.

Furthermore, although the current directive refers to seven hours a day continuous use of a tractor, my understanding is that that is not an absolute figure and that hours can be aggregated over the course of a week. More important, the seven hours a day restriction might apply to some tractors in use now, but will not apply to more modern tractors.

Tractor design has improved enormously—I have always been especially impressed by the JCB Fasttrac design. That might sound like an advertisement, but I know that it is a superb design that has produced a tremendous market leader in the form of a tractor that has suspension and a high-speed gearbox and offers tremendous in-cab comfort. Perhaps I should put on record the fact that I was driven around in one at the JCB factory not long ago.

I recognise the problems surrounding organic milk production. I recently held discussions with OMSCO, the Organic Milk Suppliers Co-operative Ltd., which does an excellent job and which the Government are keen to

[Mr. Elliot Morley]

support. We appreciate that when there is overproduction of a commodity, a fall in price occurs. We should take note of the lessons that the example of organic milk offers about how far and how fast to expand production of an organic commodity.

We are discussing with OMSCO ways in which we might assist through the range of support available through DEFRA. I shall talk with my officials to see how we might provide further help, especially on the marketing side. It may well be that the market will stabilise itself in due course, but I certainly appreciate that the current situation is a problem for organic milk producers.

Badgers and TB constitute a difficult subject. It is difficult for the Government because we are lobbied on the one hand by people who believe that the case against badgers is indisputable, and on the other hand by people who argue equally vociferously that the case against badgers is totally unproved; and both groups ask us why are we wasting our time with the Krebs trial.

However, I believe that it is a proper, sound and scientific way of examining the epidemiology of bovine TB. We need that experiment, as it will answer many of the unresolved questions that have been debated for more than 20 years. We cannot go on like that, which is why the scheme has been restarted. The survey is under way—it is the closed season for the culling of badgers—and we recognise that we need to get the scheme back on track. Professor Bourne of the independent scientific group is confident that the disruption of the foot and mouth epidemic will not knock the trial off course.

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. Liddell-Grainger) for raising that matter, as tuberculosis is deeply frustrating for the farming community. The Minister and I have debated the matter on a number of occasions. The trials will take some time; can he tell us whether there is any progress at all on licences to move unaffected cattle from affected herds to collection areas or centres?

Mr. Morley: As the hon. Gentleman knows, I am sympathetic to that problem. As I understand it, work is in hand to facilitate the provision of collection centres. I can certainly update him after tonight's debate.

The TB testing programme was knocked off course by the foot and mouth epidemic. It is now being restarted and priority is being given to hot-spot areas. We are confident that we will be able to eliminate the backlog in due course; that will take a bit of time, but we are putting our vets and staff back on to the task.

The hon. Member for Bridgwater spoke about flooding in the Somerset levels, an issue with which I am familiar and in which I take an interest. I have been closely involved in discussions, and welcome the production of the Parret catchment water management strategy action plan for 2002. I have recently received those plans and am reading them with great interest. Of course, the feasibility of the suggestions and their long-term implications have to be examined; that is a prerequisite for any action plan, and my Department will make such an examination. Our engineers will do so, as will the Environment Agency, and we will talk to the various people involved. I want to put on record my appreciation of all the groups that have come together to try to address the issue; they have tried to work together co-operatively by recognising problems rather than taking a polarised position, which is a great step forward.

The Somerset levels are a flood plain, and for generations people farmed there sustainably in recognition of the area's characteristics. In recent years, with the influence of the common agricultural policy and subsidies, some of that farming has become less sustainable. We must look at our agri-environment programmes and things such as the action plan; we must talk to the communities, people and farmers who are involved and look at how we can address the issue in a mutually beneficial way. We must consider the management of conservation and biodiversity and the needs of local farmers and communities to see if we can find a strategy and a way through. The report assists with that.

On animals being imported for restocking, I again reassure the hon. Gentleman that every single live animal currently imported is checked for disease by DEFRA staff. We recently identified brucellosis in one creature because every single animal is blood-tested. I recognise that biosecurity, both on our borders and our farms, is important; that issue was addressed at a recent meeting that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State held in the Department. To put the record straight, meat from countries like Argentina is not imported from regions with an active disease outbreak. It has to go through onerous procedures of deboning and hanging; if beef is hung for a certain time, the changes in pH will destroy any virus that it might contain. There is therefore no risk to this country from legal imports of beef from countries like Argentina which comply with the regulations. It is not complacent to say that; it makes it clear that there are procedures in place to ensure disease control.

I recognise the point about the need to re-establish markets. We shall help in promoting them. Taste of the West recently received £200,000 of FMD recovery money to help, through marketing support and promotion, speciality foods in Somerset and other areas of the south-west recover from the effects of the disease. I am sure that there are other ways that we can assist. We are happy to talk to organisations such as Taste of the West—which does an excellent job in promoting local foods—and we have constant and regular meetings with farming and rural organisations.

Certainly, there are problems in agriculture. The hon. Gentleman identified a number of them. I believe that we can overcome those problems. Some of the problems in the comprehensive list that he gave will be easier and quicker to resolve than others, but we are committed to doing so. We want a partnership approach to dealing with the problems, and we are making progress in the aftermath of foot and mouth on returning normality and stability to the agriculture sector.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at one minute past Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 26 March 2002

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

CITY OF LONDON (WARD ELECTIONS) BILL *(BY ORDER)*
Order for further consideration, as amended, read.
To be further considered on Tuesday 9 April.

MERSEY TUNNELS BILL *(BY ORDER)*
Order for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time on Wednesday 10 April.

LONDON DEVELOPMENT AGENCY BILL *(BY ORDER)*
Order for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time on Thursday 11 April.

Oral Answers to Questions

HEALTH

The Secretary of State was asked—

Nurse Recruitment (London)

1. **Joan Ryan** (Enfield, North): If he will make a statement on the latest figures on nurse recruitment in London. [43715]

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Hutton): There are currently 52,480 qualified nurses working within the national health service in London. That represents an increase of 5,330 compared with 1997. In the last year alone, an extra 3,250 qualified nurses began working for the NHS in London.

Joan Ryan: I thank my right hon. Friend for that welcome news on nurse numbers in London. He will know that access to affordable housing is an important factor in the recruitment and retention of key workers, especially nurses, in London. What progress are the Government making in tackling that issue?

Mr. Hutton: I agree strongly that housing is a key issue and that it will have a bearing on the success of our recruitment and retention initiatives. My hon. Friend will be aware that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions announced significant additional resources for the starter homes initiative, and next year 2,300 NHS staff will be given an opportunity to get on the property ladder in London. That is a start.

In addition, we are on track to meet our NHS plan commitment of an extra 2,000 units of affordable low-cost subsidised rented accommodation for NHS staff in London. Nearly 1,000 of those units have recently been commissioned. We have also introduced a new cost of living supplement for staff who are coping with the high cost of living in inner London. There is clearly more to do to tackle the problems, but the vacancy rate for nurses in London is decreasing and we are getting more nurses into training. Overall, we have a solid platform on which to build for the future.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): As it costs some £35,000 to train a nurse, can Her Majesty's Government place real emphasis on retention of skilled and experienced nursing staff? In that connection, can the Government bear it in mind that it is most important to have stability in nursing careers? For example, proposals to move the cancer centre from Mount Vernon hospital can only cause a disturbance, a loss in morale and a haemorrhaging of nursing jobs. Can the Minister also bear it in mind that the proposed transfer of Harefield to inner London was also unpopular with nursing staff?

Mr. Hutton: I understand the hon. Gentleman's general point. That is why we have introduced a number of changes, which we will continue to pursue. First and foremost, the way to produce the stability that he and others would like is to keep the investment going into the NHS, and there is a message in that for his Front-Bench spokesmen and party.

We have made a significant investment to improve the working terms and conditions of staff. Hundreds of nurses who left the NHS have returned to work in it in London since 1997. That is in no small part to do with the substantial increases in the salaries of nurses who work in London and the growing investment that is helping to improve child care facilities. Those two factors are likely to make a positive contribution in the future as well.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): What recruitment has taken place in the developing world for nurses in London? On a recent visit to Ghana, we were told that agencies, not trusts, were recruiting "jumbo jet loads" of nurses to fly to London and elsewhere in the country, thereby denuding the developing world of the health staff that it needs? It is important that those nurses are recruited locally. Will the Minister comment on that?

Mr. Hutton: I agree that it is important to protect health services in developing nations. I simply point out to the hon. Gentleman that given 18 years in which to do that, his party never quite managed to take the opportunity to do anything positive to resolve the problem. We now have a firm set of arrangements with commercial agencies. The NHS is not recruiting, and will not recruit, in developing third-world countries because that is unfair to the people there. The hon. Gentleman's description of jumbo jet loads of nurses coming from Ghana is somewhat exaggerated.

Health Care (Deprived Areas)

2. **Helen Jones** (Warrington, North): What steps he is taking to improve health care for those living in deprived areas. [43716]

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Alan Milburn): Extra resources and staff are being provided in many deprived areas. Alongside that, there is a better focus on preventing ill health rather than just on treating it.

Helen Jones: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that reply. Within Warrington's boundaries are examples of precisely the sort of health inequalities that the Government are tackling. What assurances can he give me that, when it is set up, the new Warrington primary care trust will direct extra resources to those health deprived areas of my constituency? What monitoring arrangements will the Government put in place to check that that is happening and to ensure that we get the outcomes we want?

Mr. Milburn: My hon. Friend is right about her constituency—of course she is; she probably knows it better than I do, although I have visited it on occasion.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): It's by the sea, you know.

Mr. Milburn: My hon. Friend is being helpful, as he sometimes is.

My hon. Friend the Member for Warrington, North (Helen Jones) is well aware that there is in her area a problem of health inequalities. That problem is the reason why extra money has been made available through the health inequalities adjustment.

Primary health care trusts, which are to come online in factors from next week, provide a better opportunity to focus on public health and health inequalities than the previous structures, which were to some extent distant from the local communities they were intended to serve. Health authorities are somewhat at a distance, whereas PCTs will be much more local and will be able to forge closer working relationships with local authorities, local businesses, voluntary sector providers and others precisely to deal with the problems my hon. Friend identifies. We will take care to ensure that PCTs do not merely commission good services, but do all within their power to ensure that health inequalities, which are a problem in her part of the world and mine, are dealt with properly.

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): How will health inequalities be tackled by the massive bureaucratic reorganisation currently taking place within the health service? My constituency faces a new mental health trust, a new primary care trust and a new strategic health authority—all at the same time. There is concern in Cheshire, for example, that being lumped in with Merseyside, which has very different health needs, will result in different health inequalities not being properly dealt with by the new bureaucracy.

Mr. Milburn: I do not think that there will be more bureaucracy—far from it. In fact, we have taken money out of the bureaucracy that was, as the hon. Gentleman well remembers, introduced under the Conservatives' internal market, of which he is a passionate supporter but which has now gone from the national health service. The Conservatives constantly urge the Government to be less centralising and less interventionist and to ensure that our health service is built more from the bottom up than from the top down, and that is precisely what the new primary care trusts are designed to achieve. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will reflect on his remarks and, for once, learn something.

Mr. Neil Turner (Wigan): I welcome the 50 per cent. real-terms increase in health funding that we in Wigan have received since 1997. However, more than 20 of the 24 wards in the borough of Wigan are in the worst 20 per cent. of this country's wards in terms of health. Unfortunately, when the weighting is applied, the current formula reduces the amount of money we get. That works against the Government's plans to sort out both health inequalities and social exclusion. Is my right hon. Friend going to make progress on creating a new formula that recognises real health needs and ensures that PCTs get the funding they require to tackle those needs?

Mr. Milburn: Yes, that is precisely what we want to do. Two things have happened, the first of which is that we made some interim changes to the formula for distributing NHS cash to local health authorities. We introduced the health inequalities adjustment, which is about £130 million this financial year, and is £148 million next financial year, starting 1 April. That is designed to recognise the particular problems faced by deprived communities in many parts of the country in dealing with ill health and some of its root causes.

Secondly, we are now in the process of reviewing the whole way in which NHS cash is distributed to local communities. In future, it will be important to ensure that health cash goes to those areas with the greatest health need. That is right and it is part and parcel of what we need to do generally in our country: of course we must improve the health of the population overall, but as a Government and as a nation we legitimately have the objective of securing faster improvements in health among the poorest people in our society.

Midwife-led Maternity Units

3. **Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield): If he will make a statement on the future of midwife-led maternity units. [43717]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Yvette Cooper): The NHS provides various types of care for women during pregnancy and childbirth, including care in midwife-led units for low-risk births. The Government expect that variety to continue to support choice for women, although it is for health authorities and trusts to decide the pattern of service provision in each area.

Michael Fabricant: Before the last election, the Government said that they would undertake a review of the future of midwifery-led units. The Minister may know that I led a delegation of people from Lichfield and Burntwood, local charities and Conservative and Labour councillors to discuss the future of in-patient care in

Lichfield and Burntwood. The visit took place in November, when I also wrote a letter to the Department; the answer came in January, but there was nothing at all about what would happen to midwifery and maternity care in Lichfield, nor was there anything about the future of health care in Burntwood. Can the hon. Lady finally put people in Lichfield and Burntwood out of their misery and say what is the future for in-patient health care?

Yvette Cooper: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that it is for the health authority and, in future, primary care trusts to propose local services and their configuration in his area. However, I can tell him that the Government support properly established midwife-led maternity units, which are extremely popular with women. The maternity and neonatal work force group is looking at all kinds of models of care in maternity services and the different work force requirements and procedures needed to support them.

Mr. Barry Gardiner (Brent, North): My hon. Friend will be aware that the Secretary of State visited the maternity unit at Northwick Park hospital last year and saw for himself the care provided by midwives there. There is an undertaking to modernise that maternity unit. What will be the role of midwife-led care in that modernisation, how much money will be made available and when we can expect an announcement?

Yvette Cooper: I know that hon. Members are keen to secure improvements to their local services. We have already announced £100 million of investment in maternity services this year and next to improve the physical infrastructure and facilities for women, their babies and professional staff. I will write to my hon. Friend about progress on the situation at Northwick Park. He is right to say that midwives are crucial in providing high quality maternity services, wherever they are delivered and whatever the care model and play a critical role.

Mr. Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden): Last month, I welcomed the decision of the Minister's predecessor to override the plan of local management to close the special care baby unit and maternity and women's units at Hemel Hempstead hospital. Can the Minister confirm that last week local management decided to reverse that plan and close the special care baby unit, but not to announce that until Parliament was in recess? Can she confirm that no fewer than two thirds of the nursing posts in that unit are vacant—I accept that that means that it must close—but that one third of the posts in the unit at Watford, with which it is to merge, are also vacant, so she must draft in extra nurses? She must set out a plan for the full restoration of services at Hemel Hempstead, and must appoint permanently two consultants to replace those who have gone, subject to an inquiry which reported unsatisfactorily this week.

Yvette Cooper: I understand that the relevant trust has made and announced a decision today to close temporarily the special care baby unit at Hemel Hempstead on safety grounds and that a further meeting is taking place this afternoon to discuss maternity services. We have always said that patient safety is paramount; trusts have a duty not to put women and babies at risk. A series of local factors has been involved in the situation at Hemel and Watford, but there are no clinical reasons why a maternity unit of that size should not be viable.

The right hon. Gentleman is right to raise the issue of staffing; the local trust must address concerns about staffing, not just at Hemel, but at Watford. My noble Friend Lord Hunt of Kings Heath has already asked the NHS Modernisation Agency to work closely with the trust to try to improve the staffing situation. If the trust decides this afternoon to close the maternity unit temporarily, my noble Friend will ask the chair of the Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire strategic health authority to convene a taskforce to restore appropriate services at Hemel as rapidly as possible.

Ms Julia Drown (South Swindon): Midwife-led units have been very successful in reducing caesarean rates and increasing breastfeeding rates. Does my hon. Friend agree that a major part of every local maternity service, whether it is provided by an acute hospital or by a community hospital, should be midwife-led? Could we not obtain major public health benefits from reduced medicalisation of births—allowing interventions only when midwives and parents agree that they are appropriate?

Yvette Cooper: My hon. Friend is right: many midwife-led units have proved extremely popular and successful. It is important for women to have a wide range of choices, and not to feel that a birth is being over-medicalised when that is not appropriate. Those choices should include the availability of a variety of pain-relieving drugs in maternity units throughout the country.

Delayed Hospital Discharges

4. **Miss Anne McIntosh** (Vale of York): How many delayed discharges there were in *(a)* May 1997, *(b)* May 1999 and *(c)* January 2002; and if he will make a statement. [43720]

14. **Miss Julie Kirkbride** (Bromsgrove): If he will make a statement on delayed discharge. [43730]

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Alan Milburn): The figures we have show that the number of delayed discharges fell by 21 per cent. between June 1997 and the start of this year. The number of people aged over 75 whose discharge from hospital was delayed in June 1997 was 5,973; in June 1999 the figure was 5,276, and in December 2001 it was 5,117. The numbers have fallen further since then.

Miss McIntosh: Is the Secretary of State saying that the Northern and Yorkshire region is bucking the trend? The figures there have risen by 20 per cent.

Is the Secretary of State aware of the particularly acute problem affecting elderly and mentally infirm patients who have nowhere to go? What is he going to do about

the lack of funds, especially for personal social services, and the lack of co-ordination between primary and acute health care providers and social services departments?

Mr. Milburn: It is true that there are capacity problems in nursing and residential care homes in some parts of the country, including the hon. Lady's area. Three things need to be done.

First, we need to invest more in social services, and that is precisely what we are doing. It is worth remembering that whereas investment in social services rose by a miserly 0.1 per cent. during the last Government's final Parliament, it has risen by an average of 3.1 per cent. in real terms under this Government.

Secondly, in dealing with capacity problems we must not just focus on providing more residential and nursing home places, but respect what most elderly people and people with mental health problems want—which is not to be banged up in a care home, but to be cared for in their own homes. That is why we are making extra resources available.

As the hon. Lady says, one issue is the relationship between primary care trusts and acute hospitals. As she knows—this is the third point—we have provided the necessary legislative powers to enable them to work together rather than separately.

All those measures—measures to provide extra cash, extra capacity and reforms of the structures between health and social care—we support, and the hon. Lady and her party oppose.

Miss Kirkbride: Like my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh), we in Worcestershire have a significant problem with delayed discharges. Along with many of my hon. Friends, I receive a steady stream of letters from distraught people who are watching their elderly parents spending the final moments of their lives in hospital, rather than being cared for in their own homes or in nursing homes where they can be surrounded by their possessions and photographs.

As in much of the rest of the country, the problem in Worcestershire is not a lack of capacity, but finding the money to fund places in nursing homes. What is the Secretary of State going to do about that in places such as Worcestershire?

Mr. Milburn: What we are doing, in Worcestershire and in other parts of the country, is providing extra resources. The hon. Lady should know that Worcestershire county council has received an extra £700,000 for this financial year and the next. That is already having an impact, and it is part of a £300 million package intended to deal with the problems that the hon. Lady has cited.

It is pretty self-evident that when we put resources in they produce results. Since September last year, when we provided that £300 million, the number of so-called bed blockers—delayed discharges from hospitals—has fallen by 1,400. We need to go on investing, and to make changes as well.

The hon. Lady cannot have her cake and eat it. She cannot say that her constituents are experiencing troubles—and I acknowledge that there are difficulties—while at the same time not committing her party, as her Front Bench refuses to do, to extra investment in health and social services. There is a straightforward choice. If she is worried about these problems, the answer is self-evident—to get more investment into public services, particularly the NHS and social services.

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): I warmly welcome the improvements secured by the Government in addressing delayed discharges. I think that my right hon. Friend will accept that within the improved figures, there are still marked differences from area to area. I wonder whether he and his colleagues are evaluating the reasons for these marked differences, particularly the fault line between social care and health, and whether the joint budgeting arrangements, taken up in certain areas, have had any impact on delayed discharges.

Mr. Milburn: My hon. Friend makes an extremely good point. He is well versed in these issues and in dealing with the interface between health and social services. An extra £1 million or thereabouts has been made available to Wakefield to deal with some of the problems.

My hon. Friend is right to say that the picture is pretty patchy. Overall across the country, the number of delayed discharges from hospital is falling. However, particular parts of the country have particular problems. Frankly, the situation gets worse the further south we get. That is not to say that there are not problems in some parts of the north, but as my hon. Friend knows, labour market problems and property prices down here make the situation much worse. We will be evaluating the take-up of the pooled budget, lead commissioner arrangements, and so on. We also need to ensure that we move towards a system under which there is a much closer working relationship between the national health service and social services than there has been in the past.

Mr. Bob Blizzard (Waveney): The Government's cash for change money is reducing the amount of delayed discharge in my constituency. Does the Minister agree that it is important that social services departments make the best use of their core money? Will he crack down on departments that continue to exercise their inspection role under the guise of contract monitoring, even though we are about to move to national care standard inspections? Is that not a wasteful duplication?

Will my right hon. Friend also look at the delayed discharge of elderly mentally infirm patients—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must ask one question only.

Mr. Milburn: On the first issue, my hon. Friend is absolutely right. As for elderly mentally infirm patients, to whom he was about to refer, in many parts of the country, sadly, local provision is not available in the way that it should be. That means that sometimes relatives and carers have to travel further to visit their elderly relatives in accommodation that is some distance from their home. Again, the answer is precisely the same—we must keep putting money into public services. *[Interruption.]* I know that Opposition Members do not like that because their commitment is not to increase investment in public services but to go for tax cuts. We cannot have one and the same agenda, with tax cuts on one side—

[Interruption.] Frankly, Harrogate was one of the more unbelievable weekends in anyone's experience. Conservative Members know all about vulnerability—they created it.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Paul Burstow (Sutton and Cheam): Does the Secretary of State accept that delayed discharges and emergency readmissions are the symptoms of a wider crisis in the funding and staffing of social care, and that the investment that he has told us about today has resulted in 100,000 fewer people receiving care in their own home over the past five years and the loss of 50,000 long-term care beds, not the 19,000 that is claimed by his Department? This has been an unplanned and unforeseen loss of capacity in the care sector. When will the right hon. Gentleman recognise that health and social care are two sides of the same coin and that because of his actions, he has undermined those services and not invested in them enough?

Mr. Milburn: I am delighted to hear that the hon. Gentleman has been reading my speeches. With regard to extra investment and the number of extra beds, it is true that there has been a loss of residential and nursing home beds, but not on the scale that he suggests—not 50,000; probably closer to 11,000. On extra spending, may I say to the hon. Gentleman in all candour that he should look at the performance of individual local authorities? I had the pleasure of being in Liverpool last week to visit Alder Hey hospital. I was horrified to learn that the extra investment that is going into the national health service there is being compromised by decisions being taken by Liverpool city council—a council, as hon. Members are aware, that is controlled by the Liberal Democrats.

The Liberal Democrats are cutting from social services in Liverpool £9 million in the current financial year and £7.5 million from 1 April for the next financial year. Why? In order to pay for a measly council tax cut. So when the Liberal Democrats say in the House that they want to see more investment in social services, they should look to their own. They should look to themselves. They are always talking about a postcode lottery in care. What we have with the Liberal Democrats is a postcode lottery in policy, where different fare is served up—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring): I hope that the Secretary of State will reflect on the phrase that he used at the beginning of his answer to the question, when he referred to elderly patients being banged up in nursing homes, which will have caused huge offence to many dedicated staff who look after elderly patients.

The right hon. Gentleman will be well aware that the proportion of patients with delayed discharge who are kept in hospital more than a month has rocketed to 40 per cent., and that that is having a major impact on cancelled operations. What does he say to a trust which advises that

"if there is doubt as to whether admissions can be accommodated the following day, the cancellation should occur the day before"

and that

"this will enable the Trust to deliver our target of NIL same day cancellations"?

Does the right hon. Gentleman approve of such a policy?

Mr. Milburn: As the hon. Gentleman is well aware, the number of cancelled operations is falling. I know that he prepared his question prior to my answer to the hon. Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh), but I remind him that the number of delayed discharges is falling, not rising, because of the extra investment that is going not just into the national health service, but into social services.

Mr. Oliver Heald (North-East Hertfordshire): Fiddled figures.

Mr. Milburn: The hon. Gentleman is muttering from the Front Bench that those are fiddled figures. They come not just from the national health service, but from local authorities. I would guess that among those are many Conservative local authorities.

Dr. Fox: The Secretary of State should read a little more carefully the answers given by his own Ministers. They show that the number of patients with delayed discharge who are in hospital for more than a month has risen. In the latest quarter the figure is up from 36 per cent. to 40 per cent. Waiting lists are going up again. Cancelled operations are at a record level. There is a bed-blocking crisis and a collapse in the care home sector, and all that despite the Government, admittedly, putting in more money. Can the Secretary of State tell us how, despite a 30 per cent. rise in expenditure, the NHS managed to treat fewer elective patients last year than the year before?

Mr. Milburn: The hon. Gentleman is well aware of the waiting list figures, but for his convenience I shall remind him of them. Under this Government waiting lists have fallen by 100,000. Under his Government, they rose by 400,000. He asks where the money has gone. Under his Government the number of nurses in training fell; the number of GP training places fell; and the number of acute beds in hospital fell. Under this Government, all those indicators are moving in the right direction—they are increasing. The number of beds is up, the number of nurses is up, the number of GPs is up, the number of patients treated is up, and the number of accident and emergency departments being modernised is up. We have the biggest new hospital building programme that the country has ever seen. What people will see is the greatest contrast between the Labour party, which believes in building up the NHS, and the Conservative party, both in government and in opposition, that believes in running it down and talking it down.

Accident and Emergency Services (Solihull)

5. **Mr. John Taylor** (Solihull): What the consultation procedure is to inform a decision on the future of accident and emergency services at Solihull hospital; and who will make the decision. [43721]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Hazel Blears): Solihull primary care trust is currently considering options on the future of accident and emergency services at Solihull hospital. Should major changes be required, there will be a full, open, transparent

and inclusive public consultation, and if the proposed changes are not agreed locally, the matter will be referred to Ministers for a decision.

Mr. Taylor: In March 1997, the then Minister of Health gave a pledge about A and E services at Solihull hospital. Cannot new Labour, which said that it would do better, at least match that pledge?

Ms Blears: The hon. Gentleman will know, as I explained this to him in the Adjournment debate in Westminster Hall last week, that local people will be considering future services at Solihull hospital. He will also know that I said that we see a vibrant and healthy future for the hospital. Indeed, there have been a number of dramatic improvements in services—in renal care, ophthalmology, oncology and dermatology. The hospital is doing extremely well on its waiting lists. Local people will be involved in any consultation that takes place about the future of all these services at Solihull, including accident and emergency. Last week, the hon. Gentleman told me how much his local economy was thriving in Solihull. I am delighted about that. We will be ensuring that high-quality services are available to everyone in that community.

Dr. Richard Taylor (Wyre Forest): Will the Minister inform the House when the independent reconfiguration panel will begin its work to resolve such issues, as the chair was appointed more than six months ago?

Ms Blears: As the hon. Gentleman said, we are appointing members to the independent reconfiguration panel. The panel will help us with guidance and clinical advice so that we can study some of the more controversial reconfigurations that are proposed in a more consistent manner. Dr. Peter Barrett is the chair. We will be making further appointments to the independent panel in due course. We hope that it will be operating by the autumn and playing a significant role in bringing consistency to some of these decisions.

Digital Hearing Aids

6. **Mr. Steve Webb** (Northavon): What plans he has to ensure that primary care trusts and hospital trusts have the funding necessary to expand provision of digital hearing aids. [43722]

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Jacqui Smith): We are committed to extend the benefits of digital hearing aids, provided as part of a modernised service, more widely.

We are making £20 million available to extend the provision of digital hearing aids in 2002–03. That will enable at least a further 30 sites to start fitting digital aids and at least a further 15 sites to receive the equipment and training that they need to enable them to start fitting digital hearing aids from April 2003.

Mr. Webb: I am grateful to the Minister for that response. Is she aware that my primary care trust, South Gloucestershire, which is one of the most efficient at prescribing in the region if not the country, has a prescribing deficit of £2 million this year? Although it has put in for digital hearing aids as part of the pilot, it has said that it is having enough trouble doing what it is doing and that the chances of improving services are very limited. Given that all hon. Members have been swamped with postcards from people who want digital hearing aids, what prospects do my constituents realistically have of getting them?

Jacqui Smith: I understand that United Bristol Healthcare, for example, and the hospital in Bath are already able to offer digital hearing aids—in the case of Bristol, to children. Furthermore, the hon. Gentleman's area already has new-born hearing screening. While I understand that Bristol did not feel able to put itself forward for consideration this year, it has been invited to become one of the 15 sites to be equipped and trained in 2002–03 to enable it to start fitting aids from 2003–04. Not only are the hon. Gentleman's constituents already benefiting from the extra investment that this Government have put into developing digital hearing aids, but we will ensure, through the way in which we continue to invest and modernise, that as soon as possible they can get the full benefit of the investment that this Government are making.

Paul Goggins (Wythenshawe and Sale, East): The initiative has been warmly welcomed in Trafford, which is one of the 20 first-wave areas—550 patients have so far been fitted with digital hearing aids. Given that we are now moving into a further phase—the initiative is to be rolled out to other areas—and that more than 900 people are waiting for digital hearing aids to be fitted in Trafford, will my hon. Friend confirm that after the programme is rolled out, all first-wave areas, including Trafford, will receive proper national funding in the year ahead?

Jacqui Smith: I know that my hon. Friend has been concerned about the continuation of the very good service that his constituents are receiving in getting digital hearing aids with the modernised service on the national health service. I can assure him that we take very seriously the need to continue work at the first-wave sites. That is why the Department will be allocating £100,000 to each of the 20 first-wave sites at the beginning of April, to allow them to continue to fit digital hearing aids within the modernised context while we study in more detail the activity figures, staff costs and so forth, so that we can make accurate allocations of funds later in the year. I can assure my hon. Friend that the benefit that his constituents have received from the modernised service and the provision of digital hearing aids will continue.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): Does the Minister not agree that all people in this country should be treated the same? If people can benefit from digital hearing aids, they should be allowed to gain that benefit from this high-technology, sophisticated equipment, wherever they live. Does the Minister accept that the East Cheshire NHS trust, which includes the Macclesfield district general hospital, has made an application for designation to receive assistance from the Government? Will she give the matter very urgent consideration? There are people in my area who would benefit from digital hearing aids, which can provide a new quality of life.

Jacqui Smith: I agree that it is important that we ensure that the benefits of a modernised service and the

ability to obtain digital hearing aids are spread as far and as quickly as possible. The success that the Government have already had, including, for example, the fitting of more than 25,000 digital hearing aids by the end of February 2002, shows the benefits of the investment that we have made so far. The extra £20 million that I have announced for next year will enable extra trusts to come online. I assure the hon. Gentleman that I shall consider very carefully the expression of interest from his constituency as we take forward investment and development in relation to this very important service.

Caroline Flint (Don Valley): I am sorry about my voice, but the thought at the weekend of the Tory party being the party of the most vulnerable has made me feel very sick.

Does my hon. Friend agree that, in delivering an expanded service in relation to digital hearing aids, high street opticians are in a good position to provide a dual service? Many such opticians, including Dollond and Aitchison, already provide free hearing services. What progress has my hon. Friend made in considering such opticians as a new and modern way of delivering both sight and hearing services?

Jacqui Smith: My hon. Friend has raised this issue with me on several occasions; she is a very doughty campaigner for the extension of digital hearing aid provision. I assure her that we are making progress in developing pilots to consider how we can involve private sector and high street providers, very possibly including high street opticians, to ensure that people can get treatment as quickly as possible as we develop the service. We are currently working on a private sector pilot that will operate in Shrewsbury, where a senior audiologist on the NHS site will consider GP referrals and, in cases that are considered straightforward, offer people the opportunity to have a digital hearing aid fitted on the high street or in a community centre. This is a very important initiative and we will consider the approach in detail and develop it as we take forward investment to ensure that as many people as possible can receive digital hearing aids on the NHS.

Mr. Simon Burns (West Chelmsford): If one strips out the Minister's soundbites and spin, one is left with only a cruel con. Does she not recognise that what the Government have been doing in the past few years is rationing and delaying, and depriving people who are badly in need of the finest, latest hearing aid technology of what they require, which has not been supplied? Will she explain how this latest spin can be fulfilled? Given the deficits and overspending this year by health authorities, and the fact that under the funding settlement for next year, primary care trusts will be penalised and get reduced funding, how will they honour the pledges that she is spinning?

Jacqui Smith: What a cheek! It is this Government and this Government's investment that have ensured that 18,351 people are now benefiting from a modernised hearing aid service and that 30 more sites will come online next year. When the hon. Gentleman was in government, he made no provision whatever for that service on the NHS. *[Interruption.]* Actually, it did happen towards the end of his time in office.

As we know from the speech that the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) made last weekend, Conservative party policy is now clear. It is to talk down the NHS and the extra provision that is being made. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): I welcome the Minister's statement that the 20 pilot projects have been a huge success and that they are being expanded to afford further opportunities in new areas. Can I take her comments to mean that Health Ministers in the devolved regions can no longer hide behind the fact that they have been waiting for an evaluation of the pilot projects, and that she is now able to recommend that, should they so desire, they may allocate funding for digital hearing aids in the devolved regions such as Northern Ireland?

Jacqui Smith: Allocating funding in the devolved regions is clearly a matter for the Administrations concerned. It is important that we evaluate the success of this new NHS service. That is why, with the Institute of Healthcare Research, we are carrying out an evaluation process. If Ministers in the devolved Administrations want to share in the information that we are gathering from that, I shall be more than happy to do so.

Private Operations

7. **Mr. Mark Hoban** (Fareham): How many people have funded their operations themselves in the past year. [43723]

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Hutton): We do not collect information on the number of people who have operations performed privately in the independent sector, nor on the source of funding for those operations.

Mr. Hoban: Given that independent health care companies calculate that there has been a 30 per cent. increase in the number of people who are paying for their own operations, are the Government proud of the fact that they have created a two-tier health service in which those who can pay do so, and those who cannot pay are left on longer and longer waiting lists for out-patient appointments and operations?

Mr. Hutton: This is all getting slightly ridiculous. The policy that the hon. Gentleman describes is the Conservative policy to encourage greater take-up of the private sector. That is not our policy. It is worth pointing out to the hon. Gentleman and to his hon. Friends, who appear to be unaware of it, that the NHS is treating more people and that waiting lists and waiting times are coming down. That is very much what we want to achieve and that is where the investment is going in order to produce the results that the hon. Gentleman and others want.

As regards the private sector, there is a strong case, where it represents value for money, for using spare capacity in the private sector to shorten waiting times for

NHS patients and to give them a good and sensible result. I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman would at least be able to support that initiative.

Mr. Oliver Heald (North-East Hertfordshire): Does not the Minister agree that the huge rise in the number of people who are paying for their own operations highlights the dilemma of patients in having to decide whether to wait for months in pain and fear for an operation or to use their life savings to pay for it? Is not that choice creating the two-tier health service that we have today—a tier of those who wait and a tier of those who pay, neither really able to afford it?

Mr. Hutton: I thought that when we heard from the hon. Member for Fareham (Mr. Hoban) we had reached rock bottom, but obviously I was wrong. This is preposterous hypocrisy by Conservative Members, who never showed any interest in or concern about such issues when they were responsible for running the affairs of the NHS. *[Interruption.]* They did not do better; they did substantially worse. The way to deal with the issues is not to indulge in such ludicrous, absurd posturing, but to keep the investment going in, keep the reforms on track, and, as we do so, ensure that we reduce waiting lists and times and treat more patients on the NHS. That is what we are committed to doing and that is what we are delivering.

Edgware Hospital

8. **Mr. Andrew Dismore** (Hendon): If he will make a statement about services at Edgware hospital. [43724]

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Hutton): Edgware community hospital currently provides a range of out-patient and day care acute services, which include intermediate care services, an urgent treatment centre, maternity services, diagnostic facilities and acute mental health services. The development of the new Edgware community hospital means that they will continue to be provided in improved surroundings, together with a range of additional services for the local community such as a dedicated children's service. The contract for the new hospital is expected to be signed next month with a view to building work beginning in May.

Mr. Dismore: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply and congratulate the Department on the progress in restoring services at Edgware since the Tories closed the hospital before the 1997 election. However, the fly in the ointment is last week's decision to close the urgent treatment centre at night. It has caused great anger and resentment in the community and is universally opposed. Given that overnight services in our area are generally not up to scratch, the decision should be reconsidered.

Mr. Hutton: I have listened carefully to my hon. Friend. It is worth putting it on record that the urgent treatment centre at Edgware hospital has been much used by local people during the day. The figures have increased from about 19,000 when it opened to approximately 47,000. Clearly, the service is used. At night, the circumstances are different because the number of people who use it is much reduced. However, I understand that the local community health council will oppose the service reconfigurations. In those circumstances, I have to reserve my comments on the scheme today. I have listened to my hon. Friend and I shall consider the proposals carefully.

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): Whether the urgent treatment centre at Edgware remains open at night or not, will the Minister assess the number of people who are sent there wrongly, believing that they will receive attention for a serious injury? The phrase "urgent treatment centre" causes confusion and delays in dealing with serious injuries.

Mr. Hutton: The hon. Gentleman is right to raise that matter, which local doctors and nurses have also brought to our attention. I assure him, my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) and others who are worried that we shall consider carefully the proposals that are likely to come before me. I shall have to make a decision on the matter and the comments of the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir Sydney Chapman) and others will contribute to it.

Health Inequalities

9. **Fiona Mactaggart** (Slough): What his priorities are for reducing health inequalities. [43725]

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Alan Milburn): There are six priorities for reducing health inequalities: early years; children and young people; primary care; heart disease and cancer; disadvantaged communities, and addressing the wider determinants of ill health.

Fiona Mactaggart: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. He will not be surprised to hear that of those priorities, I am most concerned about heart disease. Many communities such as the one that I represent have high levels of it. Slough is in the top 10 constituencies for early male deaths from heart disease, yet it is in the healthiest county in the country. I am worried that the new health authorities will take money but not action to deal with the problems.

I am grateful for the action that has been taken so far such as statins prescribing and the new cardiology unit at Wexham Park hospital, but I want my right hon. Friend to reassure me that he will ensure that new health authorities direct resources where they are needed, especially when there are pockets of serious ill health in relatively healthy counties.

Mr. Milburn: My hon. Friend makes an important point. Her constituency is not unusual in being a deprived community in a sea of greater affluence. Two things need to happen. In the short term, the health authorities and the new strategic health authorities that will come into being in the next financial year in a week or so, must ensure a reasonable distribution of resources to tackle the problems in the most deprived communities. Secondly, as my hon. Friend knows, from the next financial year, allocations will go directly to primary care trusts, thus creating a much more localised system of getting the money where it is most needed.

My hon. Friend is right to raise the question of heart disease. It kills more people than cancer and is the disease that kills most people in our country. There is some progress; deaths have fallen by 5 per cent. in the last year for which we have figures. The number of operations is increasing, and waiting times for operations are falling. My hon. Friend has rightly mentioned statins; prescribing of that treatment is up by one third. In addition, the smoking cessation services are beginning to have a real impact in her constituency and elsewhere. That shows that, despite the fact that these are intractable problems, if we adopt the right approach—the right policy—and back it with the right level of resources, we can get results. We now have to keep that moving in the right direction.

Mr. David Tredinnick (Bosworth): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that one of the worst inequalities in the health service is in the provision of complementary and integrated medicine? Will he confirm that I gave him notice of a question on the use of homeopathy in deprived areas, and is he also aware that he gives the impression that he really does not care about complementary and integrated health care? That is rather dangerous, given Labour's slide in the polls and the fact that one fifth of the population uses such health care.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): Acupuncture for the vulnerable.

Mr. Milburn: That is obviously the answer. The hon. Member for Bosworth (Mr. Tredinnick) is nothing if not persistent, and consistent, on these problems. I well remember him asking my right hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham), a question, and my right hon. Friend quite rightly referring to him as the hon. Member for Holland and Barrett. The hon. Gentleman makes an important point, however. As he is aware, there is an increasing evidence base for some of the interventions that he is incessantly, persistently and consistently talking about, and it is important that general practitioners should be aware of that information so that they can make their own decisions about what is right for their patients in different parts of the country.

Derek Twigg (Halton): The mortality rate from cancers and heart disease in my constituency is among the highest in the country; there is a shortage of GPs in Widnes; and we have been trying to get a health care resource centre for more than eight years now. Will my right hon. Friend do something about the north-west office of the NHS executive, which is shortly to be abolished, and perhaps use his good offices to get things moving? The executive has still not made a decision about what is to happen in Widnes, and it is crucial to get more GPs in to get the good facilities that we deserve. Will my right hon. Friend do something about that when he has discussions with the new strategic health authority, because we need these services quickly and the executive has not made a decision after many years of deliberation?

Mr. Milburn: I am aware of my hon. Friend's frustration. He has asked us to do something about the north-west regional office, and I can promise that that will happen, because it is being abolished in about a week's time. I do not know whether that is what my hon. Friend was asking for. So far as the issue of GPs in his constituency and other deprived communities is concerned, a specific initiative is under way—of which he is aware, and which I hope will be of benefit to him and his constituents—involving GPs being recruited from Spain to work in the north-west of England. In the more medium term, we also have to ensure that the incentives are right for GPs to work in the more deprived communities. We have made a start, and I personally think that we need to do more to ensure that we get the right level of primary care resources in the most disadvantaged communities.

Smoking Cessation

10. **Dr. Jenny Tonge** (Richmond Park): What assessment he has made of the impact of smoking cessation publicity measures on smoking cessation. [43726]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Yvette Cooper): The evidence suggests that tobacco education campaigns, including the advertising of smoking cessation support services, play an important part in helping people to give up smoking. The Government have run a campaign on the dangers of smoking for the past two years. In the first six months of this financial year, more than 100,000 people set a quit date using the NHS smoking cessation services, and half of them were still not smoking at the four-week follow-up stage.

Dr. Tonge: Does the Minister not agree that the Tobacco Advertising and Promotion Bill that has been successfully piloted through the other place by my noble Friend Lord Clement-Jones is also an important factor? Does she have any idea of how many young people—women in particular—have taken up smoking while the Government have been dithering over a ban on tobacco advertising for five years? Is she not ashamed to be a member of a Government who kowtow to big business at the expense of young people's health?

Yvette Cooper: That was a complete load of nonsense. I am pleased that the Tobacco Advertising and Promotion Bill will have its Second Reading after Easter. Banning tobacco advertising is an important part of a programme to help people who want to give up smoking. That ban would already be in law if Opposition Members had not decided to block it at the last minute before the election by trying to introduce a sunset clause because they wanted the ban to last just two or three years. A fat lot of use that kind of ban would have been.

BILL PRESENTED

ENTERPRISE

Ms Secretary Hewitt, supported by the Prime Minister, Mr. Secretary Prescott, Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Secretary Reid, Mr. Secretary Murphy, Mrs. Secretary Liddell, Miss Melanie Johnson and Mr. Paul Boateng, presented a Bill to establish and provide for the functions of the Office of Fair Trading and the Competition Appeal Tribunal; to make provision about mergers and market structures and conduct; to establish the Competition Service; to amend the constitution and functions of the Competition Commission; to create an offence for those entering into certain anti-competitive agreements; to provide for the disqualification of directors of companies engaging in certain anti-competitive practices; to make other provision about competition law; to amend the law relating to the protection of the collective interests of consumers; to make further provision about the disclosure of information obtained under competition and consumer legislation; to amend the Insolvency Act 1986 and make other provision about insolvency; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Tuesday 9 April, and to be printed. Explanatory notes to be printed [Bill 115].

Point of Order

12.30 pm

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I would be grateful if you could attempt to protect the House from the rampant verbal inflation from which we have suffered this morning. We have just reached Question 10. In exercising your role as the protector of the interests of Back Benchers, could you please instruct Ministers to give crisp, precise answers and not the rambling diatribes to which we have been subjected today?

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is right. The replies have taken far too long, and, in some cases, the questions were far too long. I agree that we should get further down the Order Paper.

Trespassers on Land (Liability for Damage and Eviction)

12.31 pm

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make a person liable for any damage caused to land, or property on that land, on which he is trespassing for the purpose of residing there; to amend the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 in respect of eviction from land; and for connected purposes.

As members of the public, we are constantly aware of trouble surrounding the illegal occupation of land by members of the travelling community. A steady diet of local newspaper stories occasionally break into the national press. With depressing frequency, they focus on alleged traveller misbehaviour. As Members of Parliament, too many of us are brought face to face with that reality. My experience of that reality culminated during the last general election. One particular group of travellers moved between three different sites in my constituency. At each site, they left damage, mountains of waste and intimidated local residents in their wake. Despite the robust and determined approach of the borough of Reigate and Banstead—an engaged and willing local authority prepared to act to protect the interests of its citizens—the legal framework seemed to protect the interests of misbehaving travellers rather than the settled community.

I came across this group of Irish travellers on Radstock way, which provides the outer ring of a large estate in Merstham. The road was being used as a race track by vans advertising paving and driveways. Their reckless use of the road was frightening. About 30 caravans and accompanying cars, vans and lorries had occupied a piece of land normally used for recreation by all the local residents. On it, several piles of tonnes of building waste had started to grow. Local residents would not let their children out, local people had been abused and sworn at, houses and shops had been subjected to thefts. I found the eviction notice served on the travellers by the borough council thrust into a hedge of one of the houses that I was canvassing. Unsurprisingly, I gave an undertaking to try to put the situation right.

A briefing from the borough solicitor made it clear that all that could be done to move them on was being done. However, the process was prolonged, and travellers were generally expert at prolonging it. Magistrates would take at face value claims of pregnancies and injuries detaining children in hospital, which were liable to extend the process indefinitely. Subsequently, the travellers were given a deadline by which to leave. At the deadline, I returned to the site, and they were still there. To my surprise, no police were evident. My inquiries of the travellers as to why they had not moved on produced, at first, a complicated tale about a boy in an unidentified local hospital and, finally, abuse. The following day they did move—to another common two miles away and the process began again.

Now under pressure from the borough and the then Conservative parliamentary candidate, the travellers moved up the police priority list. A pedestrian who had a stone thrown at him reported it to the police, which gave them the necessary cause to remove the travellers under section 61 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994. A police and local borough operation ensued, and, at considerable expense, was able to move them on, with their vehicles being towed away if necessary. Again, mountains of waste were left behind for borough council tax payers to pay for their removal. At one site alone, the clean-up costs came to £40,000 yet no individual could be identified as being responsible for those mountains of waste.

This Bill is my first attempt to deliver on my promise to make things better for my constituents. I judged that two issues in particular had to be dealt with: the way in which the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 works in practice and the liability for damage.

I am not alone in seeking a solution to the problem. All of Surrey, not least around the time of the Derby, has grown used to the seasonal invasions of travellers. My neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for East Surrey (Mr. Ainsworth), has been battling on behalf of his constituents recently, and my right hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell (Mr. MacKay) raised the issue on the Adjournment in Westminster Hall on 15 January 2002. The description of the appalling behaviour that my right hon. Friend's constituents suffered mirrored events in Reigate.

In replying to that date, the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, the hon. Member for Wallasey (Angela Eagle), made an important statement of principle with which I concur. She said that

"travellers are part of our society, and they should be accorded the same rights and dignities as others: they have equal human rights to the settled community. However, human rights also extend to the settled community, and travellers' behaviour and the expectations of that behaviour should therefore be the same for those in the travelling community and the settled community. Anyone who thinks that that is not the case is profoundly wrong. The minority status of travellers and gypsies should not allow them to indulge in crime or antisocial behaviour; nor should it excuse that behaviour. The law should be enforced equally on them."

The Under-Secretary went on to identify one of the problems. She added:

"We have noticed in the operation of the 1994 Act that there is not always sufficient co-ordination between local police and local authorities over whether section 61 or section 77 is appropriate . . . In the worst examples, the local authority expects the police to use section 61 and the police want the local authority to use section 77, so not a lot of progress is made."

Unfortunately, she also said that

"I am not giving a commitment that it will be the Home Office's top priority".—[*Official Report, Westminster Hall*, 15 January 2002; Vol. 378, c. 67-69WH.]

In which case, no further progress will be made.

However, I am pleased to be able to give the Home Office the opportunity to address the matter. My Bill would amend the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 to clamp down on the antisocial behaviour of those groups of the travelling community who cause damage. The Bill is designed to strengthen the powers of those who are at the sharp end of dealing with travellers illegally trespassing on land and who are democratically accountable to the public.

The proposals would improve existing legislation in the following ways. It would make all travellers on a site individually responsible for damage caused during their illegal occupation; it would reduce the six-car minimum that the police currently require to evict travellers; and it would clear up any confusion between sections 61 and 77 by enabling a local authority to request the chief

[Mr. Crispin Blunt]

constable to take action and the chief constable shall comply with any such request. That would give locally accountable politicians more power to effect evictions, as intended by the current law, when illegal occupation has occurred. That would address our constituents' frustration and anger at much current inaction. The Bill would also provide powers of eviction from land forming part of a highway. That point was previously excluded, and the loophole had become obvious and the Under-Secretary referred to it in the debate on 15 January.

Law-abiding travellers have nothing to fear from such legislation. Indeed, their position is made much worse by the reputation they have to carry from the misbehaviour of others. If all travellers respected the settled communities who play occasional host to them, much of this problem would not exist. This change in the law is designed to promote accountability and good behaviour. It would also give the unwilling host communities some protection from antisocial behaviour and damage. This one issue has caused a greater degree of heartache and distress among my constituents than any other single cause. Hon. Members have within their gift the power to support my attempt to address this problem. I seek leave to bring in the Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Crispin Blunt, Mr. Peter Ainsworth, Sir Paul Beresford, Virginia Bottomley, Chris Grayling, Mr. Philip Hammond, Mr. Nick Hawkins, Mr. Andrew MacKay, Mr. Humfrey Malins, Richard Ottaway, Mr. Ian Taylor and Mr. David Wilshire.

Trespassers on Land (Liability for Damage and Eviction)

Mr. Crispin Blunt accordingly presented a Bill to make a person liable for any damage caused to land, or property on that land, on which he is trespassing for the purpose of residing there; to amend the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 in respect of eviction from land; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 10 May, and to be printed [Bill 116].

Standards and Privileges

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That this House approves the Sixth Report of the Committee on Standards and Privileges (House of Commons Paper No. 624), Registration of Interests by Members who have not taken their seat, and resolves that its provisions should come into force three months after the date of this Resolution.—*[Jim Fitzpatrick.]*

12.41 pm

Sir George Young (North-West Hampshire): Mr. Speaker, I can introduce the Standards and Privileges Committee's report very briefly. The House will recall that, on 18 December, we debated a Government motion to allow Members who had chosen not to take their seats to use the facilities of the House and to claim certain allowances. In answering an intervention from the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Helen Jackson) during that debate, the Leader of the House said:

"The motion will enable the four Sinn Fein Members to make an entry in the register. They are not required to do so under the rules, which provide that Members shall be obliged to make an entry only within three months of taking their seat. If that disappoints Opposition Members, I can give them the assurance that the motion will bring the four Sinn Fein Members within the scope of the remit of"

the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards,

"who will be able to apply the code of conduct."—[*Official Report*, 18 December 2001; Vol. 377, c. 158.]

When the House reassembled after Christmas, the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) and other Ulster Unionist, Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat Members made representations to me to the effect that it was unacceptable for the four Sinn Fein Members to be exempted from the requirement to register their interests. I told the right hon. Gentleman that the Standards and Privileges Committee would look into the matter.

The Committee sought authoritative advice from the Clerk of the House, who explained succinctly the position of the four Members vis-à-vis the rules of the House, and made a practical suggestion for ending the anomaly that the debate of 18 December had brought to light. His memorandum is published with our report.

I should explain to the House that Members who, for whatever reason, have not taken their seat are still Members of this House. The code of conduct and the rules on registration and declaration of interests apply to all Members of this House, whether or not they have taken their seat. However, the rules are so worded that Members have three months from taking their seat to comply with the requirement to register their interests. So a Member who does not take his seat is not exempt from the requirement to register, but is, in effect, given an unlimited period within which to do so.

We propose that the rules be changed, so that Members have to register within three months of their election. For the vast majority, that will reduce by about a week the time available to complete and return the registration form. I doubt whether that will cause them any inconvenience.

I am entirely content with the proposition on the Order Paper that Members of the current Parliament who have not taken their seat should have three months' grace in which to put their affairs in order, although I understand

that three of the four Sinn Fein Members have already completed and returned their registration forms. Their entries will be included in the next update of the register, which is available in the Library and will be available on the internet in a few days' time. I commend my Committee's report to the House.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst) *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I call the Leader of the House.

12.44 pm

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Robin Cook): I welcome the report by the Standards and Privileges Committee, and I think that I can be at least as brief as its Chairman, the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir George Young). The report itself is short, just three paragraphs; it concerns a narrow point of procedure; and, as I understand it, the House is unanimous in its wish for this change. I am well aware that the House is capable of continuing all day a debate in which we all agree, but I hope that on this occasion we can protect the Easter recess Adjournment debate.

As the Chairman has said, the origins of this debate go back to the debate in December, when it emerged, to my surprise, I must confess, and no doubt to the surprise of many hon. Members, that the obligation to register runs not from the date of election but from the date of taking the Oath or affirming. That requirement has been a provision of the register ever since it was introduced in 1974 following the election of the then Labour Government. I have found nobody who can remember why the distinction was made in the drafting, and I suspect that it was regarded at the time as a distinction without any meaning.

Today, of course, it is a very meaningful distinction in that there are four Members of the House who have been elected to this place but who have neither taken the Oath nor affirmed. As the Clerk's memorandum makes clear, the fact that they have not taken the Oath does not exempt them from the obligation to register, but it gives them an indefinite period in which to fulfil that obligation.

That is plainly unsatisfactory since Members of the House, whether or not they have taken their seat, can fulfil all the functions of a Member of the House so long as it is outside the Chamber; for instance, they can make representations to a Minister in which any private financial interest might be thought relevant. It is therefore logical that they should be brought within the registration regime that applies to those Members who have taken the Oath. Indeed, it would be possible to argue that there is an even greater case for those who have not taken their seat to declare their financial interest because they do not have the opportunity available to other Members of declaring their interest when they intervene in the House.

I started by saying that I understand that the provision has unanimous support. It has support even among the four Sinn Fein Members of Parliament, who have all accepted in principle that they should register. As the Chairman pointed out, three of them have already completed a return to register their financial interests. I therefore welcome this as a sensible, worthwhile reform. I am grateful to the Committee for having given us the opportunity to take it forward, and I commend the motion to the House.

12.47 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): I am happy to join the Leader of the House in lending my support and that of Her Majesty's official Opposition to the motion before the House. It was rather revealing when the Leader seemed to imply that when the Government forced this measure on what, as far as we were concerned, was a very reluctant House last December, the Government had not realised the implications of it. Only now are we seeking to correct at least one of the major implications, but I shall let that slip by, because I would not dream of making this a party political occasion.

We can all welcome the rapidity with which the Standards and Privileges Committee has reacted and the elegant solution that it has brought to us. I was going to seek to intervene on my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir George Young) with a question that I shall now pose to him in the hope that he might seek to catch your eye, Mr. Speaker, and wind up this very brief debate. Can we have an undertaking from the Committee that it will monitor closely the position with regard to that fourth Member, so that when the three months from today expires, it will take appropriate measures if, for any reason, full compliance has not been achieved?

It is fair to say that the Committee has at its disposal measures that it can take against any Member who is unprepared to comply with the requirements that I hope we will approve today. That being the case, will my right hon. Friend, as Chairman of the Committee, reassure us that the matter will not be lost sight of, that it will not be allowed to slip by unnoticed and that his Committee will, if necessary, consider the matter and bring to the House any recommendations that it may have?

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): Does my right hon. Friend understand that the measure might cover the money received by Sinn Fein for the funding of the party? All Members of political parties in this House are subject to very strict rules about the amount of money that they receive and where it comes from. I wonder whether Sinn Fein might be covered as well as the other legitimate parties of the House in matters relating to fund-raising, not least from Noraid in north America.

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friend raises an interesting and, I suspect, important point. Although it is not really my province and I should want to seek advice from my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire, my initial response would be that the best test would be if someone were to make a complaint to the commissioner and that he should determine whether it was a matter for the Committee on Standards and Privileges. That would be the correct procedure and vehicle. However, as my hon. Friend raises such an important point, I am sure that it will not go unnoticed.

I am happy to lend my support and that of my party to the motion.

12.50 pm

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): My colleagues and I fully endorse the recommendation of the Committee and the motion.

My only query relates to the fact that as the anomaly and the solution were so obvious, it is sad that it has taken several months and the precious time of a Select

[Mr. Paul Tyler]

Committee to sort it out. I hope that in future we can find some mechanism to deal with such minor problems more effectively and expeditiously.

I hope that the Chairman of the Committee will be able to refer to the point made by the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton). If all Members were required to include in the Register of Members' Interests any financial interest of their party, they would, first, have some difficulty in obtaining the information and, secondly, the register would become extremely lengthy—not least, if I may say so, in relation to the Conservative party—

Mr. Forth: I wish that it were so.

Mr. Tyler: The right hon. Gentleman seems to suggest that cash is not going into the party coffers as it used to. That depends how far back one goes. It could be said that Members might be influenced by past donations of substantial size, going back several years.

We should be clear that the Register of Members' Interests is just that—it is not a register of party interests. There is a different mechanism for registering party interests.

Mr. Robin Cook: Perhaps I can help the hon. Gentleman. The requirement that we are placing on the four Sinn Fein Members is identical to that on all of us. Although he is correct to say that it is not an obligation to declare donations that might be received at party headquarters, it puts Members under the same obligation to declare substantial constituency funding that rests on all of us.

Mr. Tyler: I am grateful to the Leader of the House for those comments. I was about to come to that point. I do not have personal knowledge of what may or may not happen in Northern Ireland, but there are circumstances in which there is careful targeting, and if that is done on a constituency basis it could influence the judgment of an individual Member.

With those few words, my colleagues and I fully endorse the recommendations.

12.53 pm

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): I commend the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir George Young) and his colleagues on the Committee on Standards and Privileges for the report. I am sure that the whole House will want to approve it.

It is, however, a matter of regret that the Committee was forced to fill in for the Government's failings last December when they tabled the original motion on access for Sinn Fein-IRA Members. One can only conclude that the error was made in haste, as a result of the Government's desire to deal with another entry on Sinn Fein-IRA's wish list at the earliest opportunity.

I thank the right hon. and hon. Members who signed the letter drafted by my right hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) to the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire asking for the report to be produced. I also convey my gratitude to the 71 Members on both sides of the House who signed early-day motion 678, tabled by my right hon. Friend, which also sought to bring about that result.

The motion will bring Sinn Fein-IRA Members of Parliament one step closer to being treated in the same way as normal Members of Parliament. I welcome that, but the fact remains that they are still far from the fully fledged article. Indeed, the journey of those four individuals will be complete only when they decide to go that final step by taking their seats in the Chamber. In the meantime, despite what the Government might like to have us believe, we are left with two classes of Members in the House. As things stand, Sinn Fein-IRA MPs and their staff are permitted almost unrestricted access to the confines of the Palace of Westminster and to parliamentary allowances without being made accountable like the rest of us.

Only yesterday, two Sinn Fein Members were in the Palace for meetings and refreshments, before flying back to Northern Ireland using House of Commons air warrants: all gain and no pain. That is the republican way. Interestingly, they had a guest with them as they drank tea in the area reserved for Members in the Terrace Cafeteria. His name was Martin Ferris. He, like Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness, is a member of the IRA's ruling army council. Maybe next time, Messrs. Adams and McGuinness will invite along one or two other members of the army council for tea and an unescorted wander through the precincts of this building. Perhaps they will even book a table for seven towards the end of the year and hold an IRA army council Christmas party in the Churchill Room. They could bring Mr. Adams's Irish tricolour down from his House of Commons office and plant it on the floor beside them. They would certainly be arrogant enough to do that.

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North and Sefton, East): I am most grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. He has set out graphically the special privileges that are accorded to Sinn Fein Members, which set them completely apart from the rest of us. Is he aware that I continue to receive letters, as I am sure many other hon. Members do, about the grave offence that that has caused to people throughout the country? I wonder whether he is receiving continuing expressions of regret that the House has bent to Irish republicanism in this way.

Mr. Speaker: Order. We are beginning to reopen an argument that was put before the House previously. This is a very narrow matter on the registration of interests. The hon. Member for East Antrim (Mr. Beggs) should not respond to that intervention; he should confine himself to the subject of the registration of interests.

Mr. Beggs: I will be guided by the wisdom and experience of Mr. Speaker and not be further misled. Nevertheless, I have to say that there is no credible argument to justify the fact that four Members of the House have been given access to facilities without taking their seats. If any of the rest of us had asked for such a privilege, our request would have been given short shrift, and rightly so.

The fact remains that these individuals were given their new entitlements only because of the Government's unceasing desire to pacify the republican movement.

The House and many others not only in this country but especially in the United States are, thankfully, beginning to catch on to the Government.

We are here today because a Committee of the House moved to stop these individuals being allowed their many privileges without at least being made to declare their interests. I sincerely hope that hon. Members will move with equal vigour to block any attempt to grant the next item that the Government are considering on the republican wish list—the odious amnesty for on-the-run terrorists.

12.58 pm

Mr. Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry): The Standards and Privileges Committee has moved to close an anomaly that has existed for several months. I believe that everyone in the House should welcome it, and the Leader of the House said that that was the case. In fact, he went further. He said that the four Sinn Fein Members had welcomed the move, and, indeed, why would they not welcome it? The move, several months ago, to create the two-tier membership has advantaged them, and only them. Therefore, they would obviously want to take advantage of that. The hon. Member for East Antrim (Mr. Beggs) described the way in which advantage was taken of the House's facilities yesterday. That is what is happening, and hon. Members should be aware that, increasingly, such advantage will be taken.

The anomaly is being addressed today, but hon. Members should be aware that as the Sinn Fein-IRA machine utilises the political process while maintaining its military capability—in the past month, the IRA has murdered a person in Northern Ireland—it will increasingly take advantage of all that is on offer within the precincts of the House.

The hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) alluded to Sinn Fein's wealth and affluence, and Members should not underestimate that. The Conservative and Labour parties would look with some envy at the resources that are available to Sinn Fein, which is the wealthiest political party in the United Kingdom or the Republic of Ireland. Part of the reason for that, of course, is the fact that it not only takes all the advantages that go with membership of the House and the Northern Ireland Assembly, but acquires many resources by illegal means.

Only yesterday, I noticed that Consignia was complaining and reference was made to the fact that many thousands of people may have to be made redundant. Sinn Fein and its political alliances with the Provisional IRA have acquired many millions of pounds from the Post Office in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Tom Levitt (High Peak): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The House should know that the issues described by the hon. Members for East Londonderry (Mr. Campbell) and for East Antrim (Mr. Beggs), who spoke previously, are nothing to do with the debates that took place in the Standards and Privileges Committee, which, as you have said, had a very narrow remit. I wish to dissociate members of the Committee—certainly from a personal point of view—from the arguments that have been made. I ask you to direct the hon. Member for East Londonderry to stick to the narrow confines of the motion.

Mr. Speaker: It is very kind of the hon. Gentleman to remind me of my job, but he is quite right. I remind the hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Campbell) that we are examining a narrow issue and that he should not include other matters. The debate is about registration and nothing else.

Mr. Campbell: I accept that, Mr. Speaker. If the hon. Member for High Peak (Mr. Levitt) wishes to check the veracity of the comments on the millions of pounds that Sinn Fein has acquired, he may do so, but I will, of course, accept your ruling, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members on both sides of the House ought to be aware that, as Sinn Fein moves into the precincts in the coming months, it will take advantage of every facility that is on offer in the House. It will do so as a means not of moving towards the political process but of corrupting it, and I hope that hon. Members on both sides of the House will be well aware of that move.

1.2 pm

David Burnside (South Antrim): As a new Member of the House, I visited Elizabeth Filkin soon after being elected to seek her advice on what I was required to register. This motion raises many interesting questions, and I look forward to reading the entries in the Register of Members' Interests relating to the four members of Sinn Fein, three of whom are members of the army council of the Provisional IRA—Martin McGuinness, Gerry Adams and Pat Doherty. I sought advice from Elizabeth Filkin and the new commissioner, who will, I hope, advise members of Sinn Fein.

I understand the history and background of English company law; I am chairman of David Burnside Associates—a public relations company established under English company law. It declares its returns, and anyone can visit Companies House to see its audited reports. People know the legal entity that is the company. I also register the company's clients for whom I would have to register an interest in the House. I have taken guidance on my remunerated interest, and I hope that I will adhere to the rules so long as I am a Member. I also register company directorships for which I am unremunerated.

The army council of the Provisional IRA comes from the very clear, historic legal structure of an army. If I may, with respect, I would advise the Commissioner for Standards to get hold of the Provisional IRA's rule book, which is very similar to a company's articles of association. It contains guidance, rules, regulations and instructions on the operation of the Provisional IRA, three members of which have joined the House, but will not take the Oath and will not become equal Members of Parliament with the rest of us. They should come into the House and be open to the same scrutiny as I and all other right hon. and hon. Members would be if we breached the rules and standards to which we are meant to adhere. We cannot call those Members into the Chamber because they will not take the Oath of Allegiance.

The Inland Revenue does not investigate the Provisional IRA, but I think it is fair to suggest that the new Commissioner for Standards should carry out a clear and open investigation. I hope that he will invite Mr. McGuinness, Mr. Adams and Mr. Doherty to the office across the road to get the full details of their articles

[David Burnside]

of association and their membership of the Provisional IRA. I also hope that the commissioner will examine its overseas fund-raising activities, including its links with the FARC, a drug-running terrorist organisation in Columbia that has international links with the Provisional IRA and the three Members whom I have mentioned.

We continue to have two classes of Members of Parliament—first class and second class. We are second-class Members because the IRA and Sinn Fein are being given rights and privileges without responsibilities. That is an insult to the traditions of the House.

1.6 pm

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): I want to place on record the parliamentary support of Plaid Cymru and the Scottish National party for the report. I congratulate the Committee's Chairman and its members on their work. They swiftly produced a report to plug an obvious gap in the membership rules of some Members of the House.

We supported the Government's motion in December and agree with the principle that Sinn Fein Members should use the facilities of the House, bearing in mind the particular circumstances that have arisen over many years and generations in Northern Ireland. We hope that we are taking steps towards the normalisation of democratic politics in Northern Ireland. We certainly support the report.

1.7 pm

Sir George Young: With the leave of the House, Mr. Speaker, I am grateful for the support of hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber for the recommendation. Some hon. Members raised issues that go broader than the motion. I understand those strong feelings, but I hope that they will understand if I do not respond to their points.

Peter Bottomley (Worthing, West): Perhaps it would help if the Electoral Commission picked up on those points that are more relevant to its remit than to the commissioner.

Sir George Young: My right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) asked about compliance, which the hon. Member for South Antrim (David Burnside) also mentioned. If all Members have not registered at the end of the period, anyone can make a complaint that will be considered in the normal way by the commissioner and my Committee. As with other reports, we would make recommendations to the House for it to decide on the appropriate action.

My hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) and the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) touched on the circumstances in which a donation to a constituency association needs to be registered. Paragraph 22 of the code of conduct sets out the circumstances in which it is necessary to register a donation to an association—namely, when it is linked to the candidacy or the membership of the House. Otherwise, as the hon. Member for North Cornwall said, it is a matter for the Electoral Commission.

The commissioner is an independent officer of the House. If a complaint is made, he will make inquiries in the normal way, and that would be the route for the hon. Member for South Antrim to follow.

With those remarks, I commend the report to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House approves the Sixth Report of the Committee on Standards and Privileges (House of Commons Paper No. 624), Registration of Interests by Members who have not taken their seat, and resolves that its provisions should come into force three months after the date of this Resolution.

Orders of the Day

Football (Disorder) (Amendment) Bill

Lords amendments considered.

Clause 1

REPEAL OF PROVISIONS OF FOOTBALL (DISORDER) ACT 2000

Lords amendment: No. 1, in part 1, line 2, leave out "In".

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Bob Ainsworth): I beg to move that this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Speaker: With this we may discuss Lords amendment No. 2.

Mr. Ainsworth: Amendment No. 1 is a technical change consequent to amendment No. 2, which introduces a five-year sunset provision in respect of sections 14B, 21A and 21B of the Football Spectators Act 1989, which contain measures introduced in the Football (Disorder) Act 2000.

The House will recall that the original aim was, through the Bill, to enshrine those measures on the statute book without time limit. When he introduced the Bill, the Minister of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham), who has responsibility for crime reduction, policing and community safety, made it clear that there was compelling evidence in favour of maintaining sections 14B, 21A and 21B on the statute book. The measures they provide are a tailored and proportionate response to the menace of English football disorder abroad. They strike a balance between national and international interests and individuals' civil liberties, and, having undergone a thorough practical legal examination in the past 19 months, they have not been found wanting.

The House will have noted that when England played Netherlands in Amsterdam a few weeks ago, about 12,000 England fans made the trip. As those who monitor such events already know, although it was a high-risk game, not least because the Dutch have their fair share of football hooligans, there were only 12 English arrests. The behaviour of the overwhelming majority of England fans was excellent, and they are to be congratulated. The fans are clearly working hard to improve their image and reputation.

It is important to recall that in 1993—the last time England played an away international against Netherlands—there were riots in Rotterdam and about 1,000 English fans were arrested. We have moved on since the dark days of mass football hooliganism, which culminated in the appalling scenes witnessed during Euro 2000. However, the Bill makes clear our aim of making further progress in the spirit of co-operation, and I am pleased to report that that is exactly what happened in the other place.

Members on both sides of this House and of the other place recognise the need to avoid any hint of complacency. To lose the measures, which are due to lapse in August, would send out an entirely negative message to our European partners and to the increasingly well-behaved majority of England fans. It would undermine the anti-hooligan strategy and weaken the power of the police and courts to act against the thugs. Furthermore, it would be regarded by some as an encouragement to resume a pattern of repeat offending overseas at a time when England prepares to embark on its Euro 2004 campaign.

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): We all agree that seeing the current season and the World cup through will enable us to judge sensibly the long-term effectiveness of the measures. Will the Minister update the House on the number of orders issued and implemented, and the number of convictions that have followed? He will be aware that in the past Ministers have tried to keep us up to speed, and if he has up-to-date information it would be helpful if he passed it on to the House.

Mr. Ainsworth: I shall try. I was present during the debates, so I know that the hon. Gentleman is right to say that the main concern expressed when my right hon. Friend the Minister of State introduced the Bill in the Commons was that there should be an opportunity to see the measures through a number of obstacles, so that we could decide how effective they were. There can be no doubt that both Houses hold the strong view that the measures need to be tested over a longer period, which is why we did not hesitate to table a five-year sunset provision in Committee in the Lords. We were delighted that the Front-Bench spokespersons for the two main Opposition parties felt able to join us in presenting an agreed amendment, the outcome of which is before the House now.

The Bill as amended will extend the lifespan of the relevant measures for a further five years, after which they will lapse or be renewed by statute. I assure the House that the five-year period was chosen not at random, but after careful study of the international football calendar. It will ensure that powers are in place for the 2006 World cup in Germany—a point made by the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes)—and, importantly, for the 2008 European championship qualifying matches that will take place while the measures undergo further parliamentary scrutiny. Once the measures have been exposed to both those situations before the expiry of the five-year limit, we should be able to discuss and evaluate their effectiveness.

1.15 pm

The hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey asked about the number of orders. Of the 984 current orders, 722 deal with conviction under section 14A of the Football Spectators Act 1989, and 107 deal with complaints under section 14B. I hope that that helps the hon. Gentleman to understand the current position. I repeat the commitment given in the other place and by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State in this House to provide Parliament with regular impact reports on how the measures are working. Detailed reports will be submitted on an ad hoc basis before the question of renewal is resurrected so that we can see how the measures are being used.

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): I am grateful for the Minister's explanation. I do not know whether he can

[Mr. Dominic Grieve]

help the House today, but in addition to the figures he gave the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes), it would be useful to know whether there is any information on the number of applications that have been refused. As the Minister will appreciate, one concern is the extent of any impact on the civil liberties of people who have been taken through the process unjustifiably.

Mr. Ainsworth: If we are to maintain cross-party coherence on the issue, we must be as open as possible and provide Front Benchers and Back Benchers with timely information. That will assist with consideration of the proposals and with whether they need to be renewed, amended or otherwise. I am therefore more than happy to try to provide the hon. Gentleman with that information. If I cannot do so today, I shall certainly do so as soon as possible.

Simon Hughes: I wish to pursue a similar line of inquiry. Can the Minister provide us today with one final key piece of information that would help us to judge the Bill? Can he tell us how many of the 107 people subject to banning orders have relevant previous convictions for assault or anything to do with football disorder? As he knows, that issue has come up on previous occasions.

Mr. Ainsworth: The hon. Gentleman has raised those issues before. The reports that we shall try to make available must be comprehensive and must cover such issues so that everyone gets as complete a picture as possible; that is our intention.

With those comments, I commend the Lords amendments to the House.

Mr. Grieve: I shall not detain the House long. I welcome the Minister's comments and the Government's approach to the matter, which illustrates how Parliament can work effectively. The Government had good intentions in coming to Parliament to seek to extend the life of the measures. At the same time, the Opposition had genuine concerns about the civil liberty impact of the measures, even though we fully acknowledged the need to renew the orders. A compromise has been reached, which means that the orders will come back for consideration in five years' time; the House will be able to see whether they are working and whether they are still needed. You never know, we may reach a happy point at which, owing to the continuing decline in football hooliganism, measures of this kind are no longer required. That may be a little over-optimistic—I rather suspect that they will need to be renewed again—but at least the House will be able to retain some control over measures which, although required and well intentioned, have an impact on the civil liberties of the individual. It is clearly desirable for the House to monitor how they are working over the coming five years.

The measures include a provision allowing a police officer to stop someone at a place of exit from the United Kingdom and detain that person for up to 24 hours before he is brought before a court, so that a complaint can be made and a banning order obtained. That is quite draconian. The complaints provision itself is an unusual hybrid, in that it is neither criminal nor entirely civil, but imposes restrictions on individuals' liberties in the same way that an injunction does. These matters need careful consideration.

We welcome the spirit in which the Government have worked in the other place, and their response to our representations in Committee. We are happy to support the amendment, and look forward to the enactment of a Bill that extends necessary powers.

Simon Hughes: Like others, I propose to be brief, but the Bill is important even though its scope is limited.

As the Minister will recall, we have returned to this subject quite often in recent years. The Government wanted the original Bill to be unlimited, but they were up against a deadline—the summer holidays and the football matches leading up to the World cup qualifying games, particularly the Germany game—and were consequently forced to make some concessions. Effectively, a compromise was agreed.

The first Bill produced a two-year Act with a one-year renewal provision. As the Minister implied, it will expire this summer. It was given a maximum lifetime of two years because, as the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) said and as the Government conceded, here was Parliament legislating to remove from people with no previous or relevant convictions the power to leave the country. Parliament was, potentially, preventing people from leaving in order to attend a match abroad, although eventually they might be found to have done nothing to justify that. That detention power could have made a trip to Belgium or Italy useless to people who were able to continue on their way later.

The Liberal Democrats felt that the Government had brought back the legislation rather early—before we had had a proper chance to assess the consequences of the original Act. As it happens, however, although they brought it back in October—at the beginning of the Session—it has taken nearly six months for it to go around the course. It went to the Lords before Christmas.

The Minister said that discussions had resulted in a further compromise on both sides. The Government had accepted that the successor legislation should also have a limited life. The first Act will have had a two-year life, and the second will have a five-year life. That is a good principle. When evidence exists but it is not certain that it will be there indefinitely, we should not legislate to keep a law on the statute book indefinitely. We should give ourselves the power to return to the matter. We can do that in one of two ways: we can have a Bill with a limited life, or we can have renewal orders. We feel that emergency powers, and particular restrictions of liberty, should always have to return to this place.

We welcome the Government's acceptance that the legislation should have a maximum lifetime of five years, starting this summer. We in turn have agreed that rather than seeking an annual or two-yearly renewal order, we will let it run for that period.

On the principle, we are still unhappy and uncomfortable about the idea that people with British passports should be precluded from travelling on the basis of a complaint and no relevant previous conviction. That is still the law and it will continue to be the law. We do not sign up to that proposition, but we are effectively signing up to a trial period to see what happens in the courts, what banning orders are made and what effect

there is on football disorder. That is the limit of our agreement to the proposition. We do that for the common interest that this country should teach people who go to football matches and call themselves football supporters but do very little to support the game that such behaviour is unacceptable to the country and its reputation and to the rest of the people who play, manage and support football, whose name and reputation such behaviour tarnishes.

I have no problem in declaring my allegiance to Millwall football club, whom I support regularly. The club went through a period when it had bad supporters. There are now mercifully very few of them and the club has worked very hard to make sure that the bad practice of the past—the abuse and racism—has gone.

We all want football that we can be proud of, whether we win or lose, in terms of the behaviour on and off the field. We have a potentially excellent English team for the World cup and an exciting Irish team, for those who have Irish allegiance. We want them to do well. They are going to two parts of the world which have no reputation for football disorder and where the behaviour of fans is extremely good. The last thing that we want in Japan or South Korea is bad behaviour in the name of supporting the English team.

There is one other comment that seems appropriate. It will allow us to avoid having the second debate, although the Minister may be kind enough to come back with the figures for which we asked. There is clearly a link in the public mind between the behaviour of footballers on and off the pitch and that of their so-called supporters in the ground or going to or from the ground. I have always believed it right for the management of a club and of a national team to take the view that if footballers publicly misbehave and are found by the court to have misbehaved, they are punished professionally because of their role model status.

I do not know Mr. Jonathan Woodgate—I have never met him. He was taken to court and convicted. People might say that he has served his punishment. He has served his punishment to society, but as well as being a citizen he is a professional footballer—a very good footballer. We must stand behind the decision of the manager of the England football team that because of that bad, disgraceful and unacceptable behaviour, Jonathan Woodgate is not entitled to be part of the squad going to play in the World cup. Good behaviour by footballers on the pitch and in their civil life off the pitch is far more likely to lead to good behaviour on the streets by those who go to football matches.

It is not coincidental that the great debate about law and order, crime and juvenile crime is hugely influenced by the role models that young people have. They could be seen on television or video; it could be someone like the person convicted yesterday who is a musician in a band, or it could be footballers. Unless the role models behave, people will always be subject to banning orders. Impressionable teenagers will often follow the example of people whom they regard as heroes. Sadly, the people who misbehave are often no longer teenagers; they are in their 20s, 30s and 40s and are simply thugs. They certainly need to be dealt with, and dealt with firmly.

This is an experiment that has apparently been working relatively well, but we hope that in five years' time it will not be necessary to have these orders in place because the culture in England will have changed. On that basis, we happily sign up to the compromise agreement that gives the Bill a limited life of five years. We hope that in five years' time the Government of the day will not feel it necessary to suggest that we need a replacement Bill to succeed this one.

1.30 pm

Paul Flynn (Newport, West): I apologise for missing some of the Front-Bench speeches. I shall make a brief contribution.

Because there was a measurable improvement in the behaviour of English fans after the 2000 Act, the temptation is to believe that the improvement was due to the Act. It is understandable that the Government should claim that, but let us consider the origins of the Act and the reasons for its introduction. It arose from three football matches. There might well be an alternative interpretation of the extraordinary differences in the reaction of English football fans after two of those matches, compared with the other one.

At two of those matches—one in Belgium and the other in France—there was an expectation of violence. The police turned up in riot gear, the fans were allowed to drink double-strength beer, which they did in prodigious quantities, and inevitably there was a riot. At the other game, the police arrived in leisure wear; they played pop music to the fans so loud that the fans could not even hear their own chants, and they allowed them to indulge in a drug whose effect is very different from that of alcohol.

Alcohol inspires football fans to give each other a good kicking. The drug used in Holland makes them want to give each other a big hug. The result was that in the Dutch game, according to the police, the fans reacted to England's defeat—we should remember that these are the same fans who rioted in the other countries—with mild disappointment and polite applause. That is rather remarkable given that a few days earlier they had reacted violently.

Although one respects the claims that the legislation is effective, it has many drawbacks. In future we might be able to copy the example of the Dutch police with pop music and their informal and friendly approach to the fans. We hope that in the more enlightened future the fans will be able to use a drug that does not make them violent, but has a calming effect.

Simon Hughes *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Has the hon. Member for Newport, West (Paul Flynn) completed his remarks?

Paul Flynn: If the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) wishes to intervene, I shall manage a few extra sentences.

Simon Hughes: I am grateful. Can we interpret the hon. Gentleman's remarks as an invitation for football to be played in the part of south London where he lives when he is staying in London during the week, before he goes back to Newport for the weekend?

Paul Flynn: I have rejoiced in the reduction in the menace on the streets of south London. The hon.

[Paul Flynn]

Gentleman is my Member of Parliament and represents me in that part of London. I believe that we will see concrete evidence of the effect of the wise decisions of Commander Brian Paddick in south London, and that we can build on his pioneering reforms. That would be a splendid place to play all future international games.

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Paul Flynn) on his ingenuity in using the debate to raise once again in the House matters that are dear to his heart. No doubt he is correct about the impact of alcohol, and policing methods are central to the issue, but we are aware that sadly, in addition to the associated problems that must be planned for and dealt with, there is a core of people who have been following our national game for no other purpose than to indulge in violence. They are not football fans. They use the game to provide themselves with such opportunities. Through intelligence they can be identified and, to a large extent, prevented from travelling. To date the legislation has shown that that is effective.

Of course, other issues and wider problems of disorder have to be dealt with too. I do not claim that the measures have been solely responsible for diminishing the problems, but they have had an impact on the more serious elements, who travel for the purposes that I described.

I thank the spokesmen for the Conservative and Liberal Democrat parties, the hon. Members for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) and for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes), for their comments and for the support that they have given the measures. It would be good to think that at the end of five years we might not need these measures—at least we can travel in hope—and that we will be able to walk away and say that that was a job well done. Personally, I doubt that that will be so.

The hon. Member for Beaconsfield also said, as did the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey, that we will have an opportunity to study the effectiveness of the measures over a period of time in potentially difficult circumstances. We will be able to reflect on that and study exactly how the measures have been used. When we are impinging on people's liberties and their ability to travel, it is only right that the House should be satisfied that the measures are effective and proportionate. The Bill will give us an opportunity to do so and to undertake that evaluation over a required period of time. I am grateful for the support that the measures have received.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendment No. 2 agreed to.

Adjournment (Easter)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Sutcliffe.]*

1.37 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): This Easter, an innocent man—innocent of the monstrous crime that he has been found guilty of committing—languishes in Barlinnie prison in Glasgow. His name is Abdel Basset Al Megrahi. Before Parliament rises, the House ought to get an undertaking that the British Government—yes, the British Government—and not a highly controversial, devolved Crown Office in Edinburgh, will address certain questions.

Our country's relations with the Arab world have not been devolved to a Scottish Parliament, where, perhaps for understandable reasons, not one of the 129 Members has been prepared to take a sustained, in-depth view of the Lockerbie case.

Now that the appeal is over, what steps are being taken to preserve the productions amassed by the Crown for use in the Lockerbie trial? Can an assurance be given that they will not be destroyed in the same way as certain police note books have apparently been destroyed?

In particular, the British Government have a duty to look at the statement of my former constituent—she is at present a constituent of the Leader of the House—former Woman Police Constable Mary Boylan, a thoroughly credible retired police constable. She states:

"Towards the latter part of 1999, I was asked to attend at Dumfries Police Station, to give a statement to the Procurator Fiscal regarding my duties at Lockerbie. Almost eleven years had elapsed since the disaster, so I phoned 'F' Divisional HQ at Livingston Police Station to request my notebook to refresh my memory. I was told that someone would be in touch with me, and after a few days I was informed that my notebook could not be found. Shortly after this I read in a Scottish broadsheet that Lothian and Borders Police notebooks had been destroyed."

Who gave the instruction for the destruction of notebooks? After all, this was the biggest unresolved murder trial in Scottish legal history. The answer to that question is likely to be found not in Edinburgh, but in London.

I have known and worked closely with the following distinguished police officers as heads of F Division covering West Lothian: David Garbutt, Tom Wood, David Mitchell, Kenneth Mackenzie, Gordon Munro and Allan Shanks. I have also worked with the chief constables of Lothian and Borders police: Sir William Sutherland QPM between 1983 and 1996, and Sir Roy Cameron QPM between 1996 and 2002. I simply do not believe that any one of them, off their own bat, would have allowed, for reasons of routine and storage space, the destruction of notebooks relating to the biggest murder trial in Scottish history.

Mary Boylan, the ex-police constable, states:

"A short time later, while searching in field F72"—

this happened on 28 December 1988—

"I recovered the handle and rim of a brown coloured suitcase (Production Label No. unknown to me). This was entered in my notebook. PC Forrest corroborated the find and signed my notebook and production label."

Her statement continues:

"Towards the latter part of 1999 . . . On attendance at Dumfries Police Station I was asked to describe some of the debris from memory. I was then shown the suitcase rim with handle I had found and was asked to identify it, which I did. The Production Label with my signature and that of PC Forrest, and of others whom I did not know, was still attached. A photograph was then shown to me of the said suitcase rim I had found, plus other pieces of the suitcase material. I recognised the rim but not the material. I asked the Fiscal about the significance of the suitcase and he said he could not tell me. What he did say was that the owner of said suitcase was a Joseph Patrick Curry and that I would be hearing and reading a lot about him at the time of the trial."

Mary Boylan continues:

"After giving my statement I left Dumfries and drove to Lockerbie's Garden of Remembrance to pay my respects. I noticed a brass plaque there with the inscription 'Joseph Patrick Curry, Captain US Army Special Forces. Killed in the line of duty'."

He is also remembered at the Arlington cemetery and, I believe, in the Pentagon.

In 1989, Police Constable Boylan was informed by a colleague that the suitcase belonging to Curry was that which contained the bomb that blew up Pan Am 103. That is what she says. I want to know who will verify the statement and show whether it is true or false. If the bomb was in Curry's suitcase, Mr. Megrahi is hardly likely to be guilty. There is a whole literature on this subject—one almost needs to be a professor of Lockerbie studies—and it would be inappropriate and selfish to take up more of the House's time to go into the matter, but these questions must be addressed.

It has been said that eight Scottish judges cannot possibly be wrong. I draw to the House's attention the conclusion of the Appeal Court's ruling, which some of us have read very carefully. At paragraph 369, Lord Cullen and his colleagues state:

"When opening the case for the appellant before this court Mr Taylor stated that the appeal was not about sufficiency of evidence: he accepted that there was a sufficiency of evidence"—

"he" being William Taylor QC. The paragraph continues:

"He also stated that he was not seeking to found on section 106(3)(b) of the 1995 Act. His position was that the trial court had misdirected itself in various respects. Accordingly in this appeal we"—

Lord Cullen and his colleagues—

"have not required to consider whether the evidence before the trial court, apart from the evidence which it rejected, was sufficient as a matter of law to entitle it to convict the appellant on the basis set out in its judgment. We have not had to consider whether the verdict of guilty was one which no reasonable trial court, properly directing itself, could have returned in the light of that evidence. As can be seen from this Opinion, the grounds of appeal before us have been concerned, for the most part, with complaints about the treatment by the trial court of the material which was before it and the submissions which were made to it by the defence."

That is an extremely careful statement, as one would expect of Lord Cullen and his colleague judges. It does not go into the detail of the matters that were before the trial court at Zeist.

These are complex matters, and it would be wrong and absurd of me to ask my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary to respond off the top of his head. All I ask is that these extremely serious matters be taken on board by the Government in London, not just passed over to the Crown Office in Edinburgh. I ask for careful reflection on what I have said and proposed, and for a response in the fullness of time.

1.47 pm

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I apologise in advance to hon. Members on both sides of the House. Previously, at the end of Adjournment debates prior to a recess, I have been called before Members on the other two Front Benches to respond on behalf of my colleagues to hon. Members' contributions. I have enjoyed doing so and felt that it was a valuable contribution to the general debate. However, I was informed this morning that that would not be possible today. I do not know the explanation for that change of attitude, so I have to speak when I am called—which is now.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): The hon. Gentleman is getting very close to questioning the order in which the Chair calls Members to speak. I think that he should get on with the points that he wants to make.

Mr. Tyler: That is precisely my intention, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The situation does, however, give me an opportunity to ride a couple of important hobbyhorses of my own. Since my re-election to the House in 1992, I have been chairman of an all-party group concerned with organophosphate pesticides. Several hon. Members have been generous with their time and expertise in supporting the work that we have done, in co-operation with successive Ministers, to try to ensure that such pesticides are properly assessed, that appropriate warnings are given to the people who use them, and that anything remiss in the way those people have been treated in the past is rectified with proper examination, proper research and, if possible, some redress for those who have been so badly affected by their use.

In that capacity, the all-party group had a meeting yesterday with the Minister for the Environment, the right hon. Member for Oldham, West and Royton (Mr. Meacher), who has been meticulous—both in opposition and in government—in the care with which he has dealt with this issue, and generous with his time. I give him and his colleagues credit for the work that has been done to expand the research field, and to ensure that increased emphasis is put on the preventive principle. I should also like to give credit to the former Agriculture Minister, the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning), as she is in the House at the moment. She, too, played a proactive role on this issue, and I know that she has a constituency interest in it which will have informed her attitude.

The reason I mention this is that, unbeknown to us yesterday—and, I suspect, to the Minister—the Food Standards Agency was to issue an extraordinary piece of advice today. It seems to have been forced to disclose its change of attitude by an item on the news this morning from Friends of the Earth. This matter calls into question the expertise available to the Government, and the extent to which the Government's advisers are influenced by the commercial considerations of some of the largest chemical companies in the world.

In a statement that seems to have been forced out of it today, rather than voluntarily given to the media, the Food Standards Agency has

"concluded that washing fruit and vegetables is not required as a protection against pesticide residues."

[Mr. Tyler]

The agency was, apparently,

"worried that some consumers were being put off eating fruit and vegetables"

by the previous advice that they had been given; and it has therefore decided that it is perfectly easy, proper and safe not to wash or peel vegetables.

The extraordinary thing about this is that it became increasingly apparent from our discussions with the Minister yesterday—and, indeed, over many months—that the body of research evidence is far from conclusive on these issues. There is nothing in the agency's statement today to illustrate any change in the research basis for its advice. It would appear that the advice has been changed only because pressure has been brought to bear by commercial interests, not because of any change in the research base.

At our meeting yesterday, the Minister acknowledged that there was a body of scientific and medical opinion which continued to raise real concerns about the use of these pesticides, and in particular about children's exposure to them.

As recently as 15 February, in a letter sent to interested parties, the Food Standards Agency said of the action it was taking on the risk assessment of the pesticides:

"This followed concerns of a 'cocktail effect', particularly when potentially contaminated foods were to be consumed by children. Furthermore the impact of multiple residues of pesticides with similar toxic actions had been considered in the USA, under the Food Quality Protection Act."

The letter—written on 15 February, just over a month ago—went on to set out in detail further anxieties on the matter, making reference to a whole number of research projects that are in hand, and to the way in which the results of that research programme could be assessed internationally.

The decision to issue the revised advice today is extraordinary, because it does not appear to take account of any of the research already seen to be extremely relevant to the issue, and which, in many cases, is not due for completion for months, or even years. Furthermore, other research projects now coming to fruition raise new concerns about the issue. The precautionary principle that scientists increasingly accept is a good start, and represents a good basis for their advice to Ministers. I understand from my discussions with Ministers that it is one that they accept as the proper starting position for any responsible Administration. It is, however, effectively being discarded as a result of this new advice.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): The hon. Gentleman will know that I share many of the concerns that he is expressing today. As a former Minister who was obliged to advise the public about the preparation of vegetables, I have two points to make.

First, on the grounds of food hygiene—I say this as a former home economist—washing fruit and vegetables is a requirement anyway. Secondly, in the case of carrots, the evidence is clear that the top of the carrot—if it is sprayed with a substance that has an organophosphate base—absorbs far more than the rest of the carrot. Therefore, topping and tailing the carrots is sound, practical advice. I am astonished that there is no scientific verification or endorsement for the advice that is now being given to the public.

Mr. Tyler: I am grateful to the hon. Lady. There were great hopes on both sides of the House that the Food Standards Agency would provide independent advice to Ministers that was clear of all commercial considerations. However, I think that she will agree that serious questions have been raised about the practicality of the advice given by the Food Standards Agency and the basis on which it is supporting that advice. Real concern is shared on both sides of the House that, after many food scares, we must be absolutely confident that Ministers have access to the best possible advice.

As the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton is a former Minister, she will agree that it is extraordinary that, at a meeting yesterday, Ministers from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs—food is in its title, for goodness' sake—were apparently totally unaware of the U-turn by official advisers. I accept that the agency also has a relationship with the Department of Health, but if we have joined-up Government, surely Ministers with responsibilities for the environment and food should have been aware that a Government agency was about to change its mind.

This development has occurred at the very time when there are even more concerns about the way in which organophosphates have affected different people. Last week, I spent some time with the Gulf war veterans group, which is organised by the Royal British Legion and of which I am a corresponding member, in common with other Members of Parliament. There is increasing evidence that at least one of the possible triggers of so-called Gulf war syndrome is extensive exposure, as we subsequently discovered, to organophosphate pesticides. Work that has been undertaken in the United States points to that, too. I am seeking to pursue that matter with appropriate Ministers.

A few weeks ago, a preliminary report from yet another research group was published in *The Lancet*. It indicated that there may be a genetic propensity to the serious ill health that is associated with organophosphates.

Ministers and their advisers should not have been relaxing their guard; they should have been doing precisely the opposite. If the preventive principle means anything, this is a classic case where it should be applied. In layman's terms, that principle is, "If in doubt, don't." That is certainly not the current approach.

I had not intended to speak on this issue at all this morning. It was only because of the sudden appearance of the statement from the Food Standards Agency that I have done so. I had different speaking notes in my back pocket, and I now want to refer briefly to the issue of value added tax on church repairs and conservation work.

Hon. Members of all parties have shared anxiety about this issue over the years, not just because of the organisations concerned but because of this country's great historical heritage of churches, chapels and other places of worship. It was a nonsense and an anomaly that when VAT was first imposed by the previous Government, they insisted that repairs to buildings of all sorts—and particularly to those buildings—should be subject to that extra surcharge. In a way, that was against the spirit of an age in which we seek to conserve buildings

of historic and architectural value. The measure did the reverse: it encouraged people to pull those buildings down and build new ones, which was nonsensical.

I recall that the then Paymaster General, the right hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory), made a spirited but totally absurd defence of the imposition of VAT on church repairs and conservation work. Thank goodness that the general view in the House in more recent years has been that that is an anomaly and that it should be corrected. The current Chancellor decided, 18 months ago, that action should be taken. Hon. Members will recall that the Chancellor indicated that he would seek to reduce VAT to the minimum level. Of course, that is impossible in the short term. As a result a few months later—in 2001—he introduced what was referred to subsequently as the listed places of worship grant scheme.

The last thing that I want to do is express to the Minister—he will be communicating with the Treasury—any regrets that the Chancellor introduced the scheme. However, we all recognise that it was a second best and that it is immensely cumbersome. It causes a great deal of administrative inconvenience. It would have been much better if VAT had not been imposed in the first place, and we know that we cannot remove it in the short term because of the agreement that previous Governments struck with the European Union Commission and our EU partners. Nevertheless the scheme is burdensome and creates administrative problems for those responsible for churches and chapels.

I appeal to the Minister to make urgent representations to the Chancellor so that all concerned—not just Members of the House—receive a careful explanation of how the scheme operates now and how it can be simplified to improve its efficacy. It is extremely inconvenient and it is not easy to work through. I shall not describe all the details for reasons of time, but it is significant that it was left to the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell), who answers for the Church Commissioners, to try to explain how the system works. Surely, at the very least, the Treasury and the Chancellor should explain how it operates. The scheme does not apply just to the Church of England, so it was anomalous that the Second Church Estates Commissioner, who happens to be a Member of the House, should try to explain what happened in the past, how the scheme operates at the moment and how those responsible for churches and chapels can access it.

Richard Younger-Ross (Teignbridge): Would my hon. Friend be surprised to learn that a question on this issue that I tabled to the Chancellor was not answered by his Department, but was referred to the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport? I am still awaiting a reply.

Mr. Tyler: That does not surprise me in the least. My hon. Friend touches on a subject that I would like to discuss again, but we had a debate in Westminster Hall last week on the way in which Ministers tend to juggle questions for their own convenience rather than the convenience of the House.

To give an idea of the scale of the problem, the hon. Gentleman answering for the Church Commissioners said that the

"total cost of repair work in the Church of England amounts to £120 million"—

I take that to be an annual figure, but it seems incredible—and that

"the VAT on listed building work is about £10 million."—[*Official Report*, 21 January 2002; Vol. 378, c. 614.]

Those are quite large sums, and other denominations face a similar problem.

I appeal to the Minister to ask appropriate colleagues, by whatever means may be most convenient and speedy, to give us all guidance on how the schemes operates, to try to find a simpler way for those applying for grant support to obtain it, and to give us a clear undertaking about what will happen next. This is an interim scheme for the transitional period until it is possible to review the whole VAT scheme, and that cannot be before 2003–04, or perhaps even later. In those circumstances, those directly involved with the repair and conservation of historic churches and other buildings and those who represent them in the House feel that this is an important issue.

I have campaigned on this issue for years and, last year, when I tried to impress upon the Chancellor the urgency of the matter, I received more letters on this subject than on any other, including even cruelty to children or cruelty to foxes. I hope that that fact alone will persuade the Minister that the issue is of some importance. I suspect that he, too, has received a similar volume of correspondence.

2.4 pm

Mr. Alan Hurst (Braintree): I am pleased to have the opportunity to raise some thoughts on local government before the House rises for Easter. Like many hon. Members, I served on borough and county councils before I was elected to this place. I first became involved in electoral politics 40 years ago when, I am pleased to say, I was still too young to vote. Several fundamental changes have taken place since then.

The fall in turnout at local elections exercises the minds of people both nationally and locally. When I first campaigned in the early 1960s in Southend-on-Sea, turnout was normally 50 per cent. It was poor if it was 40 per cent., and it often reached 60 per cent. However, over the years, turnout has gone down and down. Last Thursday, there was an election in my division of Braintree Central—I cannot resist adding that there has been a 4 per cent. swing to Labour since the general election—but the crucial point for my argument is that the turnout was only 21 per cent., which would have been unbelievable 30 or 40 years ago.

The only year that I can think of when the general trend was not followed was 1990, after the poll tax legislation. Some people thought that it was marvellous legislation, but others took a different view. Consequently, the local elections in 1990, in effect, performed the function of a referendum on the merits of the poll tax. In some ways, that was unfair because local authorities had no power to decide whether to have the poll tax, but electors saw a clear and divisive issue on which they could make a judgment, and responded accordingly.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): The hon. Gentleman is correct. Although he might be right to suggest that the elections in 1990 were a referendum on the poll tax, another possible interpretation is that people took more interest in what local authorities were doing

[Mr. Patrick McLoughlin]

because they had to pay for their services. One problem with the council tax is that it has reduced the number of people who actually pay for the services.

Mr. Hurst: I do not entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman, but the purpose of my remarks is to stimulate thought on why local government prowess has declined over such a long period.

I was first elected to the borough council in Southend-on-Sea in 1980 and I served on the airport committee and the bus or transportation committee. The borough owned an airport and ran its own bus services. I could speak to those who had served on those co[illegible]ittees before me, and I could see the minute book for the Shoeburyness urban district council's gas works committee. Shoeburyness owned its own gas works, and I could also speak to those who served on Braintree rural district council, which owned its own water works.

By the late 1970s, a whole range of municipal enterprises, including electricity supplies, were in their final phases and had passed the more glorious stages of their development. However, if there was something wrong with our water supply, we could speak to Councillor Jones or Councillor Smith. If the gas service was defective, we would see Mrs. Brown, the local councillor on the relevant committee. There was an immediate connection between the voters and the supply of public services. Those we elected sat on the committees that could make changes.

These days, the problems are at their worst with bus services. When I served on the bus committee, I would be asked, "Why does the bus not stop at the top of Acacia drive?" Now, I can make representations to the local private bus undertaking in a town distant from the one that I represent, and it will provide me with many arguments. The main one is that it is uneconomic to provide such a service. I am sure, however, that the private undertaking thinks, "If we withdraw a service, the Government will come along with a subsidy to reinstate it." Because we have moved away from democratic local control, there is not the pressure on those providing services to respond to the wishes of the people in the localities that they serve.

There has also been a decline in the number of councils employing their own labour force. I entered municipal politics when that was a hot issue. Indeed, the borough of Southend had the great claim to fame that it privatised refuse collection in 1980. However, it is significant that it did not privatise anything else after that. The then Conservative leader of the council, Norman Clarke—he is still with us, but not as a member of the council—told me that privatisation might have been right in that case, but the ultimate advantage of a council having a direct labour work force is that they are accountable to the council. With contracts, councils have no day-to-day supervisory role and can judge only whether to renew them. By its very nature, that process could well diminish local councils' effectiveness and responsiveness.

Bob Spink (Castle Point): The hon. Gentleman mentioned Southend borough council, but will he consider unitary authorities, of which Southend is now one? Does he think that such authorities constitute a way to reconnect local people with councils and councillors, and will he comment on the fact that the council tax levied by Conservative-controlled Southend council for a band D property is just over £700, whereas Labour-controlled Castle Point council charges well in excess of £1,000 for the same category of property?

Mr. Hurst: It would be discourteous to other hon. Members to debate unitary authorities as such. I strongly opposed them when I served on Southend borough council and the county council. My purpose is not to argue that one form of council is better than another, but that we should consider the crucial reason why the influence of councils has declined. We have sought to change councils many times in the past 25 years, but without making a fundamental difference to the electorate's participation in local government.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): One other attitude is important. Has my hon. Friend noticed a change in reporting of what happens in council chambers since he and I served in local government? Virtually no reference is now made in my local papers to the work of the council; indeed, only pejorative references are made. Is it not clear that, if people do not know what councils are doing—other than through receiving political propaganda—they may fail to make any connection with their elected representatives?

Mr. Hurst: My hon. Friend makes a good point. I recollect when local papers would report almost word for word what councillors said. To read such verbatim accounts, electors must have had a high boredom threshold. Nevertheless, such accounts enabled people to ascertain what took place in local authorities, unlike the "crash" headlines that tell readers very little.

The rise of compulsory competitive tendering, which was introduced apace in the 1980s, followed fast on the decline of municipal enterprise and direct labour forces and sounded their death knell. There may or may not be an argument in favour of compulsory competitive tendering, but we should remember that, when a local authority bid for a contract, the overheads included the cost of the mayor's car, and a proportion of the costs associated with the town clerk, the running of municipal elections and almost every other element. There was never an argument in favour of that. Of course, the private contractor did not have to account for such factors in making his tender bid. I do not know whether such nonsense still applies, but the process was blatantly unfair to local authorities.

With the rise of so-called best value, I thought that the worst days of compulsory competitive tendering were over. However, some local councillors have forcefully drawn to my attention a procedure known as competitive procurement, which I thought had been abolished by the Street Offences Act 1959. Apparently, competitive procurement sets, and urges the adoption of, standards and values that make it increasingly difficult for councils to qualify as offering best value, unless they put most of their services out to tender.

Mr. Andrew Rosindell (Romford): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the problem with local government is not the introduction of compulsory competitive tendering and the extensive use of private contractors, but

the absolute failure of local government itself to monitor and assess what tendering companies are doing? Does he agree that the logical conclusion is to opt for compulsory private tendering, thereby allowing local government to focus on ensuring that the job is done efficiently, cheaply and properly? That way, people will, I hope, regain confidence in local government, and in the ability of councillors to do the job that we elect them to do.

Mr. Hurst: If the hon. Gentleman wishes to follow that course, it would be better to elect a clerk of works, rather than a councillor. A councillor's function is much broader than the monitoring of contracts, which is a job for professionals.

The decimation of local government continues apace, and extends to local authority housing. Many hon. Members doubtless represent towns with council estates that are an amazing credit to the councillors—some Labour, some Conservative, and perhaps even some Liberal Democrat—who oversaw their creation. We should consider the building style of the 1940s and 1950s, the spaciousness and sturdiness of the houses, the incorporation of village greens and greensward, and the concept that communities were created to be lived in as communities. One can still see such elements in council developments in small towns and villages throughout the land. In the 1960s and 1970s, decline set in as more and more was compressed into an ever smaller area—culminating, of course, in the ultimate folly of the tower block. We lost the concept of the community, and that loss has greatly harmed local government.

The end of council housing was probably foreshadowed by the right to buy. The right-to-buy legislation of the 1980s was entirely different from that pioneered by Sir Edward Heath, who wanted to put money from the sale of council houses towards building. We eventually reached the stage where there was no purpose beyond their being sold. As a result, local authorities' function was essentially reduced to that of a landlord's managing agent, managing properties and housing people as best they could in diminishing housing stock. Ultimately, the transfer of the entire housing stock to other bodies leaves local authorities with no function whatsoever in respect of housing its citizens, save making recommendations for housing lists that others will run.

The hon. Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink) asked whether a unitary authority would deal with such matters better than a district or county council. The question of whether a mayoral or presidential local authority is preferable to the prime ministerial or cabinet form has been discussed. Some of those forms may have their attractions, but such discussions miss the central point that local government—be it Mayor Livingstone or a committee—of a small district council—has lost responsibilities and the power to effect change.

Richard Younger-Ross: I fear that the situation is even worse than the hon. Gentleman suggests. There is a crisis not just with people voting in local elections, but with finding councillors to stand in some areas. In some parish and town councils in rural Devon, nearly half the councillors are unelected because not enough people contest the elections. Is there not a danger that, unless we can reinvigorate councils and, as he says, give power back to them, we will be fighting a losing battle?

Legislation is being enacted that will impose on councillors a duty to disclose their interests and land far more onerous than that imposed on Members of this House. As a result, many councillors in my area are considering resigning. Will that not undermine local democracy?

Mr. Hurst: I agree that it will hardly help. As I have said, if one makes the job of councillors difficult, unattractive and lacking in power and responsibility, people will not be encouraged to come forward. All hon. Members, particularly those who represent rural districts, will have met the old timer—perhaps an agricultural labourer—who served as county councillor, district councillor, magistrate, lay preacher and union official, brought up a family, did not own a car and used to pedal from village to village. They may be mythical figures, but each of us has met people like that who had a commitment to their community and made a difference to it.

Ms Julia Drown (South Swindon): Are not new regulations for parish councillors less stringent than the existing guidance, so although parish councillors might not be aware of that guidance, the regulations could be seen as an improvement? They provide a realistic and practical way forward for parish councillors.

Mr. Hurst: I do not feel as strongly about that as I do about some of the other matters that I have mentioned today. When we talk about modifying this or that regulation, there is a danger that we will dance around the issue rather than looking at it. Today, I noticed on the calendar in my office a quotation from Mr. Attlee, if one is permitted to mention Mr. Attlee these days, in which he observed:

"Democracy means government by discussion, but it is only effective if you can stop people talking."

It seems to me that we do an awful lot of talking, and all of us, councillors and Members, have e-mails, computers and every other mechanical device to transmit information, knowledge and correspondence, but the danger is that we do less because there is less for us to do—we are permitted to do less.

I fear that if responsibility for education and social services is removed from local authorities, there will be very little left for them to do. The ultimate absurdity that I have come across in my county council of Essex—it may be taking place elsewhere—is that it proposes to undertake appraisals of councillors. I am sure that that is a best value method straight out of New York city, but it shows a fundamental misunderstanding of democracy. The only appraisal of councillors that matters is the appraisal at the ballot box.

2.22 pm

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): I should declare an interest in that I have a contract with Vodafone for provision of a personal mobile phone, because I want to talk about mobile phone masts and the concerns that they cause in my constituency.

I shall come on to a particular case, but I am aware that people in many locations throughout the country are becoming so concerned about this rather grey area and the lack of scientific evidence to persuade them that masts are safe that some are even moving house to avoid living in

[Mrs. Angela Browning]

close proximity to one. I notice that the Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office is nodding. He has been extraordinarily helpful to me in earlier Adjournment debates, and I hope that he will be helpful again today. I wrote to the relevant Under-Secretary at the Department of Health on 14 February on behalf of my constituent, Mrs. Anne Cann of Crediton. Mrs. Cann has a six-year-old daughter who has been diagnosed with leukaemia, and the Canns live within 90 m of a mobile phone mast.

I raised the matter with the Under-Secretary following a report commissioned by my local daily newspaper, the *Express & Echo*. Despite sending a reminder to the Minister, I have still not received a response from the Department of Health. Will the Parliamentary Secretary ensure that I receive a substantive reply? In putting to the Under-Secretary the concerns of my constituent I also made available the information from the *Express & Echo*, and I offered to make available the detailed findings of research by Exeter university, commissioned by the newspaper and carried out in the Canns' home and the adjacent area.

Since I wrote to the Minister, we have identified four cancer sufferers living within 300 m of the mast. I am well aware from previous debates that one cannot snatch out of the air conclusions about cancer clusters. In the adult population in particular, one would expect to find people suffering from cancer in any community. However, my concern is that the Canns, to protect their daughter's health and to remain in the family home, have been forced to take measures to help to screen the house, and particularly the bedroom where their daughter Emma sleeps, from any harmful rays that may enter the property. The Parliamentary Secretary will be aware that families like the Canns live with not only the problem of having a child with a very serious illness but the constant anxiety that their home is not safe because of an external factor.

The research commissioned by the *Echo* was carried out by Dr. David Coley of the Exeter university centre for energy and the environment. The results show that the microwave emissions inside the Canns' home are more than twice the levels accepted in many other countries. Dr. Coley took measurements at nine locations in and around the property in George Hill, Crediton, and he recorded a figure of 6.5 volts per metre in the kitchen, in the garden in front of the daughter's bedroom window and just outside the property. That is more than the highest permitted limit in countries such as Russia, Italy, Switzerland, Liechtenstein and Luxembourg, and it is more than 10 times the limit set in the Austrian city of Salzburg.

One of the problems that we face is that around the world there are differences in permitted levels of exposure. Most countries comply with the guidance of the International Commission on Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection, but Britain allows emissions of more than three times the Commission's recommended levels. Limits in other countries include 6 volts per metre in Poland, Russia and Italy, and half that amount in Genoa. In New Zealand the limit is 0.28 volts per metre, and in the USA it is 0.2 volts per metre for the average city dweller.

Around the world, authorities have taken decisions that are diverse and, in many cases, the permitted levels are much lower than those decided, on scientific advice, by the UK Government. When Dr. Coley visited the Canns' property, he said it was 100 per cent. certain that the microwave field was produced by the mast. There was no extenuating factor. He said:

"Although this is well within UK guidance, it is interesting to note that it is above permitted, or recommended, levels in other parts of the world."

Since the Government came to office they have commissioned the Stewart report on the subject for their own guidance. It was written by an independent group of experts led by Sir William Stewart, the former chief scientific adviser to the Government and the current chairman of the Microbiological Research Authority. The report recommended that

"in making decisions about the siting of base stations (masts), planning authorities should have the power to ensure that the radio frequency fields to which the public will be exposed, will be kept to the lowest practical levels that will be commensurate with the telecommunications system operating effectively".

At the beginning of my remarks, I declared my contract with Vodafone. I suspect that I am not unique in the House in having a mobile phone. More and more of us rely on our mobile phones, and we are all aware of what a great boon they are. However, there has to be some balancing of the convenience to the individual of having a good signal to be able to use the phone and the significant concern about masts.

The hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) mentioned the precautionary principle. The Government should be looking seriously at adopting that principle, especially as regards the UK permitted levels. We are at odds with other countries and we need to know the scientific basis for their decisions. The Stewart report also notes that we need to take the precautionary principle into account.

When I asked Health Ministers to look into the evidence about the Cann household in Crediton, I put some other questions; for example, in the light of the recommendations of the Stewart report, why has so little research been undertaken into the health effects of mobile phone masts? There seems little tangible evidence on which to make decisions.

Bob Spink: My hon. Friend makes an extremely sound point. A lack of evidence that damage has been caused does not prove that there will be no damage in the future. Surely, we should adopt the precautionary principle especially as regards our children, who have a long time to live on this planet and who deserve care. After all, in the past there has been a lack of evidence in matters that turned out to be extremely dangerous and we got our fingers burned, so the precautionary principle is right.

Mrs. Browning: Indeed. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention.

We should be careful about children's exposure to hazards—especially ionising radiation—that might not affect adults. We should always be extremely cautious about children's health. The situation of people who live in close proximity to the masts is different from that of people who are near them only occasionally.

Mr. Rosindell: In the light of the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink), does my

hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) agree that it would be sensible not to permit mobile phone masts at schools or in areas where there could be a large number of children?

Mrs. Browning: I agree with my hon. Friend. That is a responsibility for local planning authorities. They should be able to make enlightened decisions based on Government guidelines.

We have a bizarre attitude to regulation in this country. All too often, we over-regulate on absurd matters while taking a cavalier approach to life and death issues. I am only too well aware that the lay public are fearful of science because they do not understand it. However, it is worrying to feel that the Government do not have the scientific facts on which to make informed decisions to give guidance to the general public and to planning authorities.

What health research are the Government relying on? There is an audit—a series of measurements—but is there any research into the health effects? The audit is useful, but how do those figures relate to health research? The Government's claim that there is no evidence of risk from masts should not be based on a collection of figures but on proper research into what such figures mean for the health of individuals.

What have the Government done as regards the Stewart recommendations on research and on adopting new limits? There must be evidence from other countries to show why they have set permissible limits that are so much lower than those in the UK.

The Department of Health may be having difficulty in encapsulating all these points in a letter of reply to me. However, I should like an answer to my questions. Like many Members, I want to pursue the subject in debates, questions and—I hope—meetings with Ministers and those who can give us the proper scientific evidence that will either reassure us or enable us quickly to come to a conclusion about what is and is not safe.

I commend the *Express & Echo*, an Exeter-based daily newspaper that circulates in five or six Devon constituencies, for not only taking up the problem but devoting resources to investigating it, especially in relation to my constituents in Crediton. I hope that the Minister will take the paper up on its offer to make available the detailed research carried out by Exeter university on its behalf.

I should like to bolt on to my speech a small matter that is of grave importance in rural communities. In a previous existence—in the previous Parliament—I was the shadow Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. The current Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions was then the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. He and I held many exchanges at the Dispatch Box about the Government's proposals for the future of the Post Office—the Royal Mail and the network of sub-post offices that are so much a part of our daily lives.

Many assurances were given—some of them are engrained in my memory. However, in recent weeks, all those assurances and reassurances have fallen like dust. For example, the right hon. Gentleman assured me that there would be every opportunity for people to get cash from their local rural post office. When I contended that there was no such thing as free banking, he argued me down by saying that the Government would provide something. This weekend, there will indeed be a facility to obtain cash in many rural areas from cash dispensers—but at a cost of £1.50 per transaction. That is not free banking, especially for the many people who are dependent on state benefits and retirement pensions and who draw them from the post office. A fee of £1.50 is a big chunk from one's benefit if one is obliged to use that system to draw out money.

We were also given reassurances about the Royal Mail. Members may be surprised to hear me—old Eurosceptic that I am—pray in aid the European Commission. However, some time ago, when this matter was debated by the Commission, the importance of universal delivery in these islands was recognised by Commissioners—although, interestingly, not by British Commissioners. The Commission noted that the costs should be contained and that the next-day, or second-class, delivery on which we all rely should be maintained, despite the European plan to liberalise mail and parcel services. Commissioners suggested that when licences for mail delivery were issued a levy should be made to subsidise the universal delivery of mail, so that we could continue to enjoy that service.

When I read the rather obscure minutes of that meeting, I could not believe that Ministers had rejected that proposal and were prepared to let universal delivery go hang: in other words, if we do not get our post the next day, so what; and if the price of stamps cannot be kept at a reasonable level, so what. I asked the then Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he was prepared to consider a levy on licence holders to protect universal delivery. He sent me a one-word answer, which is on the record of the House: "No." The Government have allowed the Royal Mail and the sub-post office network to disintegrate and have made absolutely no effort to honour the pledges that the right hon. Gentleman made at that Dispatch Box in a former incarnation, just a couple of years ago.

I realise that the Parliamentary Secretary cannot be expected to give a detailed answer and I do not expect him to, but I want to place my remarks on the record of the House. Under the Conservatives, the sub-post office network was guaranteed, in perhaps a rather uncharacteristic, subsidised way. We are always being told by the Labour party that it was down to us, and it was indeed down to us, in that we recognised the importance to the community of the sub-post office network. We developed plans to continue to allow people to collect their benefits from sub-post offices and plans to give the sub-post offices the right to charge for such transactions. Those charges were intended to be an important part of the remuneration of sub-post offices, to help preserve that network, which for years has faced competition from the local supermarket and other extraneous factors. To see the Royal Mail and that network disappear, as it surely will, should not come as a surprise to any hon. Member, because Conservative Members warned two or three years ago that it might happen. I am sorry that those prophecies are now—

Mr. Tyler: I am sure that the hon. Lady would not want to mislead the House but we all recall, I think, that the number of sub-post offices in the network fell dramatically during the period when her party was in government—and even more dramatically after the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley),

[Mr. Tyler]

the then Secretary of State for Social Security, decided that in future benefits should be paid through banks. The hon. Lady is a very fair Member of the House and I am sure that she will agree that some of the current tendencies and trends did not start in 1997.

Mrs. Browning: Having agreed with the hon. Gentleman earlier, I shall disagree with him emphatically on the point that he has just raised. My right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley), who served not only as Secretary of State for Trade and Industry but as Secretary of State for Social Security, recognised the importance of making changes in post offices—moving away from the old benefit book, which was so open to fraud—but also established, with public financial support, the importance of maintaining remuneration for sub-postmasters in return for giving people the opportunity to claim benefits across the counter at their local post office.

The hon. Member for North Cornwall is right to say, as I said, that sub-post offices had been closing for many years, but such closures were largely due to the fact that many sub-post offices were also the village shop. We all know that the shopping habits of people who live in villages have changed. The proliferation of out-of-town supermarkets and the fact that people are working in towns and shopping in their lunch break have all too often led to a decline in the shop section of sub-post offices. Post offices closed for many reasons, but certainly not as a result of the policies of the last Conservative Government.

When we left office in 1997, we left in place a proposal that would have brought sub-post offices into the world of modern technology. Computers would have been introduced with, ultimately, swipe cards to reduce fraud, to ensure the guaranteed income of sub-postmasters. Sub-post offices are, after all, privately run, independent businesses. Now many people cannot sell their business for love or money although they want to because they can see that, in a year or two, their income will be halved because of the Government's policies.

The Government should address the problem, because time is running out. I predict that before the end of this Parliament our mail delivery service will be in chaos, and that thousands more post offices will go out of business and disappear from the communities that they serve. That will be down to one thing, and one thing only: the mismanagement of the Post Office by the Government.

2.44 pm

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): The management of a democratic society is never easy, and government becomes even more difficult when it appears that, for one reason or another, the Government are not explaining their policies sufficiently clearly that they take with them the members of the electorate who are most affected.

I believe that the House of Commons has a special responsibility. It has a responsibility not only to look carefully at legislation but to question and, indeed, to demand an open explanation of the decisions that are being taken, either in Whitehall, to use a generic name for Government Departments, or in local government. I would not like the House to adjourn without thinking seriously about two aspects of Government policy that I regret.

The Committee that I chair produced a very specific, detailed report on the public-private partnership for the London underground. We set out the problems. Some of the problems have arisen from the fact that the underground has never been assured of a firm and continuing programme of investment, has never been able to plan properly and has always faced difficulties that are common in our railway systems, with old systems not receiving the maintenance or improvements that they need, but others have simply arisen from the fact that, over time, various Governments' policy decisions have impinged directly on the finance available—in this case for the London underground, one of the most important systems for our capital city.

I hope that the House will have the opportunity to debate at greater length the topics covered in the report. We went into not only the problems that had arisen with the PPP but the difficulties that we foresaw. We asked, among other things, for a number of safeguards that we considered important enough to be debated. First, we said that the Health and Safety Executive should be given more time to consider the case than it was being given. Secondly, we said that that contracts for the London underground should not be signed until it was clear that the House of Commons had debated, on a substantive motion, the implications of the proposals. Thirdly, we said that it was important that the House should examine the finance and the financial dealings involved in the public-private partnership.

I was therefore somewhat dismayed to receive the news that the House of Commons was not to be given the usual full 14 days to debate the issuing of what are called letters of confidence. Sometimes the English language is used, in government and elsewhere, as a means not of telling us precisely what we are doing but of confusing the issue, and in my judgment letters of confidence come rather high in that category.

It may come as a considerable surprise to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to hear that a letter of confidence is really a guarantee. Either the Government guarantee a public-private partnership or they do not, but if they choose to call the arrangement that is entered into the issuing of a letter of confidence, it is not always clear to the electorate exactly what is happening. However, this week letters of confidence were issued on the PPP of the underground, and normally the House of Commons would have 14 days in which to discuss, examine and report. Because of the imposition—I withdraw that word—

Mr. Tyler: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Dunwoody: I gladly give way.

Mr. Tyler: I wonder whether the hon. Lady would like to comment on the expression "letters of comfort", which is the term that she uses in her early-day motion, which seems to sound more like a letter of discomfort.

Mrs. Dunwoody: I should have called it a letter of comfort, not a letter of confidence. The lovely thing about the English language is that it can frequently be used in the most wonderful and flowery ways to confuse an arrangement to guarantee—a banker's undertaking. It is as simple as that. In effect, the Government tell someone who enters into what is supposedly a PPP that they will guarantee whatever happens in the future. That is the basic point that concerns me.

Many Labour and Opposition Members will have different interpretations. Some may say that PPPs are a good idea because they lever in extra money, about which many interesting arguments will be advanced. The difficulty is that if the House adjourns before it has debated those issues, it will foreshorten not only the period of time, but the responsibility of the House of Commons. That has happened not only in relation to the underground deal, because I have received a short letter from the Treasury in which it states that the Government's insurance undertakings to the aviation industry have been extended. That, too, will not be debated because of time constraints.

Let me make it clear that I have absolutely no objection whatsoever to the Government's undertaking to ensure that aviation is properly insured after the events of 11 September, so that airlines can continue to fly and people can continue to use them. I do not dispute the need for such a move. All I am saying is that the House of Commons has the right to debate such issues. If we are told that, unfortunately, such debates will not be held because of the Easter holiday, it is important to raise such issues on the Floor of the House.

I am sorry to say that that seems symptomatic of a rather real problem. Her Majesty's Government seem to have lost an ability that I prize among all others—the facility of explaining to us exactly what is their attitude on industrial policy and, above all, on a policy that directly involves the financing of major infrastructure deals. That problem should be debated, but I am very concerned about another aspect of this matter.

The House of Commons may be an inadequate organisation. Its procedures may not always be exactly what we want. From time to time, it may hold debates or behave in a way that others think are unacceptable, juvenile or even—dare I say it?—verbose and boring, but the reality is that the Houses of Parliament are the only safeguard that we and the voters have against an over-mighty Executive, who can push through decisions and decide that what is important to them is not necessarily important enough to be debated. I believe that both those tiny instances are examples of the sort of difficulty that we face.

I would have preferred the House to debate both those extensions in Government arrangements. I should have preferred to hear a clear statement from the Government on the PPP for the underground on a substantive motion. I should have preferred Treasury Ministers not to appear the Select Committee and say that they had such a narrow brief that they were unable to debate the full implications of the financial deals. I should have preferred it if all those things had happened because I do not think that the Government have a right to override the basic and vital rights of Parliament.

We may be inadequate. We may not do properly what we are asked to do. We may, as elected Members, fall short of what the voters demand of us, but if we ever stand aside and allow those rights to be pushed gently away on the basis that, somehow, it is administratively convenient—I have seen many Governments of all colours do that—we fail the electorate. We then have only ourselves to blame if people no longer want to cast their votes, and we fail in the most outrageous way to fulfil our duty as Members of Parliament. I hope that I never live long enough to see that happen in the House.

2.54 pm

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody), who has, for a long time, spoken to defend the rights of Members of Parliament, and she has done so again today with the passion that we have come to expect from her.

I want to raise several issues to show why we should receive better explanations from the Government on exactly what is happening with their policies. I shall start with perhaps one of the most worrying aspects for several hon. Members. Just over 24 hours ago, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry made a statement on the future of the Post Office and Consignia. Several of us were very worried about the issues that were omitted from the statement.

I do not believe that yesterday's statement reflected the full range of problems that the Post Office faces and the future announcements that will be made by the Post Office as it strives to compete and to turn around its business. I am particularly worried about the rumour that some 2,000, possibly more, rural post offices will close.

For just over 12 months during the last Conservative Government, I was privileged to serve as the Minister responsible for the Post Office at the Department of Trade and Industry. I asked other colleagues who held similar ministerial positions in that Government how many debates we had on the Post Office during the last five years of the Major Government. The truth of the matter is that we had very few, because the Post Office was not a national concern at the time—things were going quite well.

The Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office (Mr. Stephen Twigg): Privatisation?

Mr. McLoughlin: The Minister may say that from a sedentary position, but the only debate was on the Post Office Green Paper, and it was inspired by the then Government—I know that because I responded to the debate. I am not saying that the Post Office was not mentioned. Of course it was mentioned, but we certainly did not have the continual debates that have been held in the past few years. We have had those debates because hon. Members are concerned about the Post Office's future structure. We are very concerned about the way in which the Post Office is owned and managed by the Government.

I found out a fascinating fact yesterday. Apart from getting her geography wrong, the Secretary of State told us that the Government have decided that the Post Office will not have to pay a dividend. She also told us, however, that it is a wholly independently operated company—so why should the Government decide whether the dividend is paid? The Post Office obviously could not a pay dividend because it is losing so much money. If it were a company with proper commercial freedom, as the Government suggest, the Secretary of State or the Chancellor would not decide whether a dividend should be paid; the chairman of the Post Office would do so. Despite the mirage that the Government have created about the Post Office being a wholly separate company, we found out yesterday that it is still wholly controlled and operated by the Government.

[Mr. McLoughlin]

The other issue that I want to raise is the Government's continual increase in stealth taxes. Council tax increases throughout the country represent one of the biggest stealth taxes. I have the council tax figures for Derbyshire Dales district council, which forms the greater part of my constituency. In 1997-98, its precept on a band D property was £88.78. Council tax bills are just going out and the figure is now £118.23—an increase of £30 in five years, but that is a small element of the overall council tax bill.

In 1997-98, Derbyshire county council's precept on a band D property was £576. It is now £846—a huge increase over a limited period for people who live in band D properties.

The Government should be more honest and open about council tax rises, which are mainly a result of Government policy. As we are always being told that we have to brace ourselves for tax increases because people want better services, it was strange to discover in a small parliamentary written answer slipped out this morning that big business will pay less tax. On the one hand, we are told that the population must be prepared to pay extra taxation; on the other, the Government announce another course for big business.

The Chancellor uses stealth taxes and applies them to the British people. When I dug a little deeper to get more detail to explain the increases in council tax, I received worrying information from Amber Valley borough council. It told me:

"All pension schemes have to be actuarially revalued every three years. At the last revaluation late last year it was found that the Derbyshire Fund was significantly under funded. The major reason for this was that the returns made by Derbyshire, although well above the average achieved by local authorities in general, were not as great as had been anticipated by the actuaries in 1998. The shortfall was due to poor performance on the stock market which was itself due to a poor perception of the strength of both the world and, in particular, the British economies. The increased charge is necessary to recover the shortfall over the life of the fund. It should also be noted that the Council is also paying over £300,000 per year to compensate the fund for the effects of the cancellation of Advance Corporation"

tax levied by the Chancellor in 1997. That is one reason why Amber Valley had to increase its council tax.

One of the first things that the Government did when they took office—one has to admire them to a degree—was to do away with advance corporation tax. They said that we should not worry because the pension funds will be able to manage. That policy took £5 billion a year out of the pension system, which is fine in a bull market, but when things start to go wrong on the stock market it is not so easy to compensate for shortfalls. That is one reason why council tax is increasing throughout the country. Indeed, I understand that one of the largest increases is in the Prime Minister's constituency and I hope that his constituents make representations to him. However, council tax often falls hardest on older people because they tend to live on more fixed incomes. If the Government are not aware of that problem, they will become aware of it as the anger rises when people realise that the rate of inflation is 2 per cent., but the increase in council tax is, in the case of Derbyshire county council, 8.9 per cent.

The funding of sixth forms concerns me. Some time ago, the Government announced that they would de-layer the education funding system, which I favour. There is too much smoke around the allocation of the standard spending assessments to local government and the various spending bodies involved. The Government say that they have made a start by de-layering the funding system for sixth forms. Under the new proposal for sixth form funding, the Government will make grants to learning and skills councils. Those councils will make a further grant to local education authorities, which, in turn, will fund the sixth forms in their areas. I do not know how much simpler that is, but secondary heads in my constituency do not think that that does much to de-layer the system.

There are two issues to consider: the amount of money and the way in which it is funded. On the new proposal, a Derbyshire secondary head teacher wrote to me and said:

"For 24 hours in December, this was very good news indeed. Our provisional allocation from the LSC was £170,000 in excess of the RTG"—

the real terms guarantee. The head teacher went on:

"However, the next day we received a letter from the LEA stating that this excess has to come from the LEA and that the LEA would therefore have to recoup it from our 11-16 allowance."

The school is told that it is getting a bigger allocation for its sixth form, for which it is grateful, only to discover the next day that the extra money for 16 to 18-year-olds is to be taken from the 11 to 16-year-olds—so extra money there is none.

The Government are supposed to be working on a new funding allocation for all LEAs and on school funding in the future. I just hope that they do not try to use the same card trick that they used on the 16 to 18-year-olds because they will soon be found out and that will cause greater resentment in schools. What happened in Derbyshire is a prime example of that.

Some Labour Members have argued that education in Derbyshire has been underfunded for some time. One headmaster told me:

"If the problem of the resourcing of Derbyshire schools is ever to be sorted out, it must start with Central Government accepting the premise that there is an entitlement for funding levels for each pupil in the country from 5 to 18. Any adjustment can then reflect the disadvantage or cost. The fact that they have now done so for post 16 only makes the pre 16 situation even more shambolic. The Government is aware of the facts—they are simply ignoring them in the hope that somehow schools will cope."

The truth is that schools will cope because the staff are dedicated to ensuring that their pupils get a good education. However, they want to be treated more fairly. The introduction of the LSCs has not sorted out the problem; instead, it has added to the problem of the overall funding of schools for 11 to 18-year-olds.

On a separate issue, my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) mentioned that she had written to a Health Minister. I have had the same problem with getting answers from that Department, which I wrote to on 13 February and 6 March. A former health centre in Wirksworth would make a tremendous care home facility, which is desperately needed. Such a facility was built in 1985 at Under Hall in Darley Dale. It has 40 flats and offers short-term care. Meals on wheels are administered from there—a service that does a great deal of good for the local community.

I am sure that the Government are concerned about residential care, but we have no idea how they intend to address the problem. Residential beds in care homes are being lost, partly because of the Care Standards Act 2000.

Some 35,000 care beds have been lost over the past three years throughout the country, which adds to the problem of bed blocking. It is not a problem in isolation because it feeds back to the national health service. The Government must address the problem of residential care.

Local people are keen to establish a centre that offers residential care in Wirksworth. The project has been on their minds for more than five years. A hearty local campaign team has worked to establish a care home project, and a health care centre has now become available, but we find ourselves in an awkward position. All the trusts are about to change status, PCTs are to come online, the area health authority is to change, and so on and so forth—all of which is to take place in the next few weeks. The result is to make it difficult to assemble the combined effort needed to make our scheme work.

One of the trustees has written to me saying that the process for funding long-term care is "constantly changing", and that

"The Government's 'Supporting People' initiative will limit the funding mechanisms applicable to the project and so the ability to generate finance for development purposes. All of this unexpected and legislative change needs to be taken into consideration in order to ensure that the overall viability of the project is established. This is all rather difficult when planning within a 'fog' which sometimes seems to clear and then . . . becomes much thicker"

as local people try to secure a solution that will have a great impact on the quality of life of elderly residents of small villages and towns in the area.

I should like to pass on to the House some information that came to my attention this morning. I shall also take some time to praise Derbyshire constabulary. Various hon. Members have heard me raise with the Prime Minister the case of Stephen Downing, whose conviction for murder was quashed by the Appeal Court in January. Since the quashing, I have called on Derbyshire constabulary to re-open the case, but there has been some question about whether it would do so. Mr. Downing's conviction was regarded as very unsafe by the appeal court when his case was heard, after he had served 27 years in jail—an horrendous length of time, as any hon. Member would agree.

This morning, I received a statement from the chief constable saying:

"Following consultation with Stephen Downing, his representative and Wendy's widower, David Sewell, I have decided to carry out a re-investigation into the circumstances surrounding the death of Wendy Sewell."

In short, the case is to be re-opened by Derbyshire constabulary. I want to put on record my gratitude to the chief constable for ensuring that that is to happen. I first met Mr. Downing's father nine or 10 years ago, when he first raised his son's case with me. The fact that such a miscarriage of justice could occur and last so long in this country, in this day and age, shows an appalling failure of and gap in our judicial system. I am extremely pleased by today's announcement that the police are to re-open the investigation. I hope that in the not-too-distant future, some sound solutions will emerge as a result.

When we returned to the House in January, it looked as though the Government could be confident. That has changed in the past few weeks, however, as the issues surrounding Railtrack and the Post Office—two major industries for which the Government are responsible—have blown up. As the Chairman of the Transport Sub-Committee has just made clear, important questions remain to be answered and we will return to those subjects on our return after the Easter recess. I think that the issues I have raised today are also of great importance to local people and communities, and I hope that they will be addressed.

3.14 pm

Ms Julia Drown (South Swindon): I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin) who, like the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning), raised issues relating to the Post Office. Hon. Members on both sides of the House share their enthusiasm for the Post Office, but it should be pointed out that the closure of 3,500 post offices under Tory Governments is not a record of which those Governments should be proud.

At a time when the market is changing, the Labour Government are trying to help the Post Office to adapt. Investing £480 million in computerisation of the post office network is a step forward, and those of us who represent rural communities consider important the ring-fenced £270 million to invest in rural networks support. Both measures are important means of ensuring that key parts of our communities survive. As other hon. Members have said, there are issues relating to urban post offices, especially in disadvantaged communities, and some of that money has been set aside to ensure that those post offices survive.

The hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton voiced her opinion, without quoting much evidence, of the Government's intentions regarding the universal postal service. In all the statements made in the House it has been made clear that that service is important and should remain—indeed, the Postal Services Act 2000 created the independent regulator whose very function is to ensure that the universal postal service continues. I joined those Members of Parliament who criticised the regulator for being too keen to promote competition rather than to stand up for businesses in the sector. I believe that the regulator's No. 1 role should be to protect the universal postal service, and thanks to the pressure exerted by Members of Parliament and others we are in the process of impressing on the regulator that that should be its No. 1 goal. That is what the Government also want to achieve.

No one could doubt that the Government have throughout all their work borne in mind the continuation of the universal postal system. To voice doubt about that is unfairly to increase anxiety in the population—just as the hon. Lady did when she spoke about people on low incomes having to pay £1.50 to cash a cheque. The hon. Lady misunderstands the proposals made by the Government and the Post Office for the post office card account, which is for people who do not want a bank account but want to continue to collect their pension or benefits in cash. That account allows them to do so. There is nothing in the proposals about a £1.50 charge on the payments, and when hon. Members start to say things like that, fears are raised unnecessarily in the general population, especially in the more vulnerable groups.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): All of us want the post office card account to succeed, but is the hon. Lady confident that it will be up and running in time for April 2003, which is when, under new legislation,

[Mr. David Heath]

credits will have to start being paid through our sub-post offices? The contracts were only let in November, prior to which no preparatory work had been done. Is she confident that the machines will be in place, people will have been trained and the migration policy will be settled by April 2003?

Ms Drown: I am confident that the House can ensure that our constituents are able to get their pensions and benefits. We must ensure that the Government and the Post Office deliver that. There is no question but that that has to happen, and we can all play a role in ensuring that it does. To voice fears unnecessarily simply increases fear among the most vulnerable members of our population.

Recently, we have spent much time discussing international affairs. That has produced a significant response in my constituency postbag, and I shall take this opportunity to summarise that response for the House. One of the most positive responses has been to the Export Control Bill, which has been widely welcomed as a huge step forward in ensuring that Britain behaves responsibly in its international trade. As the Bill passed through both Houses, I witnessed a most constructive dialogue between Back Benchers and the Government to ensure that the best Bill possible was produced.

I am especially pleased that, with other hon. Members, I helped to ensure that the Government included in the Bill provisions making sustainable development a key criterion by which exports are judged. I hope that dialogue will continue and that there will be further improvements to the Bill, particularly the inclusion of a ban on offshore brokering, before it completes its passage through the House.

There is a wider issue about balancing our responsibilities to the defence industry, British jobs and exports against our international responsibility to promote peace and security. One does not need a degree in economics or marketing to realise that if our foreign and international development policy of conflict prevention is successful, that will lead to a decline in defence sales. However, the Government do not seem to have anticipated that outcome; sensible work is still not being done on defence diversification. My constituents are suspicious that, as the second largest player in defence sales, we are partly responsible for fuelling some conflicts by giving Governments and rebel movements the ammunition to fight, rather than discuss a solution. If we expect our policies to be successful, and if we hope to create a better world with less conflict, should we not do something to get the most talented people in the defence industry into more productive sectors of the economy?

I shall give two specific examples. First, my constituents are concerned that Ministers have spent Government time promoting to India and Pakistan the sale of Hawk jets, which could be used in conflict between those countries. The Government have also promoted the sale of a military air traffic control system to Tanzania—there are deep suspicions that that technology is both out of date and exceeds Tanzania's needs. Money spent on that system could be spent on health and education, which are more important for Tanzania, given the stark facts of life there: 45 per cent. of the population do not have access to essential drugs, and 160 of every 1,000 children die before the age of five. The statistics are getting worse, not better—at the beginning of the 1990s, 140 of every 1,000 children died before the age of five.

Those stark figures demonstrate the need to use our international aid budget to try to reverse that awful trend. My constituents welcome the Government's initiative to increase overseas aid and the commitment of the Chancellor and the Secretary of State for International Development to that goal. We should try to reach the United Nations target of spending 0.7 per cent. of our national output on aid as soon as possible. There is still a long way to go, but huge steps have been taken. In our diplomatic engagements, we should encourage others to follow suit, notably the United States, which has spent a pathetically small proportion of its budget on aid. Indeed, even after the recent increase of $5 billion, which will come into force in 2004, it will not spend even 0.2 per cent. of its national output on international aid.

Last week, we heard about a further increase at Monterrey but, given America's influence in the world, it is inexcusable that it is not spending more on aid. I hope that the Government will use their influence to get the United States to make a commitment to the target of 0.7 per cent. and deliver on it as soon as possible. Our society increasingly recognises that international aid is not just a moral duty but is in our interest. We need to make it clear to civil society in America that aid is about promoting peace and stability as well as creating more markets for our products and services in future.

My constituents have two further anxieties about international development. First, they are seriously concerned about possible military action in Iraq. They appreciate the fact that there are appalling human rights abuses in Iraq, that Iraq poses a threat to its neighbouring countries and that it is flagrantly ignoring UN resolutions, but they are also concerned about the situation in the middle east and our involvement in Afghanistan, and do not feel that now is the right time for the UK and the USA to embark in isolation on further military action. They urge that we should use the coalition built up to tackle terrorism to keep the pressure on Iraq and introduce via international institutions new UN resolutions to take action. They also want the international coalition to take more action against Mugabe and the problems in Zimbabwe.

Finally on international issues, I have spoken in the House on a number of occasions about the need for Britain to take a lead on the problem of child soldiers. There is no justification for sending children into conflict, yet our Government have still not fully signed up to the UN optional protocol on child soldiers. There is no reason why we could not have a separate training organisation for 16 or 17-year-olds who are interested in military service. Only when they reach adulthood at 18 should they join our military personnel. Until such an arrangement is made, we cannot be sure that we will not send 17-year-olds into conflict. I hope that the Parliamentary Secretary can raise that with the relevant Ministers. I should like an assurance that there will not be any 17-year-olds among the troops who, it was recently announced, are to be sent to Afghanistan. I trust that no 17-year-olds will be sent into that conflict.

Briefly, on domestic issues, my constituents' primary concern is funding for public services, which is especially relevant in the light of the forthcoming Budget. Concerns about health, social services and education regularly

appear in my postbag. I accept that the Government have taken major steps to deal with all those issues, but people are still waiting too long for treatment in the health service and too long for social services.

There is a particular educational issue worrying my constituents. Like the constituents of a number of other Members, they believe that the existing funding formula cannot be justified. Swindon is the lowest-funded unitary authority and is among the six lowest-funded education authorities, although the standards achieved by its students do not justify that low funding. There are huge disparities across the board: some authorities have hundreds of pounds more per pupil, even though those children achieve higher standards. That cannot be allowed to continue. I am pleased that the Government are reviewing the formula, as a new one needs to be put in place as soon as possible. It needs to be simple so that people can understand the figures, and it must increase the funds of the lowest-funded authorities like Swindon borough council. I have received that message loud and clear from my constituents. I can guarantee to the Government that more money for Swindon will be well spent in raising the standards achieved by my constituents' children.

I hope for good news about that in the forthcoming Budget which, I hope, will also deal with another concern raised by a number of my constituents—restrictions on the working families tax credit. At the moment, that credit provides a huge amount of help for many of my constituents, rewarding them for the first time for being in work. However some of my constituents, particularly those who do shift work, have a problem: they want to employ nannies to cover them at night, rather than use child minders or nurseries, which are not as flexible. I understand that the Government have been looking at that and I hope that we will get good news in the Budget so that more people will have access to the working families tax credit.

Before I conclude, I should like to raise with the Parliamentary Secretary my concern about how we make decisions in the House, and the speed with which we do so. A year ago, I requested that we e-mail oral and written questions to save the time involved in running to and from the Table Office. That issue has still not been resolved.

Two years ago, we asked for a revision of the rule about breastfeeding in the House of Commons. We have made progress on that. After our request two years ago, the previous Speaker—having referred the matter neither to the House nor to any relevant professional organisation—changed the sensible ruling allowing breastfeeding in Committees subject to the approval of the Chair, and simply banned it. The present Speaker has gone about this in exactly the right way, ensuring that professional organisations are approached and referring the issue to the Select Committee on Public Administration.

Given that all professional organisations consulted said that breastfeeding should be allowed in Committees, given the Select Committee's view that it should be allowed and given that Members are in favour of it by a ratio of three to one, it is odd that the ban continues. I am very pleased that the Speaker has said we have a responsibility to promote breastfeeding. He has been very accommodating, and I hope that further progress can be made in the near future.

What worries me is this: if we cannot secure a decision on an issue like breastfeeding, which should be non-controversial, how can we get things right when it comes to other issues on which more finely balanced judgments must be made? How can we respond to criticism from our constituents who say that we constantly pass laws insisting that people note and act in accordance with the views of professional organisations if we are not doing that ourselves?

Some may say that this is not important. It is important. Parliament should be seen to be leading the way in regard to breastfeeding, which hugely benefits both mothers and babies. Throughout the world, 1.5 million babies die every year because of low breastfeeding rates. We all have constituents whose children are readmitted to hospital owing to infections, because our breastfeeding rate is one of the lowest in Europe.

There are less clear-cut issues on which our decisions should also be right. I congratulate the Leader of the House on what he has done about some of them. One is often raised with me by constituents: why, they ask, do we start work so late? Why do we not start until 2.30 pm? If we consider this to be a serious place of work, it is hard to answer that question. Why do we start at 2.30 pm? I agree with the Leader of the House that we should at least match Thursday's hours on Wednesdays.

Mr. McLoughlin: I am sure the hon. Lady would not wish to mislead her constituents. I am sure she explains to them that Westminster Hall sits at 9.30 am two days a week, and that many Committees meet at 10.30 am. To say that an MP's day starts at 2.30 pm would be misleading, and I hope the hon. Lady will point out to her constituents that the House is working in one way or another at many other times.

Ms Drown: I entirely accept that point, but if this is indeed the supreme Chamber, why does its work start so much later than the House's other work? Of course, Members have two places of work. It is right for us to start at 2.30 pm on Mondays, so that constituency surgeries and the like can be dealt with in the mornings. But there is no reason for us not to work from 10 am until 7 pm on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, and start at 10 am on Thursdays. Then, perhaps, we could leave at 3 pm on Thursdays, and more of us could be in our constituencies by the evening.

The House is divided over the report on Select Committees. I do not think we should pay Select Committee Chairs extra; I do not think that that will change the culture in this organisation. I would prefer the money to be spent in other ways.

I hope we shall see two more measures in the Queen's Speech. Earlier today, the hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) presented a ten-minute Bill to draw attention to continuing antisocial behaviour on the part of travellers. My constituents regularly experience such behaviour, and I fully expect them to experience more in the summer. We could make sensible changes, which I think would be supported throughout the House.

Then there is the issue of legislation on sexual offences. The Government have rightly reviewed it, but it is outrageous that in rape cases the defence of honest but unreasonable belief in consent remains on the statute book. It has a real impact on all rape cases: it deters rape

[Ms Drown]

victims from coming forward and pressing charges, as they rightly should. I hope that the issue will be a key priority in the Queen's Speech.

I am grateful for the opportunity to raise so many of the issues that my constituents have raised with me. I hope that the Deputy Leader of the House will in turn raise them with the relevant Ministers.

3.35 pm

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury): I want to raise three constituency issues, each of which is the responsibility of a different Department—thus landing the Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office with a varied task.

The first issue, the future of the sub-post office network, has already been mentioned by my hon. Friends the Members for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) and for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin). I hope that the Government will act on the commitment that I understood the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to make yesterday—to keep the House informed of further developments in the planned reorganisation of what we must now think of as the company formerly known as Consignia.

I willingly acknowledge that for many years sub-post offices, like other small retail businesses, have experienced the squeeze experienced by most high-street shops as shopping habits have altered. I believe, however, that their plight has been worsened by the present Government's policy of requiring all pensions and benefits to be paid into bank accounts from next April, rather than being collected in cash over the counter. The hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) mentioned that.

Coupled with the drastic restructuring of the Post Office organisation announced by the board in the last couple of days, that shift in Government policy raises serious questions about the future of the sub-post office network. All of us who represent rural or part-rural constituencies will know of sub-post offices that have closed for various reasons in recent years. My constituency has lost sub-post offices in villages such as Loosely Row and Great Kimble, and even Butlers Cross and Ellesborough. My weekend constituent, the Prime Minister, cannot just walk down the drive from Chequers to visit his sub-post office on a Saturday morning; he must mount his bicycle and cycle several miles to Wendover or Great Missenden to perform whatever transactions he has in mind.

I agreed strongly with what the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome said earlier. Given the Government's record of handling information technology projects, the question of whether the new system will be up and running on 1 April 2003, as promised, is at the very least subject to some doubt and apprehension. When we look back on the national insurance computer system or on the systems of the Passport Agency and the immigration and nationality directorate, or if we even consult the 1901 census website, we see a track record of promises which—although I am sure they were made in good faith by Ministers and officials—have not been delivered. It is members of the public who have lost out.

In her statement yesterday, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry acknowledged the need to focus on the impact of the reorganisation of Parcelforce and, probably, to update the House on further developments regarding Post Office reorganisation on future occasions. We know from the way every newspaper had been briefed over the weekend and on Monday that it is a part of the Post Office's new corporate strategy to reduce the number of urban post offices, to follow the reduction in the number of rural sub-post offices that we have seen in recent years.

For those of us who represent urban or part-urban constituencies, as I do, there is a real concern that the people who will be most seriously and adversely affected by such a change in the Post Office's strategy will live in the poorer areas of our towns and cities. In places such as Southcourt, Quarrendon or Elmhurst, in Aylesbury, or in large council estate areas of the town, people regard their local sub-post office and the small parade of shops that surround it as providing an important service in the local community and as an important focus of community life. I impress upon the Minister my hope that the Government will provide early opportunities to brief the House on further developments and to provide it with ample opportunity, in Government time, to debate the future of the Post Office system once we return from the Easter recess.

My second subject concerns the approach of the Ministry of Defence to the future development of the Princess Mary hospital site at RAF Halton, in my constituency. The site is part of the extensive RAF base at Halton. The hospital itself has been closed since 1996; two years later, the Ministry declared that the hospital was surplus to military requirements, and the site was handed over to Defence Estates for it to plan for its future.

Every organisation in the villages of Wendover and Halton, which are separated by the base at RAF Halton, accepts that it is reasonable and proper to have development—probably residential, in the main—on that brownfield site. The argument locally, which is now with the Ministry, is about the scale and density of the proposed development and about the way in which the Ministry has handled this local controversy.

This is a sensitive site; it lies immediately below the scarp of the Chiltern hills and is on the fringe of the green belt and the Chilterns area of outstanding natural beauty. Wendover, the parish within which the site lies, is a small community of just under 7,000 people. The local services have been developed to deal with the needs of a community that size. Even so, the schools, the family doctor practice and parking facilities in the village are all under considerable pressure.

The Ministry of Defence wants a return on its site and planners want to squeeze houses into rare brownfield development sites. The local village communities are fearful that the development will make a sudden and drastic change to their size and character. Surely the right forum in which to resolve these competing demands should be the planning system, particularly the local plan inquiry for Aylesbury Vale district council. That had been proceeding for a considerable number of months in 2000-01 and is subject to an inspector's report. The initial conclusions are expected probably in July this year.

There have been competing interests as well. During the course of the public inquiry, Aylesbury Vale district council argued that the site should be developed to provide 230 homes, a hotel and a sports pitch, while the Ministry of Defence argued for a more densely packed

development, with some 330 or more homes and a small play area. What came as a bolt from the blue was a letter dated 12 October 2001 from GVA Grimley, the Ministry of Defence's advisers and agents. It wrote to Aylesbury Vale district council, while the evidence from the public inquiry was being considered by the inspector, to submit a planning application for no fewer than 480 homes on that one site.

The application went in despite the fact that all the evidence and arguments were before the inspector, whose conclusions should be known in July this year. It went in despite the fact that the Ministry of Defence had argued for a significantly lower number during the course of the inquiry. It went in despite the fact that the Ministry of Defence had spent £67,500 of taxpayers' money in fees for its legal and other professional representation in the course of the public inquiry.

What aggravated and sharpened the sense of grievance in Wendover and Halton was the written answer that I received on 27 November 2001, reproduced at column 763. The Under-Secretary of State for Defence, the hon. Member for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie), made it clear that the decision to instruct agents to submit the planning application had been made as early as December 2000, while the inquiry was taking place. So while the Ministry was submitting its evidence for 330 houses to be put on the hospital site, it was secretly authorising a later planning application for a much higher figure, without consulting anyone in the local community.

Mr. Andrew Love (Edmonton): I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will recognise that one of the recommendations of the planning Green Paper is that planning applications such as he has described should be outlawed. The hon. Gentleman expresses concern on behalf of his constituents about density, a concern that is shared by people up and down the country. Yet we must recognise, especially in urban areas such as my own in London, that we need to increase densities if we are to respond to housing pressures. Was that taken into consideration in the planning inquiry to which the hon. Gentleman refers?

Mr. Lidington: The hon. Gentleman is right to point out that that is a perfectly legitimate line of argument. The answer to his question is yes. The Government's new guidelines about density in brownfield areas were available during the course of the public inquiry and they will be considered by the inspector, no doubt when he comes to draw his conclusions. My point is that these contrary arguments should be resolved through the proper planning process. The action of the Ministry of Defence is subverting, in what I can only describe as an underhand manner, the planning process in which local people had put their trust and to which they had submitted their arguments in good faith.

I believe that the Ministry of Defence would be well advised to withdraw the application that is before the council and accept that the right way forward is to await the inspector's conclusions and then, in the light of his findings, submit whatever planning application may be appropriate for the whole of Aylesbury Vale district. The Ministry of Defence should take into account the inspector's analysis of what a dense development of the site would mean not simply for housing provision but in terms of the impact on other local services such as education and primary health care.

The third and final subject that I want to bring before the House is the Central Railway project. That, as many hon. Members know, is a private sector scheme to construct a freight line from Liverpool to Lille. Part of its alignment would run along the former Great Central Railway route. As regards my constituency, Central Railway would propose to take over the line operated by Chiltern Railways. The project would adversely affect my constituents in Saunderton, Bradenham, Princes Risborough, Longwick and Ilmer.

Ever since the scheme was mooted, I have been clear that the proposal would be detrimental to the quality of life of the people in my constituency whose homes were near the track. The railway would pass through the middle of the Chilterns area of outstanding natural beauty and would have an impact on National Trust property near Bradenham and West Wycombe.

When the scheme was first proposed, I thought that it might be a case where I would have to try to balance the competing interests of my constituents anxious about noise and development, and the national interest, which is to encourage rail freight. However, as I came to study the detail, I found the case for the project less and less persuasive. I have never been able to understand Central Railway's assertion that it could somehow raise the £4 billion or more that would be needed to finance the development, yet recoup that money at a reasonable rate of return for its investors, while still keeping charges to hauliers low enough to attract freight off the road and on to its railway line. I do not see how its figures add up.

I have also been influenced greatly by the consistent and clear statement from Chiltern Railways, the passenger operator in my constituency, that Central Railway's proposals as published are incompatible with its current, let alone any improved, level of passenger services. That is why I voted against the Central Railway Bill when it was introduced in 1996.

Central Railway later came back for a second shot. First, it sought an order under the Transport and Works Act 1992, then in January 2001 it asked the Government to support a hybrid Bill to authorise its scheme. For my constituents, the hybrid Bill procedure would have the considerable disadvantage of limiting the right of local people and organisations to argue their case in full before an inspector at a public inquiry.

Where do the Government stand? A recent written answer from the Minister for Transport states that he is not yet persuaded of the case for a hybrid Bill to authorise the scheme, but that he nevertheless wishes to go ahead with a further six months' study, led by the Strategic Rail Authority, to analyse further evidence as to whether the scheme is workable.

My constituents, particularly those whose properties are being blighted by the proposal, are becoming increasingly impatient. The request for a hybrid Bill was made by Central Railway to the Government at the end of January 2001. The Government later asked the Strategic Rail Authority to provide them with an analysis. The SRA commissioned expert consultants to look into the detail. The SRA reported to the Government at the end of last summer. It has taken the Government the months until now to come up with a decision, which turns out not to be a final decision. We cannot even examine the arguments that the SRA and the Government have considered, because both the SRA and the Department for

[Mr. Lidington]

Transport, Local Government and the Regions have so far refused to make public the SRA's report to Ministers or the consultants' report on which the SRA based its recommendations.

There has been a recent, very important change. A couple of weeks ago, the Government finally announced their welcome decision to renew for 20 years the franchise for Chiltern Railways—an operator which none other than the Secretary of State described to me in the House as a company offering a premium service. Chiltern Railways, as I said earlier, has consistently taken the view that there is insufficient capacity on the existing line to accommodate both Central Railway's proposed freight service and the current level of passenger services. It says that Central's objectives could be achieved only by building two separate dedicated freight tracks alongside the present Chilterns line, which is not what Central Railway is proposing.

Central Railway has always asserted the contrary. It has said that plenty of capacity exists, and it has adduced a study that it commissioned from the consultants Halcrow in support of its case. However, a letter that I received earlier this week from the managing director of Chiltern Railways sets out his case in trenchant terms. He states that, in particular, Central Railway suggests that

"a frequent freight service could operate with only modest changes to the infrastructure. I attach a briefing note which sets out why this is not true."

The managing director summarises his case. He states, first, that the train timetables produced by Central Railway in support of its argument

"include a high proportion of freight trains which could not actually be fitted in."

He continues:

"The notion of a frequent long-distance international freight service between Lille and Liverpool operating to the level of accuracy required to get anyway near their proposed frequency is not realistic."

The managing director argues that the expansion of passenger services committed to the Government by Chiltern Railways in the new franchise—it envisages a 50 per cent. growth in passenger numbers in the first 10 years alone—

"further erodes the limited scope for the sort of frequency proposed by Central Railway."

He goes on:

"Central Railway state that the only extra tracks required would be loops at a few locations. However, the wide gauge of the Central Railway trains would require every station platform on the Chiltern Line to be rebuilt and new tracks installed through every station—a major undertaking, with implications for land-take, disruption to services during construction, and loss of space for station parking."

It would be ironic if, in order to support what I consider at present a misguided freight project, and in order to support the laudable objective of getting more freight on to the railways, the Government gave support to a scheme which severely damaged probably the most successful passenger operator in the country, and drove thousands of people into their cars because that efficient, frequent passenger rail service from Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire to London and the west midlands was no longer available to them.

Why is there the need for a further six-month review? Surely the studies of capacity that were carried out in the 16 months while the Government were considering the Chiltern franchise renewal provide all the evidence that Ministers need. Finally, if the Minister wants us to have confidence in the good faith of the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, I ask him please to publish the Strategic Rail Authority's report and the consultants' review on which its recommendations are based. I do not see the difficulty for the Government in letting Members of Parliament and, more importantly, our constituents understand the detail of the arguments that Ministers must now consider. Greater openness will breed greater trust and better decisions.

3.59 pm

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North): I sometimes wonder why we are all here, but then I remember that we fought a civil war and a revolution centuries ago so that Parliament could keep its eye on the legislature and, above all, on public spending. After all, that is why we had our civil war. Essentially, that is the heart of the relationship between the Executive and the legislature.

As I recall, we won that conflict and that is why you are in the Chair, Madam Deputy Speaker, and why Parliament should, nominally at least, be supreme in the politics of our nation. However, although the principle then was that not a penny should be spent without parliamentary approval, it seems to have slipped somewhat. The Executive have begun to entrench their power. Let us be honest: they have taken over most of the functions that should fall to this House.

What would have happened more than 100 years ago, in a typical day in the House for looking at expenditure? Let us consider 10 May 1966, when Mr. Gladstone was—[HON. MEMBERS: "1866!"] Forgive me—if only.

In 1866, Mr. Gladstone was being held to account about pay for rectors and missionaries in the Canadian colonies. The estimate was £2,513, which is equivalent to about £118,000 today. He had to defend the estimates. During the rest of the day, he had to defend the amount of money for the Indian Department, the governorship of the Cape of Good Hope and the amount going to the Pitcairn islands. One of the greatest political figures ever to grace this House was called to account by Parliament to justify his Government's spending.

Today, the principle of control of supply is only a principle. It has died in practice and is preserved only in the rituals of this House. The Government spend £418 billion on behalf of ourselves and the electors and yet scrutiny of that spending is purely ceremonial in this place. We have all sat here for Consolidated Funds, spring and winter estimates, estimate and Supply days. There is little holding the Government—of any complexion—to account.

In the last Parliament, we spent more time discussing the contents of the millennium dome than the Government's spending plans over the four years. The very terms "Supply day"—at the heart of the conflict in the civil war—or "estimates day" have become something of a misnomer. They are simply an excuse for general debate. They are part of the arcane theatre of Parliament.

Just before Christmas on an estimates day, we nominally nodded through £1 billion in expenditure for culture, media and sport, but the debate was in fact on the world athletics championships. That should not have happened, important though those championships are. On the next day, almost £1 billion was nodded through for

the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, with an excuse for a debate on waste disposal. Important though that matter is, it is not the heart and soul of the relationship between the Executive and the legislature.

That is not the scrutiny that makes our role here important and legitimate. There is a place for that role in many other legislatures. This place is the odd one out among western democracies. The classic example is the United States, which took the lessons of our struggles in the 17th century far more to heart than we did and, unlike us, has not forgotten them.

The United States created a system based on the separation of powers that made the legislature an equal partner in creating the federal budget. Indeed, many might argue that it is an over-mighty partner, but would that that were the criticism in this House. That is why some presidents have sought the line-item veto to strike out individual items of spending proposed by the legislature, Congress, without wrecking the entire budget. That is a significant contrast to the situation here. In one great democracy, the Executive think that they have too little control over public expenditure and in another, they deny the legislature any real control at all.

There is another significant contrast. The Americans constantly debate their system of democratic control over spending and we do not. As in so many ways, Parliament has acquiesced in a complete take-over of the functions of the state by an over-mighty Executive, controlled by whichever party happens to be in power. There is a long, almost mystifying, list of things that this House cannot do as regards public expenditure and scrutiny. It would amaze our constituents—if they were bothered to take any interest in the matter, or we allowed them access to some of the arcane procedures by which we disguise the process.

First, we cannot ask for money to be added to a Department's budget. We still maintain half of the 17th century formula that the Crown proposes expenditure, even though the second half—that the Commons grants the money needed—has become obsolete. Secondly, we cannot suggest that a Department's budget be reduced without it ending with the farce of a vote of confidence. We cannot suggest that any particular programme or spending on a policy area might be transferred from one Department to another that seems more appropriate. For example, we cannot suggest that the Department of Health should become the lead Department for spending on food policy, or that constitutional and electoral matters should be reassigned to my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House.

Within the estimates for each Department, we cannot suggest that money be switched from one programme or policy objective to another. In the Home Office, for example, we cannot suggest a different mix of spending between policing, crime prevention, community development and victim support, thereby expressing not only a policy view but getting to the heart of how it becomes live by changing the balance in public expenditure. We cannot suggest such a change or, unlike many other legislatures, negotiate a change in partnership with the Executive.

Before making such suggestions, we would need to know how money is assigned to different objectives. In spite of improvements in the presentation of our public accounts, that is still a difficult task not only for us but even for Ministers who are nominally in charge of public spending in particular areas.

For example, could my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health tell me with any certainty how much his Department spends in a year on preventive medicine compared with hospital care? Without effective scrutiny, can Ministers, let alone Members of Parliament, identify the main beneficiaries—our electors—of public expenditure by their Department? Could my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions tell me how much of his budget serves the needs of different classes of transport user? How much does he spend helping car drivers compared with public transport passengers? How much of his spending benefits inner cities, compared with the suburbs or rural areas? Those questions are barely thought about. The departmental Select Committee thinks about them, but this House, as a Chamber and an institution to hold the Government to account for policy and spending, rarely touches their surface.

Who gets what is the issue at the heart of our democracy, but Ministers, let alone this House, cannot get to grips with it. We spend money or we give it away almost with no idea of where it ends up and that applies to parties of all political persuasions.

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings): The hon. Gentleman has a long pedigree in these matters and a great interest in them. Indeed, he has written about the subject. I have a three-part question. First, has he explored these matters through written questions to Ministers? Secondly, in his analysis he seems to ignore the role of Select Committees, especially the Treasury Committee, on the departmental matters he raised. Thirdly, I am surprised that he has not mentioned the Public Accounts Committee, which is particular to our Parliament—there are parallels in other democracies, but our Committee is a good model. How does he view the role of those Committees in bringing the Executive to account in the way that he recommends?

Mr. Allen: The hon. Gentleman has followed my logic so impeccably that he anticipates the very points that I am about to make.

As a former member of the Public Accounts Committee, I believe that it was the doyen of all our parliamentary Committees. I felt uneasy that it was jealous of the 900 accountants who worked for it in the National Audit Office. I have even suggested to its Chairman, the hon. Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh), that that incredible asset should be shared with other Select Committees without being diluted. It is for the Liaison Committee to discuss how the change might be made. Perhaps it could involve commissioning with the authority of the Public Accounts Committee one, two, three or four reports a year to be debated by individual Select Committees.

Mrs. Dunwoody: My Committee has already availed itself of the sterling efforts of the National Audit Office. I not only strongly support such an approach, but believe that there is a case for widening the remit and moving closer to arrangements such as those in America in relation to the General Accounting Office.

Mr. Allen: My hon. Friend is very experienced in these matters and has attempted to move the agenda along in the Liaison Committee, as have other colleagues in the

[Mr. Allen]

Modernisation Committee. Good work is being done, but, perhaps at her expense, I must say that unless Opposition parties above all realise the weakness of this House in the face of the Executive, there is not much hope for the rest of us. It is very important that Oppositions of all parties come together to discuss and agree where they wish to go if they reach power. Many Labour Members discussed for long and barren years how we would make progress on greater and more effective parliamentary scrutiny of finance. It is all well and good for Opposition Members to chide particular Ministers, but the long-term answer must be that commitments and promises of a read-my-lips nature should be made by parties of all descriptions inside and outside the House, so they are committed wholly and irrevocably in opposition to do things when they get into power, as were Norman St. John-Stevas and the Conservative Opposition before 1979. When colleagues become members of the Executive, they seem to lose that radical edge on needing to keep the Executive under control, with the implication that it is okay providing that they are pulling the levers. It is not okay, and I hope that Opposition Members will add to that radicalism and ensure that their promises are very clear.

Mr. Tyler: I apologise for intervening on the hon. Gentleman during his speech, which I have followed with great interest. Will he comment on another extraordinary anomaly? After a general election, or at the time of a reshuffle, the Prime Minister can completely alter the geography and architecture of the administration of Whitehall. He can give different responsibilities to different Ministers, perhaps making continuity in policy and allocation of resources even more difficult, without any reference to the House of Commons or any opportunity for Parliament to hold the decision to account.

Mr. Allen: The great loss of potential in our democracy is that Executives of all parties fail to see Parliament as a possible partner. Parliament is always an institution that can undermine or deflect Government from their given course. Those in government are increasingly beginning to realise that they cannot do everything, and need partners. The work of hon. Members on Select Committees makes it clear that they can assist the Government in achieving policy objectives, providing better value for money and chasing policy initiatives to fruition.

If the Government could only give of themselves by becoming a partner and listening to both Chambers, and make that approach clear to the Governments of the nations of our country and to local government, we could achieve a lot more. We could certainly achieve a great deal more in getting value for the tax pounds that we all pay in public expenditure and which nominally go through this House—the issue to which I should like to return. The House has some fundamental weaknesses in scrutinising expenditure. It is still largely backward looking. We consider money as it is being spent or wasted, or afterwards, rather than before, and we still do so against narrow criteria. We ask whether money was correctly accounted for and supervised rather than whether it was spent productively. We do not ask whether it was spent in the best way, or even whether it was sensible in terms of achieving the declared object.

Involving the House in considering how we might better spend public money would not merely be a political investment but a sound financial investment on the part of the Government. Although the Executive sometimes appear not to believe it, there is immense talent in the House and great specialist expertise that should be put to work on the nation's behalf. Our system still militates against creative spending by Ministers. Departmental spending is still locked into particular programmes or departmental functions.

Ministers are penalised for having a new idea about what to do in their Departments. They are faced with a choice between begging the Chancellor and then the House for a supplementary estimate, or, far more likely, carrying through their brilliant new idea at the expense of equally valuable existing projects. We all have experience of the results in our constituencies, especially in health and education. Many ideas and initiatives have been proposed that could deliver genuine improvements in their respective services, but when they are rolled out locally, they are often achieved only by squeezing existing initiatives in health, education and other sectors.

An allied problem is that public expenditure proposals and their scrutiny are still locked into an annual cycle. Despite a great deal that was said early in the current Administration's term of office, many of those accounting regimes persist in government, even though it is clear that many policy objectives need sustained investment rather than what is provided when there is a need to bid again every year. The House has almost no opportunity to examine the progress of public investments over a longer cycle, and still less ability to call for new objectives of sustained public spending and investment. The consequences of annual budgeting are felt locally and will be familiar to every hon. Member. Important local programmes live from hand to mouth and are never certain whether the central funding that sustains them will be maintained from one year to another.

There are a couple of examples in my constituency. The Bulwell toy library involves one person who provides a service in the local community by getting toys to kids from poorer areas, but who did not know until a week ago—just a couple of weeks before the end of the financial year—whether she would be employed from 1 April. What nonsense. It is a waste of time and effort for a dedicated person to have to bid for their job and not know whether it will continue. The result is that we lose good, public-spirited, community service-oriented people who decide that they cannot tolerate it any longer and seek more stable positions elsewhere. I found out about another local example by talking to my chief constable, who laid off 100 people connected with our burglary reduction initiative. As a serious manager who was uncertain whether the initiative would be renewed at the end of the year, he had to decide whether to keep on the employees until the end of that period, when there might be no funding, or to make a rational managerial decision and lay them off.

We must do better in spending public money and sustaining such projects. What about the answers? I shall leave them to my hon. Friend the Minister. He seems to have many answers to many issues, and I am confident that he can come up with a few in this context. We have talked about the Liaison Committee, the Modernisation Committee, a wider role for the Public Accounts Committee and the Select Committees themselves.

I propose a more general answer to my own question by urging Governments of whatever political colour to view parliamentary scrutiny of public spending not as a threat or an insult, but as something that will benefit government and Government programmes. No Minister should feel affronted by the House having different ideas on how to spend their Department's money or suggesting that they could spend it in a different way. The House should be a valued partner in matching spending to policy—not a lapdog, a scold or an enemy.

I hope that my hon. Friend will consider these matters seriously, as he did those that I raised in the Christmas Adjournment debate, and I look forward to his comments. This is a long-term question for all hon. Members and for all parties. We must decide whether to give our Parliament a real role as we enter a new century or to continue to play at discussing policy issues without getting to the heart of policy implementation, which is finance. If this place does not scrutinise finance and get involved in the detail and authorisation of public expenditure, it is nothing.

4.21 pm

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): It is a genuine pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen). I agree with much of what he said, and if he had included Crown prerogative in his discussion of the role of enhanced scrutiny, I would be able to agree with all of it. He has done the House a great service.

I always become concerned on behalf of the Parliamentary Secretary at this stage because it seems that he needs such an encyclopaedic knowledge of the workings of government that it will be almost impossible for him to respond to all the points that hon. Members have raised. To assist his economy of thought, I will touch on elements that have already been discussed by the hon. Members for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin) and for South Swindon (Ms Drown).

My subject concerns almost the fundamental point of why we are here—to represent our constituencies in matters of taxation. The taxation that I have in mind is not nationally derived income tax, but the council tax, demands for which are currently landing on everybody's doorsteps. Our constituents would expect us to have an opportunity to discuss that before we adjourn for Easter.

As the hon. Member for West Derbyshire said, this year's council tax increases are unsustainable and unfair to individuals—as they were last year and the previous year, and have been for a considerable time. Those increases have the greatest impact on people with fixed incomes, limited incomes, or both—especially pensioners who find that whatever minimal increase they receive in their pensions is more than wiped out by their council tax demands.

The Government have two traditional responses when the size of council tax increases is discussed. First, they announce to an inquiring world that some completely mythical figure will be the average council tax increase across the country. This year they suggested that it would be about 5 or 6 per cent. Yet we have only to look at district and county council tax increases across all our shire counties to realise that that is a myth. The vast majority are having to impose an increase that is greater than the suggested average, and many are hugely in excess of that.

The second defence is that those councils are uniquely incompetent or profligate. It is often suggested that that depends on local political control, and that a party in one part of the country has simply decided to impose massive increases on council tax payers in that area. That will not wash any more. It is not true, and the public increasingly understand that because newspapers are getting their heads around local government finance and are not prepared to accept Government announcements at face value. That applies to successive Governments, not only the current Administration.

The *Daily Express* announced an increase in council tax of 15 per cent. in a banner headline. *The Times* considered the reasons for the changes in council tax and the shift from national to local taxation. In my area, the *Western Daily Press* reports that all councils in the south-west face the same problems. It does not matter whether councils are controlled by Liberal Democrats, the Conservative party or the Labour party because they have the same problems. No council wishes to increase the council tax any more than it has to; every council finds that it has to do that, not to improve services or to add value to them but because the system functions in that way.

People in Somerset are upset by the increases there, but that also applies to our neighbours in Dorset. For example, the newly elected Conservative district council in Christchurch—elected on a manifesto commitment to cut council tax—has increased the council tax by more than 30 per cent. It did that because it had no choice; taxation has been transferred from national to local level. That applies to many councils.

Shire counties that are increasing their council tax by more than 20 per cent. include district councils in East Sussex, Hampshire, Kent, Lancashire, Northamptonshire, Cambridgeshire, Surrey, Worcestershire and Staffordshire. Such increases are universal.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): To help our deliberations, let me give the example of Bromley borough council, where a Liberal Democrat-Labour coalition managed to increase the council tax by 35 per cent. in the past three years. The Conservatives regained control last summer and announced an increase of 4.5 per cent. for this year, as well as the ridiculous Assembly surcharge. How has it managed to do that?

Mr. Heath: The right hon. Gentleman shows what a lottery the council tax is. One Conservative council increases it by more than 30 per cent. and others decrease it. For example, Islington and Liverpool, which are urban, Liberal Democrat councils, have cut the council tax this year, unlike the Conservative council in Bromley. A system whereby decisions are taken nationally and based on a clearly defective formula is nonsensical.

I am making the same argument as the hon. Member for West Derbyshire when he objected to the impact on Derbyshire. The formula is currently dysfunctional. Local thrift and good management are not rewarded, and many councils face impossible decisions about providing services that people want. That is wrong. I shall not go into detail about Somerset because that would overtire hon. Members. There has also been an Adjournment debate on the subject.

The Government are in denial about social services expenditure and the effect of delayed discharges and closures of elderly persons' homes. They do not appear to

[Mr. Heath]

understand the impact of what is happening, especially in the south-west and the south-east, on social services departments. It is no good saying that much more money has been spent and that the problem is therefore solved. It is not; the extra money was given with one hand and taken away with the other.

Flooding is another example of such denial. Everyone is aware of the effects of flooding over the last few years, and of the need to invest more in flood defences, yet the Government are not providing the cash for that. That is a matter of great concern.

Another small, but important illustration of this phenomenon was provided when I visited the Cary environmental site in my constituency last week. It is a marvellous area, and I put on my wellies and trudged through the bulrushes in the marshes, which have been created from a waste disposal site. The site has been restored, recovered and put to good environmental use—an excellent concept, brilliantly executed—in providing real environmental advantage and educational opportunities for children.

I was in the company of the chairman of the trust that runs the site, and he told me about his tee-shirt, which says on it, "Somerset Levels Mountain Rescue Team". For those who do not know the Somerset levels, the concept of a mountain there is a rather strange one. This was a joke. There is, however, a mountain of fridges—of all things—developing next door on the Dimmer waste disposal site, about which I have had my doubts for all sorts of reasons associated with its situation, rather than its management.

It is ludicrous that local authorities have to pay for the storage of mountains of fridges. It is estimated that it is going to cost this country £75 million this year to store them. Why? Because a Minister and our civil service could not, apparently, read the piece of paper that was put in front of them to sign by the European Union, and because they did not understand the consequences for the country of signing it. This will have an impact on local council tax payers, and on the environment, which could have been avoided but was not, because it was not foreseen, and because the Government have been slow to come forward with solutions.

Other Members wish to speak, so I shall draw my remarks to a close. I would, however, like to make just one more point. I have spoken at length about the aggregates levy in the past, because I represent the Mendip area and the limestone aggregate quarried from there supplies the products from which a great deal of the infrastructure of the south-east is probably built. The three counties of Somerset, Leicestershire and Derbyshire between them provide the majority of the stone that is quarried in this country.

I have my quarrels with the way in which the aggregates levy has been imposed, and is to be administered. I am greatly disturbed at the moment by the so-called sustainability fund, which was supposed to be the reason behind the levy. The argument was that people who lived near quarries suffered unacceptable detriment to their environment and amenities, and that the levy would be recycled to provide a solution to some of those problems. Apparently, however, the Government now intend to siphon off all the money into national funds for national purposes—all very worthy ones, I am sure, but it will not be used to make a jot of difference to the people who live cheek-by-jowl with the quarrying industry in the three counties that bear the brunt of its activities.

That cannot be right in principle, because that was not the basis on which the aggregates levy was sold to us. It cannot be right in detail, because the levy is due to come into effect in a couple of weeks' time and we still do not know how the sustainability fund will operate, which again shows extraordinary incompetence on the part of the Government. Furthermore, it cannot be right because, even if Somerset, Leicestershire and Derbyshire were to take up the offer on the table from the Government to have a certain amount of money top-sliced from the sustainability fund, that would still be less than half of what the Government had proposed, and less than half of the additional cost to those counties of the operations of their local authorities in terms of the effect of the aggregates levy on building in the counties.

This so-called environmental tax is, therefore, not going to have the desired effect at quarry level, for the reasons that we have debated at length. It will not even have the effect of environmental betterment on localities, because of the way in which the Government propose to operate the funds. I ask the Government to reconsider this issue as a matter of urgency, and I hope that this message will be delivered to the Treasury and to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. I also hope that we will develop a system for funding local government that is transparent and fair, and that does not include the absurd addition of the area cost adjustment, which so distorts the funding systems in this country at the moment.

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): My hon. Friend has rightly raised concerns about the council tax and the lack of transparency of the funding mechanism—the mechanism by which central Government badly fund local government. Does he share my view that a necessary part of the package is to get rid of council tax, to introduce a much fairer system of local income tax, based on people's ability to pay, and to combine that with a system in which a greater proportion of the money that is spent locally is raised locally, with a corresponding reduction in national income tax? Under such a system, people would know who to blame when things went wrong, and, of course, who to praise when they get things right.

Mr. Heath: My hon. Friend is right. A great criticism of the council tax is that it is so sparingly progressive in its effect, and that it impacts horribly on people who can least afford it, in a way that is inappropriate. It is transparently unfair—if such a concept exists—in the way in which it operates. I think that the hon. Member for Braintree (Mr. Hurst) made the point earlier that the difficulty with such a system is that councillors in local government simply get the blame for everything and the credit for nothing because they can take no decisions—or only those that would have a marginal effect—that allow people to connect their actions with the amount of tax being paid. That devalues the whole process of local government.

Local government today is not the local government that I entered back in 1985. When I was running a county council, I had the capacity to change the way in which Somerset operated. The decisions that my colleagues and I took then made a difference to the way in which local

authority services were provided. There was a cost to local people of our taking those decisions, and we had to persuade them that we were justified. That is the way local government should work. A system that makes that relationship impossible to discern devalues the whole process of local government, and allows central Government to hide behind the mask of local government when taking decisions centrally in Whitehall.

If we can replace council tax and the uniform business rate—about which I could speak at equal length, because it is an iniquitous tax that disconnects local businesses from the services provided—with a fairer system that would re-establish those connections, we might start to see local government doing the job that we want it to do, taking local decisions for local people in the local interest. That is what it is all about.

It is wrong that the overlaying effects of the standard spending assessment make a child in a Somerset school worth £1,500 a year less—in the Government's terms—than a child in an outer-London suburb. It is also wrong to have systems that unfairly penalise the whole of the west country, the north country and the midlands in favour of the home counties. It is time to introduce the new system that the Government have promised us for so long. It must be in place next year, and it must correct these evils if we are to see proper connections being made and people voting at local government level on proper facts relating to the performance of their local councillors and councils, rather than a myth, which is all that they have to go on at the moment.

4.39 pm

Mr. Andrew Love (Edmonton): I apologise to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for not being in my place at the start of this debate. It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) but I wish that he had shared with the House the fact that Liverpool city council, in setting a budget, not only cut social services expenditure substantially this year, but will do so in the coming year. Of course, there is a distinction between that and the comments made by Liberal Democrat Members in relation to Government expenditure.

I want to raise briefly an important issue for my constituents, which, I suspect, is reflected in constituencies across the country. I know that it has been raised in the House on many occasions. That issue is the scandal of energy mis-selling, which has not been dealt with adequately up to now. It was brought home to me a year or two ago by a retired aunt of mine in Scotland, who is relatively frail and quite elderly. She was doorstepped by a salesman, and the pressurised sales tactics that he undertook meant that she signed a form almost without knowing what she was doing. She did, however, contact me almost immediately. Because of that contact, I was able to take the necessary steps to undo the damage that she had suffered. She would not have spoken to anyone else about it—she came to me because she is a relative. Many people who suffer from these tactics do not come forward, but I have noticed a significant increase in this sort of abuse in my constituency. Let me give a couple of recent examples.

A constituent of mine, Mrs. Brimmicombe-Wood, unexpectedly received a letter from Virgin Energy recently. She was surprised and shocked to read that her husband had authorised a switch from her previous company to Virgin Energy. The reason that she was shocked and surprised was that her husband had died 18 months previously. His signature, which she requested to see, must therefore have been a forgery. Her reaction was:

"I am absolutely disgusted, it is a scandal that should never happen. It was very upsetting."

Mrs. Brimmicombe-Wood then wrote three times to Virgin Energy to try to get things changed. It was only because of my intervention as her Member of Parliament that she received an apology. Indeed, she was able to transfer her account back to the company of which she was previously a customer. Virgin Energy wrote to her:

"It is clear that the signature does not match that provided by yourself. Clearly it was not your intention to transfer your supplies to Virgin Energy. The sales agent concerned will be interviewed and please be assured that the appropriate action will be taken—this may result in dismissal".

I understand that it did result in dismissal. Although I have no sympathy for the salesman concerned, I would sympathise if he were to say that the problem relates to the pressure of commission selling in the industry, which has caused such abuses.

Let us consider a second case of someone who does not want to be named—I shall call her Mrs. X. Mrs. X was, to her great surprise, transferred to Scottish Power. She was particularly surprised because, when the salesman came to her door, her partner was with her continuously throughout the interview, and both of them totally contradict what Scottish Power has said. They signed nothing, and I have requested on her behalf a copy of that signature. We await with interest—this is a very recent case—the company's response to Mrs. X's claims.

Some would argue that we should go back to the old days of the electricity boards and British Gas, when the supply of utilities was a simple matter. I do not accept that. I believe that deregulation of the energy industry has been good for consumers in general. We must also recognise, however, that many companies are falling over each other to win the custom of consumers. Although it has delivered consumer benefit and greater choice, it has also created enormous pressure for all the companies that have come into the market to sign up customers. That is for a simple reason—there is a fixed number of customers. This is a zero sum game. If a company wants new customers, it must take them from one or other of its competitors. What has happened is that consumers have become somewhat confused by the choices available to them. As can be shown, there is a worrying trend of mis-selling in the marketplace. That issue has been raised on numerous occasions in the House, and I want to quote a recent response by the Minister for Industry and Energy:

"I have recently written to all gas and electricity suppliers to express my concern about the distress caused by incidences of sales malpractice and demand that suppliers improve their performances."—[*Official Report*, 16 November 2001; Vol. 374, c. 918W.]

I would be interested to know what progress the Minister has made in seeking reassurances from the industry.

There are many advantages to having competition in energy markets. There is evidence to suggest that it keeps prices down, and there is some evidence—although less—that it provides a better service for the customer. That type of market requires regulation, which was why Ofgem was originally set up. I shall consider whether Ofgem is responding to the real concerns about the way in which

[Mr. Andrew Love]

the market operates. I also want to commend the work being done by Energywatch, which is an independent consumer watchdog that tries to represent the consumer in a relationship with some of those companies.

Many investigations are taking place—hon. Members have referred to the work being done by the Public Accounts Committee. I am also a former member of the Public Accounts Committee, and it does a tremendous job. It highlighted not only some of the advantages that have come from deregulation but the disadvantages in the marketplace. It made three recommendations in relation to those. First, it recommended that Ofgem should provide a standardised approved form—and a simplified form—for all the companies that want to change customers over. That will ensure that every consumer knows exactly what they are signing up to before they do so. Secondly, it recommended that Ofgem should focus on some of the measures that it needs to take to curb high-pressure sales tactics and some of the misleading information that has gone out to consumers. Consumer information is critically important. Thirdly, it recommended that Ofgem should make use of the powers that are available but that it is not currently using. For example, it can fine companies that are found guilty of such activities.

Energywatch has also recognised some of these concerns and its recent "Stop Now" campaign tries to make it clear to consumers that such sales tactics are unacceptable and must be dealt with. It also encourages consumers to complain to the energy companies. Consumers did not complain much in the past, but I hope that they will do so in future. Some developments, however, are heartening. The statistics show that, from January to October 2001, Energywatch received 2,205 complaints about the gas market and 3,442 complaints about the electricity market. There has been success in encouraging people to bring their complaints forward, and recent statistics show that the number is increasing. We have yet to see whether that is because more people are coming forward or because abuse is increasing.

Echoing some of the comments in the Public Account Committee's report, Energywatch has also made recommendations that it hopes that my hon. Friend the Minister for Industry and Energy will take up. I shall mention one or two of those recommendations. Energywatch believes that Ofgem must strengthen the rules with which energy companies have to comply. That is important, because we need compliance to ensure that abuse does not continue.

Energywatch says that Ofgem must use the full range of its powers, because it does not use all those that it has to make the energy companies comply with the rules. Ofgem must investigate ways to tighten the controls that currently exist, so that it ensures that the companies are doing everything necessary to create an adequate market. Finally, Ofgem must ensure that proper compensation is paid when someone suffers distress and inconvenience. Because Ofgem believes that the current market operates solely to the benefit of the consumer, it often does not recognise the distress that certain practices cause, particularly to the elderly.

My hon. Friend the Minister will valiantly have to answer for every Department on every issue raised, but I ask him to raise these issues with my hon. Friend the Minister for Industry and Energy, who I know shares my concerns and is somewhat frustrated that Ofgem does not use all its available powers. In recent months, I and many other hon. Members have expressed concerns about the activities that I have described, and action needs to be taken. Ofgem has the powers, and it is for Ministers to put pressure on Ofgem so that consumers do not suffer in future.

4.52 pm

Mr. Andrew Rosindell (Romford): Before I raise my main subject, may I reiterate the concerns about the Post Office expressed by my hon. Friends the Members for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning), for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin) and for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington)? The Post Office will be a difficult problem for the Government to tackle and I hope that careful thought is being given to how we can best preserve the role of local community post offices, many of which, including those in urban areas, are likely to close.

I represent a constituency that is mostly urban, and I know from my experience that the Post Office is the centrepiece of a community. Elderly people, for example, require such a facility to collect their pensions and to meet their friends. They use the post office as an everyday facility that benefits the community. I hope that there will not be mass closures of post offices across the country. Rural areas are likely to be particularly affected, but I hope that consideration will be given to the consequences in urban areas such as my constituency of Romford.

Two years ago, I led a local campaign to save the post office in Rise Park. We succeeded, and I was amazed by the response that we received from the entire community. It thought that it would lose its post office and that elderly people would have to travel long distances simply to claim their weekly pension entitlements. I hope that such issues will be given careful thought in the months ahead.

The main issue that I wish to raise is this Government's and all Governments' attitudes in recent years towards British people who do not live on these islands. I refer to the people who live in the British overseas territories and, in particular, to the loyal British subjects who live on the rock of Gibraltar. They have been treated appallingly by the present Government.

Only last week, we saw on our television screens thousands of people demonstrating not for better hospitals, better schools, wage increases or better working conditions, but simply for democracy—for the right to remain British subjects. How can it be right that anyone should have to demonstrate in such numbers, simply to defend their right to remain British? How many Members of this House would tolerate their constituents being treated in the same way as this Government appear to be treating the good people of Gibraltar?

Yesterday, a delegation of the Gibraltar Women's Association visited Buckingham palace—in fact, it is still in London—to present a 16,000-strong petition to Her Majesty the Queen, asking for the issue of Gibraltar to be given the prominence that it deserves, and for Gibraltarians' rights and freedoms to be defended. Last week's demonstration and yesterday's petition are two examples of how betrayed the people of that territory feel by the way the Government are treating them. They are indeed loyal British people, and they deserve better. They deserve to be treated in the same way as we expect our own constituents to be treated. No Member of this House

would tolerate such attacks on their own constituents, so why do we tolerate them in respect of the people of Gibraltar? It is time that we gave them an equal, democratic say in the things that affect their everyday lives.

The kingdom of Spain is a democracy, a NATO ally and a so-called partner in the European Union, but it bullies the people of Gibraltar. How can that be right? At the moment, at least, Spain is not behaving as an ally or a friend. Indeed, given its treatment of British people, I consider it a fair-weather friend, and I have recent first-hand experience of that.

Just over a month ago, I flew from London to Gibraltar, accompanied by the hon. Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (Geraldine Smith), my right hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell (Mr. MacKay), and my hon. Friends the Members for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) and for Bromsgrove (Miss Kirkbride). The weather was atrocious, making it too dangerous to land on the Rock of Gibraltar. However, our flight was not diverted to Malaga—in the kingdom of Spain, our ally—as one would expect; instead, we were told that Spain would not allow the plane to land because it was a Gibraltarian flight. We were diverted to Tangiers, in Morocco, where we had to wait some considerable time for the flight to be re-designated as a Tangier-Malaga flight. On arriving at Malaga several hours later, we then had to travel to Gibraltar.

The most appalling aspect of that incident was not the fact that five Members of the British House of Commons were delayed on their trip to Gibraltar, but that on board the flight was the coffin of a young Gibraltarian, who had died in tragic circumstances. His parents were waiting at Gibraltar airport for the coffin to arrive, and the funeral was due to take place that same day. The Spanish authorities would not allow the coffin to be transported from Malaga to Gibraltar, so his poor family—distressed and distraught at the death of their son—were made to wait, only to discover that the funeral could not take place. The coffin then had to be flown to London, and was flown back again some days later. How can that be right? How can we stand by and watch British people be treated in such an appalling and unfair manner?

Although I am a Conservative Member and I speak for almost every other Conservative Member in respect of this issue, I should point out to the Minister that many dozens of Labour Members also feel very strongly about it. I should like to quote the hon. Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle), for whom I have the utmost respect because of his principled stance on this issue. In a recent letter to a newspaper, he said:

"Unwilling to take Spain to the European Court for her behaviour, the British Government has resorted to appeasement and bribery, waving the promise of sovereignty of Gibraltar in return for more telephone lines. Is it any surprise that the Chief Minister of Gibraltar refuses to attend talks based on such a premise?"

If Labour Members have such views and feel the same as many Conservative Members, surely it is time for the Government to address this issue.

I want to develop my remarks to take in not only Gibraltar but the overseas territories in general. I am very proud to speak as secretary of both the Gibraltar all-party group and the Falkland Islands all-party group. The way in which Britain has administered her remaining overseas territories is a national disgrace. Uniquely among European countries such as France, the Netherlands and Spain, Britain's attitude towards her remaining colonial possessions has resulted in her pushing them further away, offering them a baffling array of constitutional arrangements and forms of citizenship that never fully equal those on the British mainland.

Although I welcome the move to award full British citizenship to all inhabitants of the overseas territories, we must go further. It is time that we stopped regarding them as mere colonial relics and offered their citizens equal status with everybody else in the United Kingdom, including representation here in the British Parliament.

Dr. Rudi Vis (Finchley and Golders Green): The hon. Gentleman implied that the Netherlands treats its overseas territories rather better. What overseas territories does the Netherlands have?

Mr. Rosindell: The Dutch Antilles.

Dr. Vis: No.

Mr. Rosindell: Okay.

The people of the overseas territories, who are British, as we are, do not have a democratic vote for this Parliament, which is their Parliament too. The people of Gibraltar should have their own elected Member of Parliament. It was recently announced that the Western Isles is to retain its MP. I believe that its electoral population is about 20,000. I believe that Gibraltar has slightly more voters, so there is no reason, in numerical terms, why Gibraltar should not also have an MP to represent it in this Chamber.

Furthermore, in the reform of the House of Lords we have a great opportunity to give all British people in the overseas territories the right to send representatives to the British Parliament. Some Members may recall that I spoke in a debate a few weeks ago in which I proposed that we reform the House at least partly on a territorial basis, which would give all overseas territories at least one representative in the newly formed, democratically elected House of Lords. Why should not the overseas territories have a voice in this Parliament, which is their Parliament too?

Most of the overseas territories would welcome with open arms integration and representation of that type. Their current Governments could remain in place as devolved authorities. As we see in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, the principle has now been established that it is possible to have a devolved Assembly or Parliament and still have representation in the House of Commons. There would be no inconsistency in Gibraltar retaining its House of Assembly and having representatives here.

Opinion polls held in Gibraltar, the Falkland Islands, St. Helena, Montserrat and the Pitcairn Islands consistently show that for their inhabitants integration is the preferred form of constitutional settlement. It has worked well for their French and Spanish equivalents. Uninhabited territories, such as South Georgia, could be integrated immediately.

Some territories, such as Gibraltar, enjoy a special tax status, and the argument put to me by the Foreign Secretary during a recent debate on Gibraltar was that that status would be lost by integration. However, that is not

[Mr. Rosindell]

necessarily the case; it is not a barrier to integration, as experience in other European Union member states proves. For example, Spain secured the duty-free status of its integrated territories in North Africa—Ceuta and Melilla—despite their being inside the EU. Similarly, the Netherlands secured special tax status for the Dutch Antilles.

I want to devote the rest of my comments to Gibraltar, given the profound constitutional uncertainty that the Government have chosen to engineer there. The Government's policy on Gibraltar is obsequious and wrong. Rather than force Madrid by all available means to abandon its unfounded claim, the Government have put the future of the territory up for negotiation—believing it to be, as the Minister for Europe claimed, an anachronism.

Madrid's stance betrays the many occasions on which Gibraltar has aided Spain. When British forces liberated Spain from Napoleon, they came through Gibraltar. During the anti-fascist campaign against Franco, Gibraltar gave Spanish refugees food and shelter. Franco never forgave the territory for giving succour to his enemies. For all its democratic reforms, modern Spain, sadly, maintains Franco's line.

The Government try to justify their negotiations by claiming, in effect, "Short of gunboats, what else can we do?" The answer is that Gibraltarians must be given the same status as mainland British citizens, with their own Member of Parliament. An opinion poll commissioned by the Gibraltar Broadcasting Corporation found that a plurality of Gibraltarians support integration, while a lesser number support other options, including free association with the United Kingdom and independence. A much smaller number want shared sovereignty or Spanish control.

Integrating Gibraltar in that way would end Madrid's perception of a half-open door against which she can continue to push. Spain herself provides a model for that policy, having integrated most of her overseas territories—with the result that they are now celebrated and constitutionally stable, and not subject to repeated referendums on their future.

Last year, in evidence to the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, the Minister for Europe claimed that integrating Gibraltar would contravene the treaty of Utrecht. The treaty is, however, no obstacle to the integration of the territory. Under the treaty, Gibraltar is forfeit to Spain only should Britain "alienate" the territory. Integration scarcely constitutes alienation. The right hon. Gentleman also commented that integration of that sort is not compatible with the modern era—whatever he means by that. Does he think that our European partners, including France and Spain, are living in the past?

Meanwhile, Madrid clings to her dictatorial claim that the Gibraltarians' views are irrelevant. The Spanish Foreign Minister claims that by holding talks the UK and Spain are "building a house". Gibraltarians, he adds,

"may be allowed to choose the colour of the rooms".

Unfortunately, under the treaty of Utrecht, he actually has a point. Under the treaty, Gibraltar must be in either British or Spanish hands, without regard for its inhabitants' opinions.

Times and opinions change. The treaty of Utrecht was written in the age when monarchs signed over territories with little regard for their inhabitants. I hope that the Prime Minister is not hoping to emulate an ancient monarch. When Gibraltar had little civilian population, of course there was no need to give those people the right to decide, but nothing could be further from the truth today.

The legal and political standards of the 21st century leave the treaty of Utrecht in tatters. The many ways in which the treaty has been broken include the existence of Jewish and Moorish populations on the Rock. Spain's many sieges of the territory also breached the treaty. As well as being broken, the treaty has been superseded by the treaty of Rome in 1957 and the United Nations declaration on the granting of independence to colonial countries and peoples in 1960.

It is time that all sides acknowledged that the treaty of Utrecht—broken, superseded and incongruent with the democratic age as it is today—is not worth the parchment that it is written on. It is the treaty that is an anachronism, not Gibraltar.

We must end the crude and illegal pressure placed on Gibraltar by the kingdom of Spain, but negotiation is not the way to do so. Spain is in direct breach of international law and lacks any support in Gibraltar, yet for years London has squandered opportunities to force the matter—failing, for example, to block Spain's accession to the European Union or, more recently, to NATO until it dropped its claim. Rewarding Spain for its intransigence would be a betrayal of the loyal Gibraltarian people and of their right of self-determination.

We should be proud that the Gibraltarians wish to remain British, and not treat them as a colonial anachronism. It is time that we gave the people of Gibraltar and all British subjects, wherever they may live in the world, the same democratic rights, the same liberty and the same freedoms that we would demand for our constituents.

5.12 pm

Dr. Rudi Vis (Finchley and Golders Green): My comments will be brief and will address only one local issue—the Finchley Memorial hospital, which I have visited many times.

On Saturday, I attended the 45th annual general meeting of the friends of the Finchley Memorial hospital. They are a seriously good group of friends, extremely ably led by Mrs. Marion Randall, who chaired the meeting. The friends have just secured a new ultrasound scanner, after a funding campaign this year that collected £25,000. Local residents therefore do not have to wait for weeks, as the scanner is on the premises.

Equally impressive is the fact that this small community hospital treated some 24,000 local people in the past year, and all within a few minutes of their arrival. I know that the national health service is under tremendous pressure, but there are many success stories that seem to go unnoticed about health in this country. The latest report of Finchley Memorial indicates that the level of appreciation and satisfaction with treatment there is close to 100 per cent., and that certainly is due to high staff morale, excellent doctors, nurses and other staff and the friendly atmosphere that exists in that community hospital.

Vice-chair Peter Packer has also been a stalwart for many decades and I have enjoyed rattling the collection box with the treasurer of the friends, Jim McLauchlan,

on several occasions. The shop Homebase has been particularly helpful in allowing that to happen on its premises.

As in many other hospitals, the friends are getting older by the day, and it would be good to attract some younger constituents to assist them. That point was put in a characteristically endearing way by Miss Valerie Chapman, the honorary membership secretary.

Of course, I realise that there are differences between a community hospital with only a minor casualty department run by excellent local general practitioners and larger hospitals that perform the whole range of NHS work. I also accept the need for economies of scale and specialisation. However, it is good to have community hospitals, particularly as their out-patients tend to have to make only short journeys.

A vote of thanks to the officers and committee members of the friends was given by Mrs. Jenny Chung, who looks after the day hospital and sometimes does night duty on the wards.

The senior person with overall responsibility for the hospital is Mr. Anil Sohun, and the friends have an excellent relationship with him. He was also mainly responsible for setting up the mental health ward and the mental health team to look after those patients.

I also much enjoyed the excellent talk given at the AGM by local resident Professor John Hartley, who is professor of cancer studies at University college, London. He is a foremost cancer research expert and the title of his lecture was "An Exciting Time for Cancer Research". I had met Professor Hartley only socially before, so I was much looking forward to his address, and we were not disappointed—he was able to capture his audience about cancer, which is, after all, a frightening disease. In conclusion, he talked about his new love of bringing science and arts together with local artists, and I am looking forward to the exhibition, which will take place soon.

I should like to ask my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House to convey to the Secretary of State for Health the fact that he will be very welcome to visit Finchley Memorial hospital any day.

5.17 pm

Mr. David Amess (Southend, West): I wish to raise several issues before the House adjourns for the Easter recess. First, it is clear that the Government are not in good order. Indeed, they are in complete disarray. Although it might be an illusion at the moment, if the Government Benches were packed we would see a seething mass of discontent. The reason for that is clear: after Labour were elected in 1997, they said, "Yes, we are having some difficulties, but it is all the fault of 18 years of Conservative government." That line used to wear well on the doorstep, but Labour Members find that it no longer does so, as the Government enter their second term in office. The general public are sick to death of the blame culture that comes from Labour Members.

The present situation is dire. Whether in education, law and order, the health service, transport or defence, the Government are in crisis. The Leader of the House may shake his head. *[Interruption.]* Well, he has a certain way with him. I thought that he was shaking his head. My constituents feel that the Government have made a complete and absolute mess of things.

Let me start with law and order. The Prime Minister made his name with the cry, "Tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime." That has become a sick joke. Just a few weeks ago, the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis addressed a conference at which he told everyone that the criminal justice system does not work. What sort of signal does that send to my constituents? The leading police officer made a speech, which he knew would be widely broadcast, telling everyone that the criminal justice system is in disarray.

Some may have thought that the Commissioner's relationship with the Home Secretary was such that that speech would not be made. Of course, we then find out that a conference was hastily arranged at 10 Downing street. After the conference, the same gentleman came out and said, "Yippee! It's the greatest conference we've ever had. We've been listened to and everything will be fixed."

Of course, two weeks ago hon. Members were lobbied by serving police officers. They lined up peacefully outside the Palace of Westminster to express their concerns to Members of Parliament about pay and conditions. It did not seem to me that all was well. The officers were unhappy about how the Government were treating them. In addition, it was announced that people in prison who have committed certain crimes will be released early. If that is the Prime Minister's idea of joined-up Government, God help us. He has been shot out of the ground on law and order issues.

Police launches in Essex are a major concern for my constituents. My hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink) has also been lobbied on the issue. Leigh-on-Sea town council wrote to me recently to say that there is a proposal to reduce the number of police launches in Essex from two to one. The hon. Member for Braintree (Mr. Hurst) lives in Southend, West so he, too, may have been lobbied on that 50 per cent. reduction.

The town council wrote to the chief constable and was not reassured by the reply. It thinks that reducing the number of launches will, in turn, reduce the valuable service provided by the police marine section at a time when criminal damage on and to boats is increasing. In a letter to me, it states:

> "It makes working and recreational boats in Leigh-on-Sea and other areas more vulnerable, and when the reduction becomes public knowledge may well encourage more criminality in the estuary if criminals think that there is a reduction in the chance of them being caught."

The line is that there is no reduction, just a reorganisation that has nothing to do with money. However, that claim has been blown out of the water. Essex yacht club wrote to the police and received the following response:

> "Following several cost-cutting reviews, the Essex Police Marine Unit is being reduced in size both in manpower and equipment, with one launch being disposed of, with four officers being redeployed to core policing roles."

There was no mention of safety: nothing about looking after our constituents or preventing children from getting into difficulty when they play near the estuary. The reduction is the result of a cost-cutting review. I am disgusted, as are my constituents.

My hon. Friends mentioned the Post Office. I listened carefully to yesterday's announcement by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. She mentioned the difficulties that Consignia is in. In spite of the huge job

[Mr. David Amess]

losses, she explained that the changes were necessary. Time after time, the Government accuse the Conservative party of forgetting what it did when it was in government. However, Labour Members forget how they reacted to job losses when in opposition. Every time a job loss was announced, the Labour Opposition did not say that it was because of the prevailing market or because we had to keep up with technology. Instead, they made the straightforward political hit that it was all the fault of the Conservative Government. The Labour Government have to defend job losses all the time, and it is a bit rich for them to say that such losses are fine because they are in government and they always look after working-class people. As far as I am concerned, the Labour party is out of touch with working-class people, and they have abandoned them the length and breadth of the country.

I am concerned to learn that Southend might lose Parcelforce. I continually receive complaints, not about the postwomen and men, who are wonderful, but about the service overall—the mail arrives late, there is only one delivery a day, and there are all sorts of other problems. Losing Parcelforce would be a huge blow to Southend and my constituents.

I raised the issue of Southend airport at Christmas and I shall do so again today. The Civil Aviation Authority has visited the airport, which has existed for many years, to say that a change must be made to the runway. It suggests that as part of that change St. Laurence and All Saints church, which is 1,000 years old, should be moved. For obvious reasons, the proposal has not gone down well with parishioners, not least because the church is consecrated ground. Although whether one is a Christian is a private matter, the church is dear to local residents, who are extremely upset about the proposal.

The issues surrounding the airport have now grown. The airport has and always has had a licence to operate, but for various reasons the number of commercial flights from the airport has been declining for some time. Now, we learn that there is a body of people who are greatly concerned about the airport itself—in fact, one might think that some of that group were suggesting that the airport should close.

The way in which the issues have become muddied is most unfortunate. A large number of people depend for their livelihood on the jobs that the airport provides, and I hope that the issues triggered by the CAA's requirements for change will be carefully considered. I appeal to the Leader of the House to have a word with the appropriate Minister to see whether the CAA can provide more help.

I commend to the House early-day motion 1021, tabled by the hon. Member for Reading, East (Jane Griffiths), who has done the House a service by drawing to its attention the fact that the network card is to be withdrawn. As hon. Members know, that card encourages off-peak travel and makes short journeys far more attractive to non-commuters.

The Association of Train Operating Companies has acted quickly and sent most hon. Members a letter. Some might not yet have had time to read it, but I hope that those who do will not be seduced by it, because a careful reading reveals that it in no way means that what the companies are offering is a substitute for the network card. As far as I can see, they definitely plan to get rid of the card altogether and they will offer no discount on short trips in future. Our constituents will be extremely upset about that.

On education, the Government know only too well that it is extremely difficult to recruit and retain teachers. Several local teachers who do supply teaching or who teach for as little as one day a week have brought to my attention the registration fee charged by the General Teaching Council. Hon. Members might think that £23 is not a lot, but I can assure them that some teachers have strong feelings about the fact that they are asked to pay the full fee, rather than a scaled down sum.

I shall not bore the House by going through all the correspondence. The Minister for School Standards, who has been most helpful, has offered to examine the issue. A payment to teachers of £33 is suggested, but it will not be built into the teachers' pay award. In a letter I have here, the GTC admits that it has been overwhelmed by teachers' protests about the fee and says that

"The possibility of a scaled fee structure in the future will be kept under review by the Council."

It would be helpful if a Minister got onto the General Teaching Council and said, "Look, we've got a problem, but it can easily be fixed."

Finally, on animal welfare, a few weeks ago I had the privilege of introducing a ten-minute Bill which would increase the prison sentence that could be imposed for illegally importing endangered species from two to five years; at the moment, that is not an arrestable offence. I know that not everyone is interested in animal welfare, but all Members were interested in foot and mouth. A number of zoologists and scientists have told me about the dangers that illegally imported exotic animals may pose. For instance, exotic Newcastle disease is a viral disease that affects all species of birds and is probably one of the most infectious diseases among poultry. There are a number of examples across the world where disease spread by an illegally imported bird has led to all the stock over a wide area being culled. When my Bill comes up for Second Reading on 16 April, it would be terribly helpful if there were no shouts of "Object".

In conclusion, I am involved in a charity walk, and am walking down every road, cul-de-sac, footpath and byway in my Southend, West constituency, where there was an election last year. I am doing so to raise money for Fairhaven hospice, the local branch of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and the mayor's charity. If our legs are in good order, it is a good thing to walk. Young people are seduced too easily into thinking that it is all right to get into their car with a mobile phone under their chin; in my constituency, walkers are overwhelmingly elderly people. I hope that Members will reflect on that.

Bob Spink: I congratulate my hon. Friend on recently achieving a ripe old age, and hope that he has a wonderful birthday celebration this evening. If I sponsor him for his charity walk, will he sponsor me for my charity run in the London marathon?

Mr. Amess: I know that the House is quietly groaning, but yes, I will. I shall go on my charity walk, and wish all hon. Members and the staff who work here a happy and joyful Easter recess.

5.33 pm

Mr. Edward O'Hara (Knowsley, South): I wish to discuss a local issue—a dispute with my local community health trust—which I regret having to raise in the House. For over three years, I have pursued all formal means of following up my concerns, but have been left with no option but to take this means of making them public.

At stake is the important democratic principle of whether Members of Parliament should be allowed to represent the interests of their constituents and whether they should be allowed to hold bodies such as NHS trusts to account. The original issue was simple: a constituent of mine was summarily dismissed from her staff post on what I have demonstrated was a trumped-up charge of professional misconduct. She appealed, and her post was filled while her appeal was pending. She won her appeal—there is no evidence from the records of the appeal to suggest anything other than that—but management treated her as if she had lost. She was redeployed to another post on a salary £8,000 lower than her original salary.

Over the past three years this has become a very complicated matter, and my file on it is now very thick. Each attempt I have made to question the actions of management, which I believe amount to maladministration, has been met by the same sort of response. The responses are characterised by a determined attempt to block me. They have used evasion, selection of facts and distortion of the history of events, and have generally imposed layer upon layer of obfuscation.

There have been dirty tricks, too. There have been insulting references to me. I can wear that: I am a Member of Parliament. But there have been allegations, totally unfounded and untrue, that I pursued the matter only in return for sexual favours from the member of staff concerned. I have met her only once, in the boardroom of the community health trust. Another health service employee has received warnings not to pursue a relationship with her if he values his career in the NHS, and I believe there have been many attempts to block her opportunities of obtaining other posts. It has been very, very dirty.

The management have protested that, according to their solicitors, nothing wrong has been done—that the North West regional executive has examined the situation, and can find nothing wrong. That is naturally true: the case was presented to it by the very people whom I wish to call to account.

For three years I offered repeatedly to present my case directly to the board, and for three years I was steadfastly ignored. I therefore went to the board's December meeting and intervened, directly requesting my own meeting with the board to present my case in person. That request, too, was ignored. I wrote to the chairman in January in order to put my request in writing. He eventually refused it, on the specious ground that it concerned a confidential matter that the board could not discuss with me—specious, because it avoids two issues.

The member of staff strongly wishes me to present confidential matters affecting her to the board. There is nothing to stop the board from listening to what I have to say, and then going into private session to discuss it along with, perhaps, other confidential matters. I wrote to the non-executive directors pointing out that they too were being deprived of an opportunity to listen to what I had to say and to exercise their own judgment. They requisitioned a meeting of the board so that they could indeed hear what I had to say. Last week one of them contacted me to ask why I had not attended the meeting. It was then that I discovered that, a month earlier, they had received copies of a letter addressed to me inviting me to a meeting. Strangely, I had not received the letter.

Given my bitter experience of dealing with the chief executive and chairman of this trust over three years, I do not believe that the letter went astray in the post. I do not believe that it was ever sent. Yesterday the chairman offered to conduct an internal investigation. I told him not to bother.

Yesterday I attended the final meeting of the trust, which, because of the reorganisation, is going out of existence at the end of this week, and voiced my objections once again. The chairman insisted even then that he would not allow me to present my case, but said that I could meet the non-executive directors informally after the end of the final meeting—the winding-up meeting—of the board. That was the only option left to me, and the only option after that was to take the matter public, in the press or in the House. I chose the House.

I met the non-executive directors informally at the end of their meeting and was interested in their response. They had had a very interesting closed session before meeting me. When I presented my case, they were happy to accept that it fitted a pattern of malpractice that they had identified in other, more serious, areas which they had been discussing in a fraught closed session and which had been referred to the district auditor and up to the Secretary of State for Health for investigation. I feel vindicated—I am not the only person to believe that there was malpractice in the trust.

I ask the Leader of the House to refer my complaints also to the Secretary of State. The former non-executive directors will agree with me. I hope that the Secretary of State will make it clear to all NHS trusts that he will not tolerate attempts to prevent local MPs from holding them democratically to account for their actions.

5.42 pm

Richard Younger-Ross (Teignbridge): This is the first such Adjournment debate that I have sat through, and I have found the subjects discussed both enlightening and educational.

I have two local issues to draw to the attention of the House. The first is infrastructure planning—or, rather, the lack of infrastructure planning. Lack of long-term planning is a hindrance to the United Kingdom. It is a hindrance to the economy and local businesses and a pain to individuals. There is not even a joined-up system. The planning process can be painfully drawn out over a number of years, or it can be extremely quick. Things can be built overnight before local residents realise that there was any intention to construct anything.

I know that the Kingskerswell bypass has been mentioned in the House on numerous occasions, particularly by my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Mr. Sanders) in recent times. The village of Kingskerswell has the third greatest amount of traffic in Devon. It is beaten only by the traffic flow at the end of the M5 near Exeter and by the traffic crossing the Marsh Mills flyover in Plymouth. However, I am talking about an ordinary road, with sets of traffic lights and houses on either side.

[Richard Younger-Ross]

During the summer, the traffic bottleneck delays tourist and business traffic trying to get to and from Torquay. During the winter, there is less of a bottleneck, but the road is still gridlocked at many times of the day. Traffic is forced to use country lanes as a rat run to avoid the slow crawl between Torquay and Newton Abbot.

Lack of planning is a major concern. The road was planned for many years. In the 1970s a length of dual carriageway was built from the end of the M5 as far as Newton Abbot; then it stopped. It is clear from the road layout that it was designed to go on towards Torquay. It is clear from the estate layout and the roads on Buckland, where new estates were built at the time, that they were designed to have feeder roads coming across towards Newton Abbot, so that there was no bottleneck and not just one roundabout to cope with all the traffic.

The local authority in its infinite wisdom allowed a supermarket to be constructed right at the roundabout. That severely restricted the options available to the county council, or the Highways Agency before that, for the design and construction of a road. If it were a major trunk road, there would be a compulsory purchase order and the supermarket would be knocked down; but sadly, that is not in the gift of the county council, which has been left with responsibility for the road, after the Conservative Government removed its trunk road status and said that it was no longer the Government's responsibility. It may be the third busiest road in Devon, but it is now the responsibility of the county council. It was a sad day when the Tories reneged on promises to construct the bypass.

There has been a total lack of planning. A proposal is to be made by the county council, which will have to look for private funding. The process is so long and drawn out, despite the demonstrable need and the desire of local people for the road. There will have to be a consultation process, then planning, and we will end up with a public inquiry. After the funding has been put in place, construction might begin in 2007 or 2008. For the people who live on the road, use the road and suffer the existing road, that is not an acceptable way of planning highway needs. It is also immensely damaging to the economy, particularly of Torquay and to some extent of my constituency.

In addition to infrastructure planning, we must consider road design and the quality of the end product. With the move towards private sector funding for roads, I am worried that we will end up with a result similar to the worst of 1960s housebuilding or motorway design, where everything was done on the cheap.

Recently, I was fortunate enough to drive to Brussels. I shall not comment on the roads in Belgium, but on the roads in France the design of the lay-bys, service stations and toilets is of strikingly high quality. The standard and quality of the design of the bridges, too, is striking. That is the case in other parts of Europe as well.

We tend to end up with cheap, mundane design, which is damaging to the environment and to those who live near the roads or use them every day. We ought to think more clearly about the fact that what we construct will be there for a long time. It is said that doctors bury their mistakes. Architects and civil engineers can only grow ivy in front of theirs, and hope that they disappear one day.

Public transport services are also characterised by a lack of thought and infrastructure planning. I shall not deal with the local bus problems and the lack of rural buses, as that has been dealt with on other occasions. However, I must comment in passing that it is sad when a rural bus service from somewhere in the middle of Dartmoor—Moretonhampstead, say—which takes people to work in Newton Abbot by 9 am has to be withdrawn because of lack of funding, and the earliest that people can get into Newton Abbot now is 10 or 10.30 am. That does not strike me as joined-up thinking about transport systems.

I must also mention rail transport and the use of the rail network—not the big scheme of things, but local services. We need to put in extra local stations. People in Kingskerswell have been campaigning for a new station for a long time.

People in the Bovey Tracey/Heathfield area of my constituency have also been campaigning for some time. A parish council that I met the other night mentioned the matter to me. The rail link to Heathfield, where there is a large housing estate and an industrial estate, could be reopened to passenger transport. The county council has been asked about that, but says that it does not have the resources for an impact study to consider the viability of the options. Again, it all comes down to a lack of planning. I cannot say whether a rail link to Heathfield is a viable option, but if the local community regards it as important, it ought to be considered.

I referred to the problems with the Kingskerswell bypass and the road from the Buckland estate toward Newton Abbott. Not long ago, I asked the county engineer what detailed planning he could undertake on traffic flows east to west across Newton Abbott, which tends to be bottlenecked for most of the summer months, in particular on market days. He said that he did not have the funding to look into that. It is vital that all those areas be considered before viable options are ruled out. The supermarket that was built in Newton Abbott has caused immense problems for the building of the Kingskerswell bypass.

I mentioned the problem that some processes are painfully drawn out, but some are painfully quick. Just after the war, a number of authorities were granted in legislation, for good reason, the right to construct and build without having to refer to or get the consent of local authorities or any other authority. The railways have some such rights, but I am thinking in particular of the docks.

Teignmouth is a viable local port and I wish it every success. I cannot but worry, however, that the port authority has the right to build storage sheds along the entire length of its quay, completely obscuring the views from, and putting a wall of steel in front of, the houses in Alexander terrace and the other streets up the hill behind it—although I realise that there is no right to a view. It cannot be right that no one can question the port authority's right to do that. It goes against all that I understood to be local democracy that that should be allowed to happen. I am saying not that the authority should not be allowed to do it, but that the proposal must be questioned and local residents must have the right to their local authority questioning the proposal. I am told that a port authority could build a silo 100 or 200 ft high without having to get any consent, which would have a severe environmental impact on the area.

On another subject, in a social care debate in January I raised the lack of funding for social services in the south-west. I drew the attention of the Minister present to a report by the 15 authorities in the area, which said that they were having to divert funding for elderly people to cope with child protection requirements. I have been told since that the funding available to many local authorities will only just cover the bare legal minimum without all the other requirements that they must meet to ensure that children are not abused and have a fair and reasonable start in life.

The Minister responded that what had been described was clearly unacceptable and promised that she would investigate the matter. To date, I have heard not a word from her. I raised the matter three weeks ago with the Leader of the House, who promised that he would raise it with the Secretary of State. Again, I have heard nothing. I hope that this will be third time lucky, and that we will get a response on this important issue.

5.55 pm

Peter Bottomley (Worthing, West): I apologise to the House for not being present to hear earlier speeches. I am glad that many hon. Members will have had the opportunity to contribute.

I should like to echo the words of some of my hon. Friends who have spoken about the state of post offices. Worthing has the highest proportion of retired people in the country. The future of rural post offices is a matter of interest, but urban post offices are often of greatest interest. None the less, I know that many of my villages will feel very miserable if their post offices are withdrawn because of Government mismanagement of Post Office issues.

I should have liked to speak at some length about overseas British pensioners, as half of them live in countries where they get upratings in the state retirement pension, while the other half do not. The issue may soon come before the courts, but because I want to raise another pressing matter, I hope that those pensioners will forgive me if I do not deal with the issue at the same length as I have done previously and hope to do in future.

I want to turn the attention of the House to the situation not of a Louise Woodward, who was young, female and white, but of Krishna Maharaj, who, at 63, is just about a pensioner, male and black. He has an Asian background; he was born in Trinidad, and born British. For those who are concerned about the proprieties of the House, let me say that I am not going to speak about the hearing that is under way in Miami, Florida about whether Krishna Maharaj should go back on to death row. I want to raise a question that is excluded from that hearing: whether he is guilty.

In the years since 1986, when Krishna Maharaj was convicted, the question whether he is guilty has not come forward, but it matters. I am part of a group that believes that he deserves his life and liberty, and justice. I am aware of the growing help from Foreign and Commonwealth Office consular staff. It is the convention that we do not name civil servants, and I shall not break it, but I am pleased that the help being made available is growing. It is a shame that the Florida prosecution authorities did not notify the British consul when Krishna Maharaj was arrested. They broke their international obligation. Some may regard that as a technicality, but I think that it might turn out to be more. I believe that if Krishna Maharaj had had effective representation from the beginning, he would not have been convicted of the murders for which he was sentenced.

I shall turn in a moment to some of the particular issues in Krishna Maharaj's case, many of which are listed on the Krishna Maharaj website at www.krishnamaharaj.org, where the Florida supreme court knocks down a number of the arguments that in this country and most others—and probably in many other US states—would have gained an order for retrial. Before going into detail, I want to point out that more than 300 people are on death row in Florida. Krishna Maharaj has not been on death row in a technical sense since the evidentiary hearing in 1997 in Miami, which I attended. He came off death row because the second judge in his case had asked the prosecution for a draft death sentence before the jury reached its conclusion. It is a convention of the courts that judges maintain an open mind until a jury has reached a conclusion, and asking for a draft death sentence does not necessarily support it.

In respect of the past 20 or 30 years, I have received information on 24 people who have had death sentence murder convictions either quashed or listed for rehearings. I will not talk at length about people who were almost certainly innocent but were executed, and this speech is not about the death penalty as such. I am grateful to the organisation Reprieve and to Andy Lamb, who helped to provide some of the information. Some of the details may not be precisely accurate because of the short time that has been available to bring the information together.

The first case that I want to discuss is that of James Richardson, who was convicted in 1968 and released in 1989—a period of 21 years. Krishna Maharaj has been in jail for 16 years. James Richardson was convicted and sentenced to death for poisoning one of his children. The prosecution argued that he had committed the crime to obtain the insurance money, but in fact no such policy existed. The primary witnesses against James Richardson were two jailhouse snitches, as they might be described, to whom he is said to have confessed. Post-conviction investigations found that the neighbour who was caring for Richardson's children had a prior homicide conviction, and the defence provided affidavits from people to whom he—probably the real killer—had confessed.

James Richardson's conviction was overturned after further investigation by the then Dade county state attorney-general, Janet Reno, which resulted in a new hearing. Hon. Members will recall that she has since been United States Attorney-General and may be the Democratic challenger to Governor Jeb Bush at the forthcoming Governor's election. I will not give a view on whether she or Governor Bush would be the better choice—that is for the people of Florida to decide—but I hope that both the present Governor and his possible challenger will consider whether there has been an injustice in this case in Dade county and give their backing to law, order and justice by asking for a review so that the Florida courts can decide whether the conviction is safe. If, having been given a list of some of the issues involved, the prosecution still thinks that it can secure a conviction, it should not object to a retrial, and if it fears that it would not obtain a conviction, it should jolly well join people like me to argue for a retrial.

[Peter Bottomley]

I should advise the House that I have notified the registrar that on my visit to see Krishna Maharaj in jail at the Raiford Union correctional institution 11 days ago, two legs of my flight were arranged by the Krishna Maharaj support group and the other two legs and other expenses were paid for by myself.

Another example involves Wilbert Lee and Freddie Pitts, who were convicted in 1963 and released in 1975. They had 12 years in jail. Although no physical evidence linked them to the deaths of two men, their guilty pleas, the testimony of an alleged eye-witness and an incompetent defence counsel led to their convictions. The men were sentenced to death but maintained their innocence. After their convictions, someone else confessed to the crime, the eye-witness recanted her accusations and the state attorney-general admitted that the state had unlawfully suppressed evidence. The men were granted a new trial and were again convicted and sentenced to death. They were released in 1975, when they received a full pardon from the then Governor Askew, who stated that he was

"sufficiently convinced that they were innocent."

I suggest to Governor Jeb Bush's advisers that they should ask an independent person to review all the points that have been put together, some of which I shall list and others of which are available, to decide whether Krishna Maharaj should benefit from a similar declaration and executive action by the governor.

I could go on to discuss the case of Joseph Green Brown, in which charges were dropped after the prosecution had knowingly allowed false testimony to be introduced at the trial. That came within 13 hours of the execution, when a new trial was ordered. Brown was released a year later when the state decided not to retry the case.

The following elements exist in the Krishna Maharaj case. He was arrested on the day the two men were killed. The detective did not take a paraffin test on his hand to see whether gunpowder was there. For anything other than a professional contract killing, that paraffin test is always introduced. Another factor in the detective work is that the detective concerned took 21 witness statements, 20 of which were notarised, typed, signed by the witness and recorded. The sole exception was the interview with the suspect, Krishna Maharaj. I would suggest, putting it gently, that that allows room for dispute or error in what Krishna Maharaj actually said in answer to questions. This is not one of the cases in which it is suggested that the accused was tortured, bullied or coerced into making a false confession. In this case, Krishna Maharaj always denied the charge.

Furthermore, it is acknowledged—it is possible to check this—that an assistant state prosecutor, Myra Trinchett, went to Mr. Maharaj's cell before the trial and said words to the effect of, "Why don't you take me or somebody else on as your defence attorney for $50,000?" Krishna Maharaj says that she told him everyone knew he was innocent, and that he would be treated leniently. That visit is acknowledged.

What has not yet been acknowledged—although the prison records ought to demonstrate it—is whether a man called Harvey Swinkle went to Krishna Maharaj's cell before Myra Trinchett and asked for $75,000. The reason that the price dropped from $75,000 to $50,000 is that Krishna Maharaj had passed a lie-detector test in the meantime, and his innocence was rather better established. The prison ought to have a record—it has not yet disclosed it—of whether that visit by Harvey Swinkle was made.

A further piece of factual information that the Governor's advisers should ask for is whether either of those visits to Krishna Maharaj was recorded under the FBI's Operation Court Broom, in which the bureau secretly taped a number of discussions between prisoners and people claiming to be there on behalf of judges. If so, can the tapes and transcripts be released? Is it true that, of the 13 judges in office in Dade county at the time of Krishna Maharaj's trial, five were subsequently sent to jail for irregularities? Is it also true that a detective involved in his case was taken off murder cases for misusing witnesses' testimony?

There are a whole series of issues surrounding the pre-trial procedure that are worth checking. I will not go on at any length about the fact that, three days into Krishna Maharaj's trial, the trial judge was taken away in shackles, accused of accepting bribes in a different case. I acknowledge that Krishna Maharaj and his lawyer, who is new to capital charges, decided not to ask for the case to be re-started, so it continued for another week and a half. Krishna Maharaj's assets put him just above legal aid level, but do not allow him to employ his lawyer for very long. I have mentioned the mistake by the second judge in asking for the death sentence in draft before the jury came back with the verdict, and I shall not make anything of the fact that the first appeal judge was later taken off the case because he had been in the state prosecutor's office at the time of the prosecution.

There are a number of similar issues, which are technical, but, taken together, they begin to draw a picture that at least introduces an element of severe doubt—in fact, a whole series of doubts—about whether Krishna Maharaj could have committed the crime. There is no doubt that he had been in the room at the time and, as the excellent Channel 4 film, "Murder in Room 1215", made by Roger Bolton and his associates about seven years ago showed, there are a number of other elements involved.

I shall conclude by focusing on the key prosecution witness, Mr. Neville Butler. He is known to have lied. At the trial, it was accepted by the court that Krishna Maharaj had booked the room in which the murder took place, because Neville Butler said that he had done so. Am I right in saying that, after the trial, the FBI discovered that Krishna Maharaj could not have done so, because Neville Butler had booked the room himself? Is the key so-called eye-witness therefore implicated in booking the room in which the murders took place?

These issues matter a lot, because Krishna Maharaj might have been convicted of crimes that he did not commit and, because he is British, it is our responsibility—and the responsibility of our Government—to try to help the Americans to get things right. I am not making broad accusations against the Miami police, the Dade county judges, or the supreme court in Florida. I am saying that they should be as concerned as we are in this country about discovering whether justice has been seen to be done.

I could raise a number of other issues, but I shall finish by saying that, in Illinois, immunity has been taken away from state prosecutors. In that state, because of various scandals, any prosecutor who knowingly uses perjured

evidence is exposed to investigation and prosecution. That is not the case in Florida. Although I was not given a rough time yesterday, I was shut up quite often by the judge when I was giving evidence, as the state prosecutor objected to most of the things that I wanted to say. If it turns out that any state prosecutor in any of the cases or hearings in which Krishna Maharaj has been involved knew that evidence had been given that was not true—or it turns out that they knew of evidence that ought to have been made available to the defence and to the court—I hope that Florida will consider what action ought to be taken. To take one relatively small example, the murder victims in the case, the Moo Youngs, were said to have been innocent business men. In their case, the prosecution knew in advance of the trial that they had been setting up drugs accounts around the Caribbean and had been involved with some pretty suspicious characters. That makes it possible that they suffered contract killings, which is far more likely given the circumstances.

I hope that, in time, the Foreign Secretary will be able to come to the House and announce that Krishna Maharaj has been set free and allowed a new trial. When I saw him, his words to me were, "I don't just want to be released from jail. I want a new trial so that I can be found innocent, not just discharged with a cloud over my head."

6.11 pm

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for your permission to join this debate at such a late stage. I want to speak about three issues, which might be called the three Ps: Post Office, planning and police. They are all national issues, but they all have a direct bearing on my constituency.

First, if we reach the stage, as appeared to be prefigured by the news yesterday, at which there will be a mass closure of sub-post offices the length and breadth of this country, I predict that there will be enormous dissatisfaction, upset and complaint from every conscientious constituency MP, irrespective of the party to which they adhere. The reality is that, in five years in the House, I have never seen such anger among Back-Bench MPs as I saw when similar moves were being carried out by the large banks, and when Barclays bank came to make a presentation, not to consult with MPs about what it proposed to do, but to try to explain the mass closure of local branches. The result of that was a scale of protest that eventually led the banks to agree a sensible policy among themselves: where there was only a single branch of one of the big four banks left in a given locality, that branch would not close. I do not know how the Post Office will be able to deal with the analogous uproar that I anticipate, but deal with it it will have to. I say to the Government in the nicest possible way that they are vulnerable on this issue. As the Opposition are now full of concern for the vulnerable, I wish to advise the Government that they should not neglect the people who will be sorely hit if many sub-post offices go to the wall.

The second issue is planning. I am deeply suspicious of the Green Paper on proposals to change the planning regime. Even as I speak, a major public inquiry is under way about a proposal to build a huge container port at Dibden bay in my constituency. I am confident that, day by day, as the inquiry proceeds, the weakness of the case for carrying out this massive project will steadily become apparent. At the end of the inquiry, I expect to see a detailed and dispassionate report on the strengths and weaknesses of the arguments deployed. Let us suppose that the inquiry concludes that there is no overriding national need for a container port in New Forest, East, given the more suitable alternative sites at Shell Haven, Felixstowe and Harwich among others. It will then be up to the politicians to decide whether to override the inquiry result and insist on allowing Dibden bay to be built regardless. In the Green Paper, however, it is intended that Parliament should take a "decision in principle". Can one honestly believe that even the more salient arguments in favour of or against a project such as the Dibden bay container port development would receive an impartial or dispassionate hearing in the Chamber or a Committee room that was divided along party lines?

At present, the Labour party enjoys a huge parliamentary majority. The Labour-dominated city of Southampton, which is next door to my constituency, wants Dibden bay to be built and it would have every reason to believe that such a Parliament as we have today would be heavily biased in its favour on purely political grounds. The idea that Parliament should take a decision in principle first, with the detailed inquiry coming later is plainly to put the cart before the horse.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): I have listened to my hon. Friend's remarks with great care, because it is a subject in which I am also interested, not least because of my chairmanship of the Procedure Committee. It will very shortly begin an inquiry into the way in which the Government's proposals impinge upon Parliament and its procedures. The Select Committee on Transport, Local Government and the Regions is similarly considering this dramatic change from the normal planning process. I hope that my hon. Friend will be somewhat reassured that Parliament as a whole is apprised of the problems.

Dr. Lewis: I can think of no one in whom I would have more confidence than my hon. Friend in trying to protect the interests not only of Parliament but of the population as a whole when such an amazing reversal of priorities is being proposed by the Government.

If that reversal of priorities took place, the result would be prejudiced in advance and the task of objectors would be turned into a far greater uphill struggle than that which they already face. In short, what is proposed would, if implemented, destroy local democratic control of the planning process. Any Government with a large parliamentary majority may be tempted to try to bury local democracy in that way. Sooner or later, however, the boot will be on the other foot and it will be a Labour Opposition's turn to complain about a prejudicial arrangement such as is now being sought. I hope that it never comes to pass.

Finally, I shall talk about the police. On 2 November 2001, I was fortunate enough to secure an Adjournment debate on community policy in Hampshire. I was fairly tough in my criticisms of the way in which local policing was being centralised and about the invisibility of policing in the town of Totton and the villages on the waterside and in the New Forest that are in my constituency. I am pleased that, since then, there have been very clear steps in the right direction.

The new head of the police force for the New Forest, Superintendent Paul Colley, is a proponent of the proactive policing that I referred to in that debate. That

[Dr. Lewis]

means going out, looking for trouble and nipping it in the bud before it can develop. It contrasts with the centralised and reactive way in which so much policing is carried out today. Superintendent Colley has set up a proactive unit that will operate precisely as I have described, and I look forward to seeing how it works in the not-too-distant future.

Having put last November the case for the prosecution against the police, I now feel obliged to redress the balance as I promised to do to the chairman of the Hampshire Police Federation, Mr. Alan Gordon. He organised an excellent open forum on 18 January, which was attended by several Hampshire Members of Parliament. The forum was the result of the growing protest about the reforms, particularly of pay and conditions, that the Government are proposing. I promised at the time that I would do my best to air in Parliament some of the police's concerns, and that is what I hope to do in the few remaining minutes.

Members of Hampshire constabulary who have complained to local MPs range from those at the top of the tree to those in the front line. At the top of the tree is the chief constable himself, Paul Kernaghan. His letter addresses in particular the point that

"the Police Reform Bill contains provisions enabling the Home Secretary to effectively sack Chief Constables at will."

He says that he has some concerns about those provisions, and he is quite willing to say exactly why:

"Chief constables have no right of appeal against the Home Secretary under the proposed legislation and the body to which they are immediately accountable, namely the police authority cannot retain their services if the Home Secretary wants them to go.

I respectfully suggest that the lack of safeguards and the effective bypassing of police authorities will result in a cadre of Chief Constables obsessed with pleasing the Home Office, regardless of their own professional judgement. Chief Constables cannot be above account but the current proposals will result in increased central control at the expense of local representatives."

A vast range of concerns has been expressed from the front line. On 15 December, I wrote to the Home Secretary, setting out, in their own words, the specific concerns of about half a dozen police officers who had written to me. I received a reply exactly three months later, on 15 March, but I have to say that it was a very general one. I am sure that it was a standard letter, and if that was all that we were going to get it could easily have been sent out much sooner. As the specific complaints were not addressed in that reply—a letter signed by someone on behalf of a junior Minister, who was writing on behalf of the Home Secretary—I shall pick out a couple of examples that give a flavour of what is so upsetting to today's front-line police officer.

One officer wrote to me as follows:

"There was a time when the five operational stations within the New Forest Division were staffed with 5 detective sergeants and up to 20 detective constables, now it is 2 detective sergeants and 11 constables, the pressures on the officers within the New Forest and Hampshire as a whole are immense yet we are still meeting or heading towards the increased performance indicators set for us, though God only knows, we must remember that quantity does not mean quality. We are reaching breaking point and offering a sub-standard service to the public."

Another officer wrote:

"If these proposals were to be implemented in their current state I have no doubt we would suffer the biggest reduction in numbers ever known . . . in fact I wouldn't be surprised to see as many as a quarter of the strength up and leave."

A woman police constable said the following:

"I feel that I am the owner of two distinctly undesirable labels. I'm a Police Officer . . . I am also a 'single mother' . . . I make suitable arrangements for my son when I am required to work on short notice, work late, and when I am on unpaid call-out . . . and now the government want me to work an extra 2.5 hours a week for absolutely nothing at all whilst I pay my childminder at triple time . . . I have what I consider to be a good sickness record. Since April 1989 I have been sick on a total of 28 days. However, my sickness record shows that I have had 118 days off sick. This is because my Maternity Leave of 90 days is included in the total."

Finally, I should like to quote the following extract from the letters that I originally received:

"As my local MP, I would be grateful if you will try and convince the Home Secretary not to underestimate the strength of feeling that his Reform proposals have drawn from virtually every officer I have spoken too. Morale is at its lowest that I ever recall in almost 25 years service, it will fall lower."

The key to the problem was summed up in a letter handed to me during the mass rally by the police when they lobbied Parliament a couple of weeks ago. Constable Andrew McDonnell, a police traffic motorcyclist, who said that I could name him and quote him in the House if I had the opportunity, gave me a letter in which he said:

"The Government has very deceitfully handled the current situation, which should deal with two very different issues, Police Reform and Pay and Conditions.

In February, there was a vote by the police federated ranks in response to the proposals for pay and conditions. I am sure you are aware of the unprecedented rejection, a 75 per cent. turn out of voters with 91 per cent. rejecting the Home Office's offer."

The constable believes that the rejection of the Government's proposals on pay and conditions is being misrepresented as a rejection of necessary reforms to which the police do not object at all.

The letter concludes:

"I cannot emphasise enough how let down the vast majority of Officers feel by The Government. We have an unenviable job by most, constant verbal and sometimes physical abuse and we are restrained in carrying out the most simple tasks by red tape."

The final twist in the argument is that even when, against all the odds, the police succeed in making an arrest and bringing someone before the court, time and again, red tape and bureaucracy, the inefficiency of court proceedings and a tendency by magistrates to bend over backwards in favour of the defendant frustrates their best efforts.

If we are, from time to time, critical of the police, we must also, from time to time, realise why they are fighting with one hand behind their backs. I hope that the Government will not lock themselves into a corner on police reform but realise that they have made an honest mistake, back track and recognise the debt that we owe to those people who maintain law and order on our behalf and on behalf of our families.

6.28 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): By my calculation, we have had five hours of very wide-ranging debate, in which we heard 18 speeches that lasted about 17 minutes each. That leaves the Minister and me less than one minute per speech to make some sort of response, so I hope that the House will forgive me and even the Minister if our responses are not as full as they might be.

The Father of the House, the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), in his typical way, focused very precisely on the question that he wanted to raise with the

Government. On the face of it, that was a proper and simple question, as is characteristic of the hon. Gentleman, and one to which I am sure he deserves a straightforward answer. As I understood his main question, it concerned the fact that key evidence on the prosecution side in the Lockerbie case has disappeared. He would like to know, as would I, on whose authority such evidence has disappeared and where it is. I hope that the Minister, if he cannot give a precise answer to that simple and direct question today, will ensure that the hon. Gentleman gets an answer because he directed his question at Ministers in Westminster and specifically asked that it should not be passed sideways to Edinburgh.

The hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) raised a number of issues, not least of which was that apparently the Food Standards Agency—of all people—has given advice that, on the face of it, seems rather odd to most of us: we no longer need to wash fruit and vegetables before we eat them. The hon. Gentleman made a rather serious allegation when he suggested that the Government's advisers might be unduly influenced by commercial interests. That is a grave accusation and it should be taken seriously by the Government.

If we cannot obtain reassurance today, I hope that the allegation will be looked into closely. If the agency set up to protect our food is somehow under the improper influence of commercial interests, we certainly want to know about it. Something should be done about it very quickly indeed.

The hon. Gentleman also raised the problem of VAT on church repairs. I would not be so uncharitable as to tell him that that is one of the many benefits flowing from our membership of the European Union. I should not be as crude as that—*[Interruption.]* In any case, he denies it. However, I sympathise with him: the problem appears to be intractable. Like him, I hope that the Government are hard at work on it.

The hon. Member for Braintree (Mr. Hurst), in a thoughtful speech, posed a question that occurs to all of us: why has the turnout in local elections fallen over the years? He suggested that it results from the demise of municipal enterprise and the reduction in the number of direct employees of local authorities.

I am not sure that that provides all, or even much, of the answer. If one considers the varying turnouts—at parish, district, county, Assembly, Westminster and European elections—one realises that it is difficult to find a direct relationship between turnout rates and the influence of different levels of government on their voters or through their employees. Nor can one relate—as should be possible—the directness of contact through, say, parishes, districts and small wards, to the turnout in elections. The problem remains intriguing and intractable. We are all obliged to consider it seriously; politics—our livelihood—is most affected.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) spoke about telecommunication masts. She made the valid point that it appears that sufficient research has not been undertaken into their health effects, and referred to what we might be able to learn from other countries.

As my hon. Friend is aware, we are keen to learn from other countries nowadays—it is one of the new Conservative new approaches that, as we know, has such appeal to the electorate. Perhaps my hon. Friend can persuade Conservative central office to fund an extensive tour of other countries so that she can look at telecommunication masts. Failing that, she makes a fair point. Surely it cannot be beyond the wit of Government, with all the resources available to them, to investigate what is done in other countries and why those countries seem to achieve such a superior result.

The hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody), in a most succinct and pungent speech—as ever—questioned why the Government appeared to be saying that lack of time prevented the House from fully considering Select Committee reports, despite the fact that we are about to go into what I can only describe as "premature recess", when we shall be away from this place for a two full weeks. Meanwhile, the other place will be sitting for a further two days and will return earlier than us. That mystifies me as much as it does the hon. Lady. Perhaps the Minister, with his legendary ingenuity, will be able to tell us why we are bunking off for a long recess, when the Government tell us that we do not have enough time to debate Select Committee reports.

My hon. Friend the Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin), in a comprehensive and all-embracing contribution, covered several important points. His final point—on the crisis in care homes—was the most telling. We are all becoming more and more aware that that is a major problem in all our constituencies. The Government bear almost the entire responsibility for the problem and it will give them serious difficulties. However, that is not the issue.

The important issue is the welfare of the people who are supposed to be looked after in those institutions. I hope that a solution can be found quickly; otherwise, the problem will have a severe effect not only on the well-being of the folk who want to stay in care homes, but consequentially on the health service through bed blocking. The problem must be closely considered.

The hon. Member for South Swindon (Ms Drown) will be glad to hear that I shall not dwell on breasts on this occasion, because she would not want to hear what I had to say on that subject anyway, but I take issue with her analysis of the time for which the House sits.

I do not regard this place as a legislative factory—I do not believe that the House of Commons exists to churn out more and more Bills. Therefore, I take issue with the Government's approach of ever more routine, systematic and vicious timetabling. However, I do not believe that it will be to the benefit of the House and its workings if we regard ourselves as a sort of office block where we work from 9 to 5. Apart from anything else—this is what I find so curious about the hon. Lady's argument—I fail to see how, unless one has one's family within easy travelling distance of the House of Commons, working from 9 to 5 adds in some way to family values or contributes to the family.

Most hon. Members, especially the hon. Lady's colleagues, have their families some distance away from London, in their constituency, so I wonder what the families think when they believe that Members of Parliament, instead of being tucked up securely in the Palace of Westminster until 10 o'clock every night, are out roaming London promptly after 7. I will leave that to the hon. Lady to explain; I certainly will not try.

[Mr. Eric Forth]

My hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) made some important local points. If he will forgive me, I shall deal with only one—Central Railway and Chiltern Railways. My hon. Friend asked, very reasonably, why the matter could not be resolved more quickly. In particular, he reasonably asked why we cannot obtain more public information about the analysis performed by the Strategic Rail Authority and the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions. Why is the matter being dealt with so secretively?

That issue pervaded some of the other speeches, not least that of the hon. Member for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara). One of the keys to the fascinating but horrifying tale of his constituent seemed to be the secretiveness with which the matter was dealt with, and the plea for far greater openness. All hon. Members know that our individual constituents all too often get into confrontation with powerful bodies and institutions, and that those disputes must be resolved one way or another, but it is unforgivable that the powerful use secretiveness and failure to divulge information as one of their main weapons. Without judging which side of the argument is right in each case, surely the key must be that people must be given all the relevant information on which a proper judgment can be made, and that applies to the case that the hon. Gentleman raised as much as to any other.

The hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) was very critical of local government funding—aren't we all? I was involved peripherally in that process in my years in the foothills of government, and I simply tell the hon. Gentleman that whenever one tackles this problem, one runs into what is known in the trade as winners and losers. No one has yet devised a system in which everyone wins. One ends up redistributing both the goodies and the burdens across local authorities, and between local authorities and central Government, in a way that usually makes a few happy and a large number unhappy. I caution the hon. Gentleman about this; there is no easy answer.

Mr. McLoughlin: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Forth: I cannot possibly give way. I promised the Minister that I would sit down in two minutes' time, and that is what I intend to do.

The hon. Member for Edmonton (Mr. Love) made an excellent speech and some very positive suggestions. He identified a problem and, unusually on these occasions, provided some solutions. I congratulate him on that. He said that he believed that a standard form for changing energy suppliers would be a good thing, which it surely must be. He also believed that Ofgem should make more use of fines, which would be a perfectly proper solution. I thought, although I doubt that he made that connection, that the money from the fines could go towards compensation, where appropriate, for those who had suffered damage. I congratulate him on his speech. I hope that the Government listened to it and will pick it up and follow it through.

I shall finish soon. I ask some of my hon. Friends to forgive me—I cannot now possibly do justice to all of them—but I shall take my life in my hands by saying something, in the friendliest way possible, to my hon. Friend the Member for Worthing, West (Peter Bottomley). I listened carefully to what he said. As it happens, I am going to Florida on Friday, but not for the purpose that he was there recently. Let us consider the sort of cases that he cited—for example, the recent tragic case in Georgia, where the death penalty was applied. I am not convinced that well-meaning intervention in a country's judicial process by people from outside necessarily always bears the desired fruit.

I say that particularly of the United States, which, with all its faults, prides itself on having a proper, democratic judicial system in which—whether we like it or not—judges and attorneys are elected at county and state level. One should be very cautious in seeking, even with the best motivation, to intervene in the judicial process of the United States. I suspect that that is why such action is not as successful as my hon. Friend and others would wish. Having said that, I wish him well in his endeavours, and I hope that Florida's judicial system will come out of this latest case with as much credit as possible in the circumstances.

I have over-run my time, so I ask the Minister to forgive me for taking a minute of the time that I promised him. I also ask for the forgiveness of those of my hon. Friends whose speeches I have not been able to mention.

6.41 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office (Mr. Stephen Twigg): Like the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth), I apologise if I fail to respond to all the points made during the 17 Back-Bench and two Front-Bench speeches. At least 50 issues have been raised during a five-hour debate—matters ranging from mountain rescue in Somerset to the best way to wash carrots. My hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) reminded us of the origins of the control of supply and the English civil war. The hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) even referred to the spectre of the Prime Minister getting on his bike in search of a post office close to Chequers.

I have been impressed by the Conservative party's new-found concern to learn lessons from other European Union countries. It even has a new-found concern for the vulnerable, although I felt that perhaps the hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) could not quite keep a straight face as he expressed that concern at the beginning of his remarks.

Let me address the issue that has been raised most often during the debate—the Post Office's future. Hon. Members on both sides of the House are concerned about the fact that we need to ensure that the Post Office is successful and that it gives our constituents the service they deserve. I do not believe that that would be a party political issue in an ideal world, but it has been raised as such during the debate, so it is worth reminding ourselves of the Conservative party's record of post office closures. Post office closures did not start with this Government; there were very many such closures previously. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin) laughs, but during his time as a Minister the Conservative party seriously contemplated the full privatisation of the Post Office. Those proposals were defeated only because of a very sustained and popular campaign, which had some support from Conservative Members.

My hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), the Father of the House, referred to Lockerbie, as he has done on several occasions in the House, and sought careful reflection from the Government. I certainly take note of his concerns and his long-standing involvement in seeking to get to the truth of that dreadful episode. He will not be surprised to hear that the only response I am able to give him today is to say that he has had the opportunity to ventilate that issue. He will be aware that most of the issues that he mentioned are devolved; they are matters for the Scottish Executive. I will ensure that the Lord Advocate is made aware of the points that my hon. Friend has made and seek an answer from him.

The hon. Member for Worthing, West (Peter Bottomley) referred to the Krishna Maharaj case, and I am aware, from media coverage of his involvement in that case, of the work, commitment and dedication that he has shown in seeking justice in that case. He will be aware that I am not able to comment on the detail of what he said today, but I am grateful to him for his kind remarks about the support that he has received from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. On the broader issue, I look forward to the day when no country has the death penalty. Many of the miscarriages of justice in different corners of the earth are greatly compounded by its existence.

The hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) raised a number of issues about organophosphates and VAT on church repairs and conservation. Although the advice issued by the Food Standards Agency states that washing or peeling fruit and vegetables is not required as a protection against pesticide residues, it also says that it is sensible to wash fruit and vegetables before eating for reasons of general food hygiene. [HON. MEMBERS: "Ah!"] I am glad that the House is enlightened. I was not aware of that until I was briefed for my closing remarks. It is still considered sensible to wash fruit and vegetables before eating them for reasons of general food hygiene. I am also advised that the FSA's nutritional advice is that consumers should eat at least five portions of fruit and vegetables each day as part of a healthy, balanced diet. I am sure that hon. Members on both sides of the House would concur on that.

The hon. Gentleman also mentioned listed places of worship and mentioned the scheme launched by the Treasury on 4 December last year. He acknowledged that the Treasury is trying to address the problem, but raised concerns about the bureaucracy surrounding the new scheme. The European Commission has said that it will consider the United Kingdom's proposal to introduce a reduced VAT rate for church repairs when the reduced rate provisions are reviewed in 2003, so that matter clearly needs to be pursued in the European Union.

My hon. Friend the Member for Braintree (Mr. Hurst) addressed the issue of the decline in turnout and, in particular, the decline in the status of local government. I have much sympathy for his remarks, which could form the basis for a full debate in the House in their own right. I concur with the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst: the issues that relate to turnout are complex. Although the problems that surround the decline in local government powers are real, there has been a general fall in turnout, not simply in local government elections. We need to address that in a full and comprehensive way, and certainly not in the short amount of time that I have left.

The hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) spoke from the Back Bench today, having spoken from the Front Bench in the two other pre-recess Adjournment debates since the general election. She was concerned about mobile phone masts, a problem that has been raised by hon. Members on both sides of the House. That issue is raised with all Members of Parliament. Indeed, I have several such cases in my constituency. I nodded vigorously when the hon. Lady described people having to move home. A family in my constituency was about to move into a new home when they discovered that a mobile phone mast was to be put directly outside the house, which was opposite a church with two nurseries. They pulled out of that sale and made an alternative purchase only to discover that another mobile phone company wanted to erect a mast close to the home that they had moved into. We are still fighting that case.

On the specific issue that the hon. Lady raised, the North and East Devon health authority is aware of the concerns that have been raised and is collecting further information. I will chase up the Department of Health to ensure that she gets the replies she deserves. I am afraid that I do not have time to deal with the other issues that she raised.

My hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) dealt with transport. She mentioned the tube and aviation, and I can tell the House that announcements have been made today. She sought to emphasise that it is important for us to have the opportunity to debate such matters. I am well aware of her concerns and it is important that we provide such opportunities whenever possible. That is one reason why the debate on the modernisation of the House of Commons is so important.

The hon. Member for West Derbyshire was concerned about the Post Office. He also mentioned council tax. I am sure all hon. Members agree that council tax has a particular effect on those who live on fixed incomes, especially retired people. As his colleague the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst said, local taxation has troubled Governments of both main parties for decades. We had rates, which everyone wanted to see the back of, then the poll tax, which still retains one or two advocates and champions in the House but which did not prove overly popular with the wider general public, and now we have the council tax, which was introduced by a Conservative Government.

The current Government do not have a policy of reducing grant to local authorities to shift the balance towards local sources of income, but we are aware that council tax increases have been considerably above the rate of inflation in recent years. In the recent local government White Paper, the Government made it clear that we would separately consider the balance of funding, but it is too early to say what the outcome of that review will be.

The hon. Member for West Derbyshire spoke about sixth forms. Hon. Members on both sides of the House will be aware of the concern felt by schools with sixth forms that they should not be worse off as a result of new arrangements of funding via learning and skills councils. All local education authorities were told last month in a letter from the Department for Education and Skills that the Government do not consider it reasonable of an authority to do what the hon. Gentleman described as

[Mr. Stephen Twigg]

having been done in his constituency—make adjustments to other elements of funding for a school with a sixth form that have the effect of cancelling out 100 per cent. of the potential gain that it stood to receive from the learning and skills council.

We have changed—the hon. Gentleman looks impressed, but much as I would like to say otherwise, I assure him that it is not as a consequence of today's debate—the financing of maintained schools regulations for the coming financial year to require that a school sixth form must gain at least one third of the potential increase that the LSC allocation would have given it above its real-terms guarantee level.

The hon. Gentleman raised the important issue of social care and residential care, before speaking about the case of Stephen Downing. I am pleased to pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman's hard work on behalf of his constituent. As he said, Derbyshire's chief constable has announced the opening of the reinvestigation. I am advised that it will begin next month, in April 2002, and will we hope be brought to a conclusion by autumn.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Swindon (Ms Drown) raised a large number of issues, to some of which I shall respond. I shall pass on to colleagues her positive comments on the Export Control Bill and the aid budget. On Iraq, I am pleased to repeat the assurances given by the Foreign Secretary on Sunday, that any proposal for action in that instance will of course be subject to international law and our international obligations. However, as my hon. Friend said, it is Iraq and Saddam Hussein's regime that are in contravention of their international obligations today, and we seek to bring them to book for that.

In respect of public services in Swindon, I am advised that it has been announced today—perhaps not as a consequence of my hon. Friend's speech, but if she wants to take the credit, that is a matter for her—that Swindon has received £57 million in private finance initiative credits, which will enable, among other things, the building of two new secondary schools and a new primary school in Swindon, in the constituency of the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, our hon. Friend the Member for North Swindon (Mr. Wills).

I share my hon. Friend's view on breastfeeding and hope that the matter will progress as she said it should. The right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst is perhaps not quite as much of a moderniser as his party's leader. No one to my knowledge has proposed that the Commons should become a 9-to-5 Chamber. Anyone who enters the Commons is aware that being a Member of Parliament is a hard job, and rightly so. We should all work hard at that job, but we do want to consider changing the hours to ensure that we more effectively scrutinise legislation and hold the Government to account, and become a Parliament that is genuinely representative of all the people.

Parliament remains 80 per cent. male and has very few ethnic minority Members. I know that the Conservative party is now tackling that issue—albeit apparently not with the support of the shadow Leader of the House. I look forward to the day when the House of Commons truly reflects the diversity of modern, 21st-century Britain.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Swindon also raised issues that may be mentioned in the Queen's Speech. On the specific and important question of sexual offences, I am pleased to be able to assure her that the Government are committed to introducing new sex offence laws and intend to legislate as soon as parliamentary time allows. She will understand that at this stage I can go no further.

The hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) set out in detail a number of specific concerns relating to his own constituency. I undertake to draw them to the attention of my colleagues and seek a reply for him. My hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, North, in a characteristically thoughtful speech, set out concerns about scrutiny of the Executive in relation to public expenditure and the democratic control of supply. He demonstrated once again that he is a serious reformer; I am sure that his suggestions will be considered as debate on the modernisation and reform of Parliament progresses.

The hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath), who may have wondered whether I would reach him in my list of speeches to which to respond, raised the issue of the fridge mountain. I am advised that both the Local Government Association and the Environment Agency have not reported a significant increase in the fly tipping of fridges, but I am aware that there are a number of cases such as those to which he referred. Local authorities have a statutory obligation to accept and collect all household fridges and freezers; significant extra funds have been provided through government to meet that obligation. Clearly, the issue needs to be closely monitored.

My hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton (Mr. Love), who is also my neighbour, raised important issues about energy mis-selling, which I shall draw to the attention of my hon. Friend the Minister for Industry and Energy.

The hon. Member for Romford (Mr. Rosindell) has taken a close interest in the British overseas territories since entering the House last year. As he said, he is an officer of the all-party groups on Gibraltar and on the Falkland Islands. He will be aware that the Government's position on Gibraltar is clear: no proposal affecting its sovereignty will be implemented unless its people agree. On the broader issues of the British overseas territories, he will be aware that the British Overseas Territories Bill is now an Act, having received Royal Assent, and represents an important advance in citizens rights for the people of the British overseas territories.

I apologise for not being in the Chamber while my hon. Friend the Member for Finchley and Golders Green (Dr. Vis) was speaking, but I watched his speech on television while eating my cheese sandwich. He talked about a recent meeting of the friends of the Finchley Memorial hospital. I certainly concur with him about the high quality of service at the hospital; my grandmother was there two years ago, and I visited her. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for raising a number of issues and shall convey to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health his invitation to visit the Finchley Memorial hospital.

The hon. Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess) made a characteristically robust speech, as is his wont during these debates. Again, I apologise for missing most of it because I was still eating my cheese sandwich, but I shall ensure that he gets a response to the specific issues that he raised. He mentioned the network card. The Strategic Rail Authority's review of fares policy will report late next year, and I suggest that he makes a submission to ensure that his concerns are properly reflected in that review.

My hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara), in a disturbing contribution, made a number of serious points, putting them on the record in Parliament. I undertake to ensure that he gets a response from the relevant Ministers and that the lessons to which the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst referred are learned. The hon. Member for Teignbridge (Richard Younger-Ross) raised many issues of concern to his constituents. I am well aware that there are anxieties about the funding of social services on both sides of the House which reflect concerns in all parts of the country. Social services funding is currently being reviewed by the Government as part of the comprehensive spending review.

Finally, the hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) discussed the three Ps—the Post Office, planning and the police—and aired a number of issues to which responses will be forthcoming.

However, as the minutes tick away, I should just like to thank everyone who has taken part in our debate. Pre-recess Adjournment debates provide a good opportunity for the House to air issues of concern, whether local, national or international. Members on both sides of the House have done so, and I join the hon. Member for Southend, West in wishing people a happy Easter and a good recess; I also wish our Jewish constituents a happy Passover.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That this House, at its rising on Tuesday 26th March, do adjourn until Tuesday 9th April.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to delegated legislation.

Ordered,

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

That the Local Government (Best Value) Performance Plans and Reviews Amendment and Specified Dates Order 2002 (S.I., 2002, No. 305), dated 13th February 2002, a copy of which was laid before this House on 14th February, be referred to a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.

That the Local Government (Best Value) Performance Plans and Reviews Amendment and Specified Dates Order 2002 (S.I., 2002, No. 305), dated 13th February 2002, a copy of which was laid before this House on 14th February, be referred to a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.

That the Social Security Amendment (Residential Care and Nursing Homes) Regulations 2002 (S.I., 2002, No. 398), dated 21st February 2002, a copy of which was laid before this House on 27th February, be referred to a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.—*[Angela Smith.]*

ADJOURNMENT

Resolved,

That this House do now adjourn.—*[Angela Smith.]*

Adjourned accordingly at Seven o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 3 April 2002

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth, The Queen Mother

11.34 am

Mr. Speaker: I invite the House to rise and observe a minute's silence in memory of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother.

The House observed a minute's silence.

11.35 am

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): I beg to move,

That an Humble Address be presented to Her Majesty expressing the deep sympathies and condolences of this House on the death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother, whose life was given unstintingly in devoted public service to the Country and the Commonwealth; who with his late Majesty King George VI rallied the nation in the darkest days of war and who in times of peace was a unifying figure for Britain, inspiring love and affection in all she met.

On Friday, the Queen Mother's coffin will be carried in a ceremonial procession to Westminster Hall, where it will lie in state until the evening of Monday 8 April. Members of the public will be able to pay their respects there prior to the funeral, which will then take place at 11.30 am on Tuesday 9 April in Westminster Abbey.

I know that the whole House will join me in paying tribute to the Queen Mother who, for almost a century, was part of our lives, inspired our country, aroused its respect and affection, and for whose service and life we give our most profound thanks.

Part of the fascination with the Queen Mother was undoubtedly the sheer span of history that she encompassed, not just the great events of the 20th century—its wars, the ideologies that came and went—but its technological and scientific discoveries and its vastly changing culture. No doubt 1801 was very different from 1701, but 2001, compared with 1901, seems an historic age apart, and yet she saw and experienced it all.

The Queen Mother was born during the Boer war in an era virtually free from the motor car, a time when, she once remembered, a dairy man still often stood with his cow, selling milk near the gates of Buckingham palace. Yet at the end of her life, thousands of people sent e-mails of condolence to the royal website.

During that long life, the Titanic sailed and sank when she was 11; the first world war broke out on her 14th birthday and her first child was born in 1926, the year that television was invented; she was the last Empress of India; in 1986, she became the oldest person to bear the title of Queen in the history of the British monarchy; and, in all, she saw 20 different Prime Ministers pass through Downing street. One of my best memories of her is sitting with her at Balmoral as she told me of her personal recollections not just of Churchill and Attlee but of Asquith, Lloyd George and Baldwin.

Undoubtedly this long perspective brought stability to the monarchy and to the country, but the respect that the Queen Mother received and the outpouring of affection accorded her death are not the result simply, or even principally, of her long life. She could have lived for more than 100 years and made little mark. The tributes could have been a ritual, but they were not. They were genuine and heartfelt, from young and old, all classes, all backgrounds and all walks of life. That was because of the person that she was, not the rank that she held. The Queen Mother came to embody what was best about our past and makes us most optimistic about our future.

The Queen Mother never expected to become Queen, despite, as a child, being told by a fortune teller that she would be. It was only after the abdication of King Edward VIII that her husband became King George VI. In 1936, during the abdication crisis, she wrote to the Archbishop of Canterbury:

"I can hardly believe that we have been called to the tremendous task . . . the curious thing is that we are not afraid."

The Queen Mother's husband had seen active service in the Navy. She had never anticipated the role of Queen. Both had led lives reasonably broad in experience and in meeting people.

The second world war was to prove that fate had chosen well for Britain. Hitler, it is said, watching a newsreel clip of Queen Elizabeth laying a poppy at a first world war memorial and noticing her poise and spirit, dubbed her the most dangerous woman in Europe—at least for him. King George and Queen Elizabeth rallied the nation magnificently during the second world war's worst hours and days. Her refusal to leave London is now legendary. A clue to why she refused can be found in what she wrote after visiting the east end:

"I feel quite exhausted after seeing and hearing so much sadness, sorrow, heroism and magnificent spirit. The destruction is so awful and the people so wonderful they deserve a better world."

She spent nights in air raid shelters and took revolver shooting lessons in the grounds of the palace. Her spirit and the British spirit became inseparably intertwined.

The Queen Mother was a unifying figure because she personified the diversity and unity of Britain and the Commonwealth. She considered herself a Scot, and was proud of it. A descendant of Scottish royalty, she spent a lot of time from an early age at her family's estates in Scotland. She was never happier than when at her home, the Castle of Mey in Caithness, or fly fishing in Scotland's rivers. During a visit to South Africa in 1946, she met an old Boer veteran who told her bitterly:

"I can never forgive what the English did to my people."

Not at all put out, she replied:

"Oh, I do so understand. We in Scotland often feel just the same."

In all her work, the Queen Mother was motivated by the most powerful sense of duty and service. She believed that the royal family's duty was to serve the nation. She carried out that role with total and selfless devotion, even after she had suffered the loss of her beloved husband.

[The Prime Minister]

She was still carrying out 130 engagements a year at the age of 80, and more than 50 at the age of 100. She was involved, often as patron or president, in considerably more than 300 charities, voluntary bodies and other organisations. She served the British Legion, for example, throughout almost its whole existence over nearly 80 years.

We should remember the Queen Mother for her great sense of fun and her zest for life. Her enthusiasm and humour shone through in all that she did, whether it was handing out shamrocks to the Irish Guards on St. Patrick's day, inspecting the Chelsea pensioners or indulging her lifelong and very serious passion for horse racing. Her infectious sense of fun could charm even opponents. The veteran anti-monarchist and former Member of Parliament, Willie Hamilton, said, on her 80th birthday:

"I am glad to salute a remarkable old lady. Long may she live to be the pride of her family. And may God understand and forgive me if I have been ensnared and corrupted—if only briefly—by this superb old trouper."

The Queen Mother not only enjoyed life to the full, but helped others to do so. Her longevity and her vitality in old age gave hope to older people everywhere. Commenting on her extraordinary vigour and gaiety—she was still dancing well into her 90s—she once said:

"I love life, that's my secret."

As His Royal Highness Prince Charles has said, she was

"the original life enhancer—gloriously unstoppable."

Today, our thoughts and prayers are with all the royal family, and especially with Her Majesty the Queen, who in the space of a few weeks has so cruelly suffered the loss of her sister and her mother. The Queen has borne that with her customary dignity, continuing to serve the nation even while she grieves.

We have seen in the many moving and memorable tributes paid to the Queen Mother the recurring themes of her love of life, her warmth and humour, her love of country and, above all, her devotion to duty. It is the belief in duty that best captures her spirit, yet it was not duty in an arid or formal sense. She enjoyed life, lived it and loved it to the full. She showed, however, how it could be lived and loved while not for one moment compromising her commitment to duty. It is that combination of high integrity and simple humanity that made her not just respected but loved. There is nothing false or complicated about the public response to her death. It is the simplest of equations: she loved her country and in turn her country loved her. For that, and for her long life of service and devotion, we earnestly give our thanks and praise.

11.45 am

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): In supporting the Humble Address, all Opposition Members concur entirely with the tribute that the Prime Minister paid to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother. As he said, our thoughts and prayers are with her Majesty the Queen and the royal family, particularly because in this, her golden jubilee year, Her Majesty has had to suffer the death of her sister and now her mother within a matter of weeks—a personal tragedy.

Fifty years ago, Sir Winston Churchill stood in the Prime Minister's place as the House gathered to mourn the death of the King. He said of the King during the last war:

"the fate and fortunes of the whole nation and of his realms were centred not only in his office but in his soul, that was the ordeal which he could not have endured without the strong, loving support of his devoted and untiring wife and Consort."—[*Official Report*, 11 February 1952; Vol. 495, c. 961.]

Sir Winston Churchill was more aware than anyone of the service that the Queen Mother gave our nation. All of us owe an enormous debt of gratitude to the woman who played such a vital part in defending our liberty and democracy.

We often tend to think of great figures in our history as being victorious generals, influential thinkers or inspiring national leaders. The Queen Mother's great contribution to our nation was different and special. She did not lead military campaigns, inspire through speeches or transform the nation directly, but by standing resolute in the face of danger beside her husband the King and her country, and by providing a loving family in which her children and grandchildren could grow up, she made a contribution that was no less enduring. In this, the Queen Mother shared the attitude of millions of British soldiers, public servants and private citizens whose service to future generations is given through individual lives of courage, love and devotion. When her country needed it most, she gave her inner strength and her wonderful personality. In doing so, she embodied what is good and noble about the people of our country.

As the Prince of Wales said in his moving tribute to his grandmother,

"She understood the British character and her heart belonged to this ancient land and its equally indomitable and humorous inhabitants."

Queen Elizabeth's life embraced a century of tumultuous change, as the Prime Minister said. When she was born, the motor car was still an uncommon sight on our streets and, by the time she died, people thought nothing of flying to the other side of the world. It was a century of enormous technological advance, from communications to medicine—a century that produced penicillin and the internet, but also two world wars and the atomic bomb. It was a century in which democracy flourished, but it was also regularly threatened by regimes of monstrous depravity, such as those of Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia.

During that century, the Queen Mother personally also had to suffer the early loss of a much-loved brother and of a husband worn down, perhaps, by responsibilities that were unexpected. From the Queen Mother we learn that character and inner strength can be a formidable anchor during times of change and upheaval. She felt no need to trim to the prevailing winds of fad and fashion; instead she stayed true to herself. Yet she never seemed anachronistic or, less still, out of touch—our memory of her has a timeless quality.

The Queen Mother's strength was that she brought to her public duties the same enjoyment with which she practised her private enthusiasms. She rejoiced in the company of young people. She was devoted to her regiments, passionate about her sporting interests—from fishing to racing—and brought energy to all the causes with which she was associated.

I first heard of the death of the Queen Mother when I was fishing on a Scottish loch on Saturday. It struck me at the time that she might well have approved of such a way of spending a Saturday afternoon. My first reaction was sadness, but as I thought more it turned to gratitude, for the Queen Mother's life was long, well lived and for the benefit of many. She was, frankly, the best of us.

Her Majesty the Queen and the royal family should know that all of us in the House and in the country share their sadness, but that our sadness is balanced with pride. We are proud to have shared in the life of this deeply loved and remarkable lady.

11.51 am

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West): On behalf of my right hon. and hon. Friends, may I say that it is our privilege to give our support to the Humble Address moved by the Prime Minister?

Her Majesty's passing marks, without doubt, the end of a very long and, indeed, seminal chapter in our country's history. Without doubt, hers was the story of the 20th century, and what an extraordinary story it has been.

As the leader of the Conservative party rightly acknowledged, Her Majesty's passing follows, after only a few short weeks, the untimely passing of Princess Margaret. For the Queen, of course, the whole House will wish to express its profound sympathy for the loss of both her only sister and now her mother in such a short space of time. Let us not forget Princess Margaret's children who, during the same period, have lost both their mother and their grandmother. Coming as it does in jubilee year, it must be very hard indeed for that family to have to live out those setbacks in such a public way.

The Queen Mother came from an era that seems very distant for us today, yet for all of us who had the opportunity to meet and talk with her it was obvious that she belonged very much here in the present. She had a fantastic knowledge of and interest in contemporary events and people. She had the gift of being absorbed completely in whatever she was doing at any given time. Her achievements went beyond mere incredible statistical longevity. She was the key bond between the monarchy and the people of our country.

Over the weekend, my parents were reflecting on their wartime experiences: my mother's in Glasgow—your home city, Mr. Speaker—and my father's in the west highlands of Scotland. The signal sent by the King and Queen in terms of their personal commitment was vast, especially to the people of London and the other cities in the south that suffered so much during the blitz; but that message resonated every bit as much in remote places such as the north of Scotland, which would never have caught a glimpse of the monarchy at that stage of the country's development. It was psychologically very important.

I want to say a word about the special place that the Queen Mother always had in the hearts of people in Scotland. She was raised at Glamis castle. Scotland was where she really belonged: whether it was the bracing air of Balmoral, salmon fishing on the River Dee or the River Thurso, or indeed her most immediate legacy, which has been discussed, in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (John Thurso), who, as a trustee of the Castle of Mey, hopes to catch your eye later, Mr. Speaker—the far-sighted renovation of the Castle of Mey and the way in which she has bequeathed it for future generations. That is a cause of great pride and celebration in our area.

Scots do not always give of their affection lightly. I think that the Prime Minister might agree with that in other contexts from time to time. As a people they are not over-impressed by grandeur, but all generations of Scots took the Queen Mother absolutely to their hearts, because of her warmth and because she identified so strongly with us.

We all have our Queen Mother anecdotes; one of my favourites concerns a friend of mine, the late Mark Bonham Carter. The Queen Mother used to visit Mark's house once a year for a private lunch or dinner, and he would invite friends of his from a cross-section of age groups and walks of life. On this occasion I was asked along, and it was very pleasant. There were a couple of dozen of us and the Queen Mother was holding forth on subjects ranging from agriculture to Europe, and even proportional representation—she was not very sound on that one, Mr. Speaker. *[Interruption.]* I do not think that we want to divide the House on that issue.

The Queen Mother arrived with her private detective, slightly late, and he was shown into an adjacent room. We all sat down and ate and argued our way through a splendid lunch. At the end, when it was time for the Queen Mother to leave, someone went off to raise the private detective—and "raise" proved to be the operative word. The private detective—her protection—was sound asleep in an armchair. He looked a bit embarrassed by this discovery, and I said a word of condolence to him for having been caught out in that way. He said, "The problem is, I am exhausted; I just can't keep up with her."

On the Queen Mother's 100th birthday, a number of us had to present the loyal petitions on behalf of both Houses of Parliament at Clarence house, and she held court, in every sense of the word, in the garden; a beautiful afternoon it was, too. I got a real earbashing about the state of fishing in the north of Scotland, and what I was going to do about it. That seemed to me to be rather a tall order, to say the least.

This matriarch for the country as a whole, who will be so greatly missed, perhaps teaches all of us an important truth. We get obsessed with institutions and structures, but people really respond to people. She responded to people, she liked people, and as a result they liked her and she helped save and preserve a great institution. We wish her well.

11.57 am

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On 14 February 1990, Speaker Jack Weatherill had the happy idea of inviting a cross-section of 15 Members of Parliament to meet the Queen Mother in Speaker's House. The hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley), the leader of the Democratic Unionist party, and—smiling on the Front Bench—my right hon. Friend the Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng), will remember the occasion.

After a very nice dinner, and a beautiful speech from the Queen Mother, we were sat down, one by one, by the Speaker for three or four minutes each, next to her on that Speaker's couch that you know so well, Mr. Speaker. When my turn came, I had just sat down and she turned to me and said, "Mr. Dalyell, tell me about Scotland and Scottish devolution." I will spare the House what I said,

[Mr. Tam Dalyell]

but then she added, with a twinkle in her eye and a slightly malicious smile, "Of course you know that I can't tell you what I think." She had a real and very sharp sense of humour. But, as the leader of the Liberal party said, she was profoundly concerned about Scotland.

I had the good fortune to have something to do with her, as I was a member of the council of the Scottish National Trust in the 1960s and 1970s. The Scottish National Trust never had a more active patron—in fact, no organisation had a more active patron—than the Queen Mother. It was the view of the late director, Sir Jamie Stormonth Darling, confirmed by the former deputy director, Findlay McQuarrie, that it was the Queen Mother who drove through a number of schemes with her personal interest. In schemes such as the little houses at Dunkeld and Culross, and the good work of the Crown Estate Commissioners in Fife, which the Chancellor of the Exchequer knows very well, at Dysart, her personal interest made all the difference.

The officials of the Scottish National Trust said, "Not only is she patron, she actually reads the minutes and asks us sharp questions about them." So I suspect that for a number of organisations she was far more than a titular head.

The right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Inverness, West (Mr. Kennedy) referred to the Castle of Mey, which ought to be her memorial because it was personal to her. I had the opportunity to go there with the Ancient Monuments Board of Historic Scotland. At the end of my visit, I asked the experts who took us around, "Who had the good taste to advise the Queen Mother on this beautiful interior?", because she had rescued a castle that was almost irredeemable. They said, "Look, no one advised her; she oversaw and did a lot of this herself." I extend all good wishes to the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (John Thurso)—one of the four trustees, with John Stobo and Lord Caithness, and the chair, Ashe Windham—in their opening for the summer of the Queen Mother's castle, because it is very different from the royal palaces: it is hers and in her taste.

I end on the matter of taste—I realise that I am on delicate ground—but having known the Queen Mother not well, but sufficiently, I just wonder whether the sister of Fergus Bowes Lyon, who, as the Leader of the Opposition said, died tragically in the first world war, would object if, after we have paid tribute and after a quarter of an hour or so, there was a discussion of the urgent situations, because I think that she would have been deeply concerned about events, for example, in the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem.

12.2 pm

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): On behalf of the Scottish National party and Plaid Cymru, I want to express our condolences to the Queen Mother's friends and family and offer our support for the Humble Address. When a grand old lady dies in her 102nd year, it is not a tragedy. There is sadness certainly, but it is more a time to reflect on a remarkable life. It was highly appropriate yesterday that the Queen Mother's coffin was accompanied by Pipe Major Motherwell, playing "The Dark Island"—a lament, as you will know from your own experience Mr. Speaker, written not in the mists of antiquity but rather more than halfway through the Queen Mother's remarkable century.

Those hon. Members who have spoken so far have referred to the momentous events that the Queen Mother has lived through, but I prefer to offer a few recollections and reflections on that life. I very much liked the Prime Minister's story about the Queen Mother's encounter with the disgruntled Afrikaner. It has been said that the Queen Mother bore her Scottish identity with pride. That is certainly true, but what I found remarkable is that each of the four hon. Members who have spoken thus far on their personal experience with the Queen Mother emerged totally convinced that she was on their side. That indicates a remarkable political talent, not to say a certain tolerance on the Queen Mother's part.

The Queen Mother bore her Scottish identity with pride, and looking back, as I have done in the past few days, at the newspaper front pages at the time of the accession, there was an early love relationship between the Queen Mother and the Scottish people because she was greeted then as the first Scottish queen for 400 years. The Queen Mother's Scottish upbringing at Glamis probably gave her her greatest talent and gift of all, which stood her in greatest stead: not so much a common touch as an ease and facility with people.

I suspect that there is no greater challenge for anyone in public life than dealing with people in a state of bereavement, in finding that mix of compassion and humour that allows people to feel that bit better in their times of greatest extremity. Ten years ago, I witnessed how that should be done when the Queen Mother unveiled the Piper Alpha memorial in Hazelhead park in Aberdeen. It was an extraordinarily hot day, nearly 90 deg, and the Queen Mother herself was 90, yet for a matter of hours that afternoon, she behaved towards 167 bereaved families in an absolutely impeccable fashion—an example for all in public life that is much aspired to, but not always followed. I know from the recollections of others who encountered her in similar situations that that experience has been shared by us all.

I shared with the Queen Mother an interest in horse racing. Indeed, we shared that interest with the Leader of the House, although I suspect that neither the right hon. Gentleman nor myself conferred the same respectability on the sport as the Queen Mother did. Over the past few days, the mysterious collapse of the Queen Mother's horse, Devon Loch, has been written and reminisced about. It belly-flopped 50 yards from the finish line just as it was about to win the grand national in 1956. The remarkable thing about the story is not the event—unprecedented and remarkable though that was—but the Queen Mother's reaction to the defeat. First, there was a philosophical "That's racing"; secondly, a concern for the jockey, the horse and the trainer; and thirdly, and most important, full and public congratulations for the owners and connections of the winning horse. There was something irresistible in the way that the Queen Mother reacted to adversity in both large and small events. As the Queen Mother goes on her final journey next Tuesday, it is highly appropriate to wish her, as the *Racing Post* did yesterday, a sunny day with the going good.

12.6 pm

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): I support the Humble Address in its expression of condolences to Her Majesty the Queen and the royal family on the death

of Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother. In expressing sympathy on behalf of my colleagues, I am conscious of the fact that I am also expressing sympathy on behalf of very many people in Northern Ireland who are drawn from right across the political spectrum and who feel a sense of loss and sadness at the death of the Queen Mother.

A number of people have spoken about the Queen Mother's character, her sense of humour and the way in which she could conduct herself to put almost anyone she met at ease. She expressed and carried herself with extraordinary grace without in any way losing a sense of her majesty or position. She had such an effect on the people of Northern Ireland from the first time that she visited it in 1924 as the Duchess of York right through until her comparatively recent visits.

One remembers the Queen Mother not so much because of her character, longevity and the events that she lived through, but more because of the contribution that she made towards this nation over time. Reference has been made to her courage and to her sense of duty Inevitably, one thinks of how she and His Majesty King George VI conducted themselves during the second world war. However, I rather suspect that, when the full story is told, we will realise that she made an even greater contribution in the mid to late 1930s. With her husband, she provided stability at a time when our society was under great stress. That active contribution then and during the war years will be seen not as her only contribution to our nation's life, but the most significant.

The Queen Mother's courage did not diminish either. I recall that the plans and details of her visit to Northern Ireland in 1983 were stolen from a press cameraman's car in Dublin a few days before the visit was to take place. However, she carried on with the visit and, to the consternation of those responsible for her security, she departed from her itinerary to mingle with the crowd. That emphasised her courage and her ready rapport with the people.

As we have all acknowledged, the Queen Mother made a tremendous contribution over a long period. Underneath it all was her sense of duty and her sense of having a job to discharge and a service to give to our nation. That will be remembered.

12.9 pm

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): I want to say a few words as Second Church Estates Commissioner on behalf of the Church of England as the established Church, although my remarks will cover all faiths and religions.

Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother lived the life of a true Christian, finding her deep spirituality in the worship of God, in the stories of the Bible and in the singing of hymns. She enjoyed going to church. It was a part of her life. As the Archbishop of Canterbury has said:

"Christian love shone through her character . . . it was the great depth and simplicity of her own Christian faith that saw her through one hundred and one years."

Her faith would see her through the troubled days of the abdication of Edward VIII, which saw her husband come to the throne; the dark days of the blitz and the years of the war; the anxieties of state; the tragedy of losing her husband when only half of her life had been lived; and numerous operations and health scares that have tended to be forgotten as she lived to see out the fullness of her days. Her faith, her family and her sense of public duty—she was steadfast in them all. They were a joy and comfort to her.

We saw goodness and love in her life, and what that love and goodness has meant to each one of us. She might have been born in a world of privilege, but she subordinated that privilege to a sense of public duty. Her motto seemed to be the greater the privilege, the greater the public duty. She had a vision—a clear view of her world. She might have walked with kings and archbishops, but she never lost Kipling's common touch. In her love of racing, she would have seen the likes of the famous tipster Prince Monolulu on the race course and she might have read and enjoyed the racing novels of Sir Dick Francis, her ex-jockey, but she also introduced the royal walkabout with the King.

Faith, it is said, can move mountains. The Queen Mother did not need to move mountains, but she was able to show that faith can be an inspiration to us all to lead a good life, a useful life, a dedicated life. She showed that goodness, like mercy, can touch the lives of others, as she did walking around the east end in the blitz. She showed that even the memory, the recollection, the remembrance of things past, can create goodness in others and make better persons of thousands—possibly millions—who had never met or spoken to her, but who had felt her presence and been motivated by her example. The Queen Mother has left us not a footprint in the sands of time, but a monument to decency—a beacon that shall shine as a guiding light unto a perfect day.

The Church shall rejoice in her life because her faith has nourished the faith of others. Christians and others of all religions the world over can be inspired by her example in what, for many of them in different parts of the world, are troubled times. She believed in the faith that, like love, passeth all understanding. We must mourn her passing but think of her in our prayers, and think too of those she has left behind, not only members of the royal family, who clearly loved her dearly, but the people of our nation who equally loved her.

12.13 pm

Rev. Ian Paisley (North Antrim): May I identify myself with the remarks that others have made, and express the sympathy of those whom I represent in this House and the people of Northern Ireland whom I represent here on this sad occasion?

Our words are but breath: they are like life itself—they appear for a little time and then vanish away. Our tributes today are but tiny tributaries that can never fill the great ocean of what we would like to express at a time of national sorrow and at the end of a very important historic era in this nation's history.

I remember listening to King George VI speaking on the radio when he put a stamp of immortality on some words written by Miss Harkins. The words were these:

"I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year, 'Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown.' And he replied, 'Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the hand of God. That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way!' So I went forth and finding the Hand of God, trod gladly into the night. And he led me towards the hills as the breaking of day".

The faith of the Queen Mother could be summed up in those words. She had evidently done what was said by her husband on that occasion.

[Rev. Ian Paisley]

We might well pose a question to ourselves in the House today. What was the secret of her love, her courage, her steadfastness, her loyalty, her determination, her sparkle and her zest for living throughout her life? No doubt vast numbers of people who listened to the tributes paid on a very good BBC programme on Sunday evening will have been struck by two very important incidents, one in the days of sunrise for the Queen Mother and one in the days of sunset for her.

From the days of sunrise was the recollection of the fact that for her church confirmation the Queen Mother picked for her hymn a very well known hymn, "I'm not ashamed to own my Lord or to defend His Cause, Maintain the honour of His Word and the Glory of His Cross." In the days when sunset was coming, two trees in her castle grounds had to be felled and her staff worried what her reaction would be. However, when she came out and looked on the felled trees, she said, "I am glad now that they are gone for we now can see the mountains." She then recited the magnificent Psalm of David:

"I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my strength.

My strength cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth".

She continued until the final verse:

"The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore."

As I sat here watching the Members gather for this special sitting of the House, I asked myself what the Queen Mother would have said to us if she were here. I thought that she would probably have quoted those great lines by Browning:

"Grow old along with me!

The best is yet to be,

The last of life, for which the first was made

Our times are in His Hand

Who said—A whole I planned,

Youth shows but half; trust God

See all. Be not afraid."

In her very long life, the Queen Mother saw all.

I believe that if we can learn the lessons of the Queen Mother's life, this nation can renew its strength. I salute the memory of a great Queen and a great Queen Mother. I salute the memory of a job that was well done, of a race that was well run and of a battle that was well won. John Bunyan, the author of "The Immortal Dream", said of the pilgrim:

"They laid the pilgrim in a large upper chamber, facing the sun rising. The name of that chamber was peace."

We can say the same about the Queen Mother.

12.19 pm

Ms Oona King (Bethnal Green and Bow): I speak in this debate to represent the people of the east end who, as the whole country knows, held the Queen Mother in great affection. I shall speak not about what the Queen Mother inherited or passed on, but what the Queen Mother merited. She merited respect, and nowhere is that respect greater than in my constituency—land of the pearly kings and queens who were inspired by the sparkling monarch who picked her way through the rubble.

As I drove to Parliament this morning, I passed the plaque at the bottom of my road that reads:

"here fell the first flying bomb on London."

Sixty thousand British civilians died during the war, 30,000 of them in east London. Indeed, the first early-day motion I ever tabled was on a memorial for civilians who died during that war. Earlier, the Prime Minister quoted the Queen Mother saying of the east end carnage:

"the destruction is so awful, and the people so wonderful, they deserve a better world."

The Queen Mother inspired the east end during the blitz. One eastender recalls that

"There was still an air raid on when she walked through the rubble. I always thought the world of her. She doesn't sit back pompous-like. I remember her putting her arm around people covered in blood and grime, and consoling them. I feel she knows what our lives were like."

As my neighbour Mary Isaacs said:

"She came down Bow road slowly, and oh what a lovely smile."

As another cockney woman put it:

"Ain't she lovely! Oh ain't she just bloody lovely!"

The century the Queen Mother spanned has closed. She was the last Empress. Although the world in which she was born and in which she moved has vanished, the characteristics with which she is associated endure, and we in the east end give thanks for them.

12.21 pm

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe): On 1 August 1979, Her Majesty the Queen Mother was installed as Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports, in succession to Sir Robert Menzies. As I have the honour to represent the constituency that contains two of the original cinque ports—Hythe and Romney—I am grateful for the opportunity to say a few words about the enormous contribution that the Queen Mother made to our part of the realm in her capacity as Lord Warden.

The origin of the Confederation of the Cinque Ports goes back at least to the reign of King Edward the Confessor, and the office of Lord Warden is almost as ancient. The Lord Warden has many privileges: as the letters patent record, the Lord Warden is entitled, among other things, to

"all manner of wrecks of the sea, jetsam, flotsam and lagen goods merchandises and effects whatsoever which at any time or times . . . shall be cast away, wrecked or lost."

I have no knowledge of the extent, if any, to which the Queen Mother claimed the right to any of those privileges during her long term of office as Lord Warden, but she certainly took her duties most seriously.

Those duties were many and various. They included the responsibility of ensuring that beached whales were given a proper burial, and that at least one tooth from each beached whale was extracted and sent to the natural history museum, so that the whale could be properly identified. The House will understand that the duty was not one that the Lord Warden was required to carry out personally, but I know that the Queen Mother always took a keen interest in the results of the researches of the natural history museum.

The Queen Mother came every year to Walmer castle, and she always took the opportunities offered by her visits to east Kent to visit schools and carry out all sorts of other responsibilities and duties. Those included the opening of

community halls, such as the one in Lydd in my constituency, which she opened in her 94th year. On every occasion, she lit up with her presence the whole of the gathering involved. As many of my constituents have said, she was just as much at home with children as with people of her own age.

My abiding memory of the Queen Mother is of her officiating at the unveiling of the battle of Britain memorial. That took place on the top of the cliffs at Capel on the boundary of my constituency. It was a dreadful day. The rain came down in sheets and most of us felt that the wind was hurricane force at least. We all huddled in the rather precarious protection of tents but the Queen Mother, apparently oblivious to the weather, went from one tent to another, radiating charm, making sure that she met everyone and illuminating the greyest of days with the magic of her personality. She will be much missed throughout the realm, and especially in east Kent. She will always be remembered.

12.25 pm

John Thurso (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross): All those who have spoken today have expressed more eloquently than I can Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth's immense contribution to our national life and to the national stage. She showed courage, zest for life, a sense of duty and devotion, and, above all, gentle leadership for almost a century. She was an exemplary human being.

I should like to pay a parochial, partisan tribute to her on behalf of myself and my constituents. It is hard to put into words the affection that she felt for Caithness and that the people of Caithness felt for her. It was partly based on her obvious commitment to duties in the constituency, which were small when judged on a national scale—opening the harbourmaster's office in Scrabster or visiting Caithness Glass—but none the less greatly appreciated. It was partly based on the evident joy that she took in attending local events, such as her annual visit to the Society of Caithness Artists or the Mey games. I once witnessed her consoling a team of German motor cyclists who had been beaten in the tug of war by the motley crew of footmen and equerries from the Castle of Mey.

Above all, the fact that, once a year, she came among us in Caithness and was our very special royal engendered great affection. Her Majesty warmly reciprocated the feelings of the people of Caithness. That was partly because the Castle of Mey was the only home that she owned herself. She first saw it in 1952 when it was about to fall down. Indeed, she told me that the occupants were in one room and the sheep were in the other. She bought it, took it over and restored it over a period of three or four years. She did it all herself.

Her Majesty made many happy visits with the late Hetty Munro to the Ship's Wheel in Thurso. That antique shop no longer exists but she bought several antiques there. It may be coincidence but my family home was demolished at roughly that time. I like to imagine that I might recognise the odd piece in the Castle of Mey. She enjoyed it enormously and later added Longoe farm where she became a tremendous connoisseur of stock. She understood Aberdeen Angus cattle and north country Cheviot sheep. The societies for those breeds were immensely grateful for and encouraged by her patronage over the years. She was a keen stockman and I am told that she read the agricultural pages of *The Press and Journal* every day to keep abreast. That practicality was typical of her and meant that in 1996, she put the castle into a trust of which I have the honour to be one of the four trustees. She has left us with a marvellous legacy, but with a challenge too. She wished the Castle of Mey to be open and available to the public, and as soon as the current building works are complete some time in July, we will be opening it to receive the public, as was her wish.

The castle was her home. She brought a warmth and friendliness to that house, which all those who ever went into it will never forget. The other part of our challenge is to meet her vision of keeping the house in good order and of retaining the feeling of warmth and friendliness in it.

Queen Elizabeth brought a special warmth and light to everyone she ever met; it was her great gift. We in Caithness will particularly miss her; I will miss her. She touched all our lives, but above all today, we thank God for her life, for her tremendous service to her country and for her great sense of humour. Whatever journey she is on, we wish her well.

12.31 pm

Mr. Iain Luke (Dundee, East): I should like to make a humble contribution to this Humble Address on behalf of the citizens of Dundee and my constituents.

Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother was a freeman of the city of Dundee on two counts—as the Queen and Empress of India, and as the Colonel-in-Chief of the Black Watch, which is the home regiment of Dundee, Tayside, Angus and Fife. Indeed, the castle of Glamis lies across the Sidlaws in the beautiful vale of Strathmore. The valley and the whole area was connected by her affiliation and association with the regiment, which played its part in all of Britain's campaigns, especially during the first world war when she lost family, and while others in her family were closely associated with it. As Colonel-in-Chief, she was well received in Dundee during her many visits in that guise.

I also pay tribute to her time as chancellor of the university of Dundee. As a graduate of the city of Dundee's university, I was proud and very aware of her prime role during her three decades as chancellor, and of the way in which she handled events at the university, presiding over graduation ceremonies and the subsequent garden parties, at which I had the opportunity to meet her.

During her long association with Dundee, she played a vital part in an organisation that is probably not well known in this Chamber: the Lord Roberts workshop. The workshop was created after the first world war to employ disabled people and disabled service men in building furniture, giving them a useful life following the suffering of the great war. The Queen Mother kept up that connection over a span of five decades and was involved in its joining the Royal National Institute for the Blind in the 1990s to create Dovetail Ltd.

One of the major events in the changing life of the city with which the Queen Mother was involved was the opening of the Tay bridge in 1965, over which she presided. The bridge made an immense difference to the centre of the city of Dundee. As a consequence, I was again able to meet her briefly when I was chair of a

[Mr. Iain Luke]

committee to restore a bandstand in Magdalen Green. Her involvement in such matters was perhaps the mark of the woman.

In response to a letter from our committee asking her to make a donation or to become involved in the restoration of the Victorian bandstand, we received a personally written letter from her saying that she had seen the bandstand on many occasions while crossing the Tay rail bridge, was very aware of its poor state and would be happy to make a contribution and be involved in the restoration. One of her ladies-in-waiting presented a small gift for the raffle, and we received pictures by people such as one of her favourite artists, Mackintosh Patrick, helping us to raise the £100,000 needed to restore the bandstand to its Victorian grandeur.

As a sign of respect, we invited the Queen Mother during one of her visits to the area to preside over the dedication of the bandstand in 1991. It was a very wet day, and as she was not as young as she had been, we created an indoor event around the rededication of the bandstand, with a small band, flowers and children. At the end, as the Queen Mother was being moved away by her personal detective and her ladies-in-waiting, she insisted on spending time with the children who made up the band, to say a little word of thanks for their efforts on behalf of the restoration. That reflects the way in which she looked at things, the detail with which she tackled projects and her personal touch.

It was no mistake that the Queen Mother was called the Rose of Glamis. Although she came from a rural area, her smiling face was able to conquer the hearts of the rough diamonds of the east end and tame the rough spirits in Dundee. I am glad to have the opportunity to pay my respects. I know that the Lord Provost of the city of Dundee has been invited and will attend the funeral next week. I pay my respects on behalf of the citizens of Dundee to one of the longest-serving freemen on two counts.

12.35 pm

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. Luke). I also have a fond memory of 1991. I went to Clarence house as chairman of the William Morris Craft Fellowship, along with a brilliant young woodcarver and some members of the committee. Our task was to present Her Majesty with a wonderful carved head of William Morris. She received it with great delight, looked at it, stroked the wood and said, "What a noble head. It reminds me of one of your colleagues in the House—Mr. Faulds." The resemblance was indeed striking.

That is just one of a number of memories that I have, but my fondest is of receiving the Queen Mother when I was warden of St. Margaret's across the road—the House of Commons church. Every year she came to the field of remembrance in November for the dedication of that field, and every year after the short service she would go round and speak to as many as she could of the assembled veterans and the bereaved, taking, as it were, a personal interest in each one. Then, when the tour was complete, she would come into St. Margaret's and sign the book. She had a great love for our church and contributed to its restoration when we had the great appeal some years ago.

I remember that in 1990, when the Queen Mother had turned 90, she came in and said, "I'm terribly sorry. I think I've been too long this year." She had spent about an hour and three quarters going round. She said, "You know, there are an awful lot of old people out there." That was typical of her.

The Prime Minister spoke very movingly of all that the Queen Mother did and all that she meant during the second world war. It would be appropriate for us commemorate in a tangible and proper way all that she did and all that she stood for. There is nobody in the Chamber for whom she was not a central figure in the nation's life throughout our lives. I wonder whether we ought to take the Monday nearest 11 November and make that an annual holiday, remembering the veterans and the fallen, and also remembering her. I hope that that idea will commend itself to the Prime Minister and colleagues in all parts of the House.

I hope, too, that further thought will be given to making next Tuesday a public holiday. The House will not sit, as a mark of respect. That is right and proper. Others should have a similar opportunity. We are commemorating the life of the most remarkable woman of the 20th century, who has touched all our lives, directly or indirectly, and who will never be forgotten. Her memory should not be forgotten, either.

12.39 pm

Mr. Michael Jabez Foster (Hastings and Rye): On behalf of my constituents in Hastings and Rye, I express our heartfelt condolences to Her Majesty the Queen and the royal family at this time of personal loss. Families, whether royal or not, suffer the same sense of bereavement, and for those in the public eye, the hurt is no less. During last year's general election, my own dear mother, Dolly Foster, died. I appreciate, therefore, how much more difficult it is for those who must grieve in the public gaze.

I want to refer in my brief contribution, however, to the enormous affection and respect in which the Queen Mother was held by so many of my constituents. Because of the age profile of those living in Hastings and Rye, many recall her sense of duty and commitment during the war years about which many other right hon. and hon. Members have also spoken.

I recall the wonderful celebrations that we held in our town centre on the occasion of her 100th birthday. It was Tesco champagne and 1066 birthday cake, and I am pretty sure that she would have welcomed the knees-up that all our elderly folk enjoyed.

The special affection in which Her Majesty was held by so many of my constituents arose in part because of two special relationships. The first may seem trivial, but she was an honorary member of Hastings Old Town Winkle Club. Its members had presented her with a special gold winkle brooch, which she wore on her 100th birthday, to the pride and satisfaction of all we Hastingsers. "I'm a winkler too", she was heard to say as the winkle club contingent passed in the birthday parade.

The more significant connection was Her Majesty's role as Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports, to which the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) referred. I hope that he will not mind my saying this, but Hastings, as the senior cinque port, as well as Rye and Winchelsea, are all members of the

confederation. When the mayors from my constituency of Hastings and Rye, as barons of the cinque ports, attend the funeral next Tuesday of our beloved Lord Warden, it will be a further link with the Crown that goes back, it is believed, more than 1,000 years to Edward the Confessor.

Older generations remember Her Majesty setting out at 8 am each morning to visit the communities that had been bombed the night before. On that basis, Her Majesty was a worthy holder of the office of Lord Warden, a position that Winston Churchill assumed in the 1940s. The cinque ports were historically the front line in the defence of the realm, and for Her Majesty to be our Lord Warden was a great honour for us.

Our links in Hastings and Rye and in the whole of the confederation go back much further than that. It is 65 years since the barons of the cinque ports attended Her Majesty's coronation. The ritual of carrying a canopy over the king's head at the coronation was abandoned in the 19th century and the privilege granted to the barons of the cinque ports to carry it was lost, but Edward VII directed that the barons should always be invited to such celebrations and, I fear, such events as next Tuesday's.

Thus it was that our links with Her Majesty started early. It was entirely appropriate, none the less, that her inspiration in the war was why she was appointed Lord Warden. Many of her friends have said that within her sense of fun, there was a ring of steel. So it was with her association with us. In her enjoyment of her annual cinque ports picnic, there was a sterner association. We have always been the front line in a purpose to which she gave vital years of her life—the defence of our realm.

The next duties of the barons will be a sad one, but in attending the funeral service next Tuesday, they will represent the affections of the people of the cinque ports towns and their pride in their association with this woman of duty.

12.43 pm

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex): I want to speak only briefly as the House this day records its tributes to Queen Elizabeth. To my eternal good fortune, I had the great privilege and joy of knowing Her Majesty for a little over 40 years.

I want to testify to the oneness of Her Majesty's character. Whoever people were, whatever their age, whatever they did or wherever they came from, the Queen Mother was always the same to everyone. Her completely natural personality and her sparkling wit and charm truly put all who met her at their ease.

As the Prince of Wales said two nights ago in his most moving tribute to his grandmother, she was indeed indomitable, tireless, wise and loving, with a unique natural grace and understanding of the British character. She had, as well, an infectious optimism—just as well, given her love of national hunt racing—and was one of those rare people able to span the generations.

What a life it was—born in the reign of Queen Victoria, the Queen Mother was married to the last King Emperor and was the first non-royal Queen Consort since Catherine Parr in the 16th century. She lived in two centuries and through two fearful wars, in the first of which she lost her brother, Fergus Bowes Lyon, an officer of the Black Watch, at the battle of Loos in 1915. That event marked her for the rest of her life.

It was the telescope of history that gave the Queen Mother such perception, wisdom and experience. She lived in the reigns of six monarchs and through a period of the most profound social, technological and economic change. Yet she never lost her bearings, fortified and sustained as she was by the discipline of her Christian faith and by her strong principles. She wrote, in the foreword to "An Anthology of Assurance", a book by Lady Elizabeth Basset, one of her ladies in waiting:

> "We can, at one and the same time, be truly contemporary men and women and yet have our thoughts and lives rooted in truths that do not change."

That was the Queen Mother.

The Queen Mother's affection, admiration and respect for the armed forces, and her robust defence of all military traditions, bound her closely to all three services, particularly to their old comrades. She caused me some testing moments when I was Minister of State for the Armed Forces when she kindly, but very firmly, let me know, in no uncertain manner, of her concern about or even disapproval of some cut or amalgamation proposed by the wicked Government.

The Queen Mother's loyalty towards and support for all her regiments, and her naval and air force affiliations, were, and will remain, of the most profound importance and encouragement to all who deeply value and cherish an historic connection of which they will for ever be extremely proud.

Queen Elizabeth loved life, but she was also a symbol, for all generations, of courage and endurance in peace and war, of truth and gentleness and constancy to duty. In Kipling's words, she did indeed walk with Kings, but yet retained the common touch. With her passing, someone very special, splendid and unique has gone out of all our lives for ever. Truly, it can be said of Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother that we shall never see her like again.

Rest eternal grant her, and may light perpetual shine upon her.

12.47 pm

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): It is a privilege to follow that personal tribute from the hon. Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Soames). I also compliment the hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Ms King).

When I had the privilege nearly 20 years ago of being elected to Parliament, I was already aware that the war and the blitz had been among the most life-affecting experiences in the docklands communities of London. The two people who personified the resilience of those communities, among which many families paid the ultimate price, were the King and the Queen. It was not as though there was much in common between the backgrounds of those communities and the King and Queen. Nor was it that the electors of the docklands would have naturally voted Conservative—indeed, the eminent MP for Bermondsey was a republican but was elected again and again during the 1920s and 1930s, until the second world war.

Within days of the start of the war, the King and Queen came to inspect the civil defence forces in Bermondsey. They came again the following year to support the Women's Royal Voluntary Service. The Queen came again the following year to go down into the air raid

[Simon Hughes]

shelters. On each of those occasions, she encouraged and inspired everybody, and won their respect. Whether people were monarchist or republican, they thought that she was a star: whatever political views people hold, everyone is now generous enough to say so.

After the war, the Queen Mother kept up that amazing service. She had not chosen to be born an aristocrat, she had not chosen to become the Queen and she had not chosen to be widowed so early in life, but she did choose to make of each of those opportunities a life of service. For 50 years from her widowhood, she continued that life of service.

Only a few years ago, the Queen Mother made her last visit to the docklands to see how they had been rebuilt after the war. She visited the new housing and opened a housing estate at the Surrey docks. Then, she asked to go into the pub. I think that she was the first monarch who had ever asked to go where normal people go pretty regularly. She went into the pub, had a half-pint of beer and chatted to the people. They said then that she was a star and what a power of good she had done for their community over the years.

On behalf of those communities and the people from all over the world who have come to settle in the docklands—many of whom fought on the home front or abroad—I want to say that we are very grateful for her life of service. She did a power of good to her family, a power of good to her faith, a power of good to the monarchy, a power of good to her people and a power of good to this country at home and overseas. We are very grateful and we give thanks for her very much.

12.51 pm

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): The first time that the Queen Mother visited my constituency was in January 1923, shortly after she became engaged to the Duke of York. The last time that she left my constituency was by helicopter in February of this year on her way to the funeral of her daughter, Princess Margaret. In between, there were 79 years of countless visits and deep involvement in the local community.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for South-West Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard) knows only too well, the Queen Mother was very proud to become the first female to receive the freedom of the borough of Lynn in 1954. At the time, she said:

> "I can assure you that nothing pleases me so much as the knowledge that you think of me as a neighbour. When the King first brought me to Norfolk I fell in love with the place and its people and this love has only grown over the years. There is a very big part of my heart in Norfolk"—

quite something from a Scots lass.

That love manifested itself through the patronage of numerous organisations. The King's Lynn festival and the Sandringham flower show featured very much as a focus for her annual summer visits. When she came to the constituency over Christmas and new year, she was involved with the local women's institutes and schools. She even instituted her own personal awards for pupils at local secondary schools for academic excellence and she invited them every year to Sandringham to talk about their careers and ambitions for the future.

All of that was interspersed with many other official visits and, whenever there was a natural disaster locally, such as the floods in 1953, the Queen Mother was on hand to give comfort to people. Her knowledge of west Norfolk and its people was awesome, as I discovered shortly after being elected. The King's Lynn custom house, its great historic building, was threatened with closure and had an uncertain future, and I was summoned—it was hardly a summons, as I was contacted by her private secretary, who said, "If you can get away from the Whips, Her Majesty would be delighted if you would come and join her for dinner." The Whips would not believe that for a start and I could not believe it either, as she made it look as though I was doing her a favour by going to talk to her about the custom house. She told me to "rattle some cages"—what a great turn of phrase that was—and to use my position as Member of Parliament quietly to get a few things done. So, I received advice early on as an MP from a very wise person and the King's Lynn custom house was saved. Then, the Queen Mother wrote a letter to the local paper to thank everyone locally for being involved in the campaign.

Shortly afterwards, the Queen Mother took a great interest in the local railway line. She was always very concerned about it and had used it many times in the past. She wanted to be kept informed about the campaign to electrify the line. She let it be known that she would like to attend the opening of the King's Lynn electrification. I thought, hang on, something has gone wrong. Queens do not come to openings, they do not turn up in a taxi to watch some junior Minister unveil a plaque—they actually do the opening; but that was her modesty. Can you imagine, Mr. Speaker, any Minister wanting to come to an opening? They want to do the opening themselves.

The Queen Mother came to that opening and met five or six grades of British Rail management. Obviously she was charming to them, but I could tell that she wanted to get on and meet real people. She then met the drivers, conductors and local station staff and spent a long time talking to them and she really made their day. She probably gave them the best day of their careers. She was indeed a life enhancer and had the ability to make the people she met feel fantastic.

The Queen Mother's hospitality and generosity was limitless. She never said no to a request for a prize or present for a raffle for local charity in west Norfolk. That kindness touched the lives of thousands of people. I have a personal debt of gratitude to her, as on several occasions she invited my wife and me to stay with her.

As long as the Queen Mother lived, a bright light shone on my constituency. It was a light based on the best human qualities, those encapsulated by her: compassion, sympathy and concern for others. Now that light has been extinguished my constituency will be the poorer, but I will go to the service on Tuesday to represent my constituency and to give thanks for a remarkable life.

12.56 pm

Mr. Michael Trend (Windsor): For 70 years, the Queen Mother made a family home at Windsor. Affection, gratitude and respect for her life of service are keenly felt in and around our town—as are sorrow and loss at her death at Royal Lodge.

That was clear when I took my two youngest children up to the castle gates on Saturday evening. Already, people from the town and visitors from throughout the

country and the world were gathering. They were drawn together to share their sense of shock. It was quiet and dignified. However much one may anticipate death, it always comes as a great blow. Windsor was no more prepared for that than anywhere else in the United Kingdom. The people outside the castle—scene of so many memories in the life of the Queen Mother and where she will be laid to rest—were, in their private ways, trying to come to terms with their sadness.

Over the Easter weekend the crowds grew. Windsor is accustomed to large numbers of visitors on bank holiday weekends, but those gathering at the castle were not drawn by mere curiosity. I was hugely impressed by the reaction of my 11-year-old son and 8-year-old daughter. They and the other young people shared the same emotions as the older generations.

I was struck by the remarks of the Prime Minister and my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition about the sheer span of the Queen Mother's life. She was a hugely familiar figure to us all. She had become a symbol of continuity in our society, and continuity brings with it a sense of security, which we all—old and young people alike—need in our lives.

In Windsor, we are very aware of the royal family. I think that we try hard to live together in a neighbourly way, letting them get on with their lives as human beings, but the deep affection that local people hold for the royal family should be no surprise. That feeling is warmly reciprocated.

Over many years, the Queen Mother undertook countless visits and appearances in the royal borough of Windsor and Maidenhead. Many of our shops now have photographs of her in their windows. During the past few days I have met dozens of local people who have particular memories of her. Many speak of a sense of personal loss.

I should also like to tell the House of the special place held by the Queen Mother in the hearts of those who live within the Great Park, especially in the Village with its York Club. Many hon. Members know Cumberland Lodge, whose foundation and development owed so much to her vision and commitment. She would frequently greet its guests from all parts of the country and the Commonwealth at Sunday services in the Chapel of All Saints—the chapel where she lay after her death.

The Queen Mother made a home for her family at Royal Lodge. We have all read or heard accounts of the happy informal atmosphere of that house, but most people know the Queen Mother best from the times when she was out in the world—on parade, as it were. She knew that people would turn out dressed in their finest and be on their best behaviour to meet her, and she always did the same. On state occasions and Garter day she showed star qualities. At Royal Ascot and at the Windsor race course, she clearly joined in the fun. She showed a lively interest in and real concern for the many voluntary groups and public organisations in Windsor.

The royal borough, although in mourning, is therefore giving grateful thanks for the interest and affection that Queen Elizabeth had for us. Tributes more eloquent than mine will be paid to the Queen Mother, but today, with humility, I speak for my constituents in expressing our love, our respect and our deep sympathy for the Queen and her family.

1 pm

Sir Robert Smith (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine): I rise to support the Humble Address, given the strong contacts between my constituency and Her Majesty the Queen Mother, and her long association with it since her honeymoon as Duchess of York in Birkhall, part of the royal estate of Balmoral. The association spans much of her life and many of her summers. When she was not at the Castle of Mey she would move south to Birkhall and join the rest of the royal family in Deeside. In the north-east of Scotland, we almost take it for granted that the royal family are part of the fabric of our society, and as a result their time at Balmoral is free of intrusion. It is a chance for them to get away from the glare of publicity and enjoy a true family life.

The Queen Mother in particular will be much missed. It was welcome news when it was announced today that shops and businesses that had received warrants as a result of her patronage over the years could keep them for the next five years to maintain her connection with the community.

The Queen Mother's last official public engagement in Scotland was to another part of my constituency. In Alford, which has a long association with the Aberdeen Angus breed, the Queen Mother—who, as has been said, was a keen breeder of Aberdeen Angus cattle—joined her grandson at the unveiling of a statue to mark that connection. It was a time when the rural community was under much stress as a result of foot and mouth disease, and she spent over 40 minutes on her feet, mingling with several hundred people, making it something of a joyous occasion and bringing some light into a very dark year in the farming and rural communities.

A few days later, the Queen Mother's last public appearance in Scotland was at the Craithie Opportunity Holidays site, opposite Balmoral, where holiday homes are being built for people with mobility difficulties. She quipped that she hoped to return this year and enjoy one of the homes. Obviously she will not be able to do so in person, but I am sure that she will in spirit.

Her Majesty made a great contribution to the century. We can pay one of the most lasting tributes to her, and in a way keep her alive, by acknowledging that she symbolises for us, in the public policy sphere and as individuals, the fact that no one is ever too old to make a public contribution. If we can remember that, no matter what age someone is, they are an individual who has something still to contribute, and if individuals can remember that, whatever age they are, they have something to contribute, she will have left a lasting legacy for us all.

1.2 pm

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher and Walton): In supporting the Humble Address, I share the solemnity that has fallen on the House. As I listened to all the tributes, however, I found that the vitality of Her Majesty the Queen Mother came through. The twinkle in her eye came through in every anecdote.

My own experience with the Queen Mother came during two different aspects of my life. First, as a governor for a while of Research into Ageing, a charity that tried to extend the quality of active life, I once remarked that if we could bottle up the elixir of life represented by Queen Elizabeth we would have solved

[Mr. Ian Taylor]

some of our research problems. I never did have the courage to ask her what it might have been in the bottle that she carried with her, but she served the charity—and so many of the other charities with which she was involved—in a remarkable way.

However, my principal reason for intervening in this debate on the Humble Address is that I am the Member of Parliament for Sandown Park—or, at least, I think that the Queen Mother thought that I was, given the number of times that we met there. Sandown Park, in her own words, was her favourite race course, and Sandown Park really loved the Queen Mother. When she moved from the president's box to award the trophy to the winning jockey and owners, she always made time to speak to everyone and regularly received spontaneous applause. Quite often, the Leader of the House, who may not have had as many winners at Sandown Park as the Queen Mother, although I am sure that he tipped as many, joined in that applause. She was spontaneously popular with everyone, from all walks of life, who attended Sandown Park. It was the race course on which she had 79 winners over the years. She won the Whitbread gold cup with Special Cargo in 1984 and another big race two years later. There was a special relationship between the two, but she could be quite a hard taskmaster.

On one occasion, we were lunching at a Whitbread gold cup meeting. Anyone who knows Sandown Park will know that the wind whips across from the reservoirs into the stands, and it can be very cold, even though the meeting takes place on the last weekend in April. On that occasion I had enjoyed a hearty lunch and the first race was about to start. I was told that I would have the honour of sitting first with the Queen Mother out in the open, so I started to reach for my very heavy overcoat when the lady-in-waiting looked at me with one of those looks that ladies-in-waiting give when someone is about to do something that is not right. I noticed that the Queen Mother was dressed in a summer frock and was on her way out. We sat through that race and every jockey, every horse and every bit of history was recounted with an absolutely crisp memory and precision. I must have increasingly sounded as though I was dumb, not just because I did not have as much knowledge of racing as the Queen Mother, but because I was absolutely frozen to the marrow. She showed no signs of that at all. I do not know whether that was because of the Castle of Mey or the other Scottish houses that she inhabited. However, standing up to go back inside was quite an effort on my part, but it seemed to have no effect on the Queen Mother.

The Queen Mother's character was such that no one was immobile or too worried to do things when she was present. She sparked a vitality into the company that she kept; that was very much part of her own character, which she shared with others. Those at Sandown Park will long remember her. There is a wonderful equestrian statue of Special Cargo at Sandown Park—the Queen Mother's spirit will always be beside it.

1.7 pm

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): There can be no greater or more fitting tribute to the brilliant life of Her Majesty the Queen Mother than we have heard in the House today. In adding my support for the Humble Address, I speak not just for myself and my constituents, but proudly as the United Kingdom member of the executive of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, on behalf of its chairman, the right hon. Pius Msekwa, the secretariat and all our members throughout the Commonwealth's 172 Parliaments and legislatures.

The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association would like to express its most profound sympathies on the death of Her Majesty the Queen Mother. She did not just belong to this country, but was loved and respected throughout the entire Commonwealth, where she travelled extensively. She represented the finest traditions of the monarchy and was noted for her extraordinary warmth and affection by peoples of all nations. She is especially remembered by Commonwealth parliamentarians for her official opening of the 30th parliamentary conference, held in 1984 on the Isle of Man. The warmth with which she greeted members of the association made a lasting impression on all who attended, and she brought to the conference an air of grace, majesty and gentleness that was an inspiration to the parliamentarians who came to the Isle of Man and all the Manx people who lined the route to see her. The association was honoured by her presence and is deeply saddened by her passing.

The Queen Mother is, in death as she was in life, an abiding symbol of all that is good in our world. Her unselfish devotion to duty and country, the depth of her love for her family and her unfailing sense of humour are her legacy to us all.

It is hard to find words that are truly fitting, but Milton wrote many of his beautiful poems in my constituency, so it is to his words that I turn to pay my tribute. They come not as hon. Members may imagine from "Paradise Lost", but from "Arcades"—a verse of which she could so easily have been the subject. He wrote:

> Mark what radiant state she spreds,
> In circle round her shining throne,
> Shooting her beams like silver threads,
> This, this is she alone,
> Sitting like a Goddess bright,
> In the center of her light.

Throughout the Commonwealth, we mourn the passing of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother, but her radiance will never be forgotten.

1.10 pm

David Burnside (South Antrim): In supporting the Humble Address, I wish to recall a day in 1985 that I will never forget. It was always easy to remember the Queen Mother's age, so Sir John King, the then chairman of British Airways, wondered in late 1984 what could be done for her 85th birthday. A message was sent to Clarence house to ask her what she would like for her birthday and the reply came back that she would like to fly on Concorde, because she wanted a bit of excitement.

A flight on Concorde was arranged and the Queen Mother came to Heathrow dressed in her normal pastel shades. She was wearing, I think, light blue, four-inch heels—I am told that they cannot go much higher—and a large hat. She sat in seat 1A, and she had been asked whether she had any special requirements for the flight. A copy of the *Sporting Life* was ordered, and not for a casual read on the flight but to make contact with the ground so that she could invest in the horse racing business. She did that from the flight deck.

The Queen Mother had a very fine lunch, and was invited to the flight deck. Concorde is very small, with a three-man flight deck for the captain, first officer and engineer and with a little jump seat behind the captain. She sat on the jump seat still wearing her hat, which was about half the width of the flight deck, and we flew over the Irish sea. The route had been worked out with the Queen Mother, and we flew over the Castle of Mey. That is what she wanted for her 85th birthday.

The 100-seater aircraft was filled with representatives of civic and business life from all round the United Kingdom and it flew back south to Heathrow. The Queen Mother had been briefed beforehand on who was who so that they could be introduced to her. As a director of the company, I lucky enough to be sitting in about row 8 and Sir John King introduced me as David Burnside, the director of public affairs. She said, "From Northern Ireland. I pray for Northern Ireland every night." I have never said that publicly before but the House and the people of Northern Ireland would appreciate knowing what she said. We have lost a great lady.

1.12 pm

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley): I wish to say a few words as the Member for a constituency that had no specific connection with the Queen Mother. However, she was just as well loved and respected there as in those constituencies that had a more direct connection with her.

My constituency is in Lancashire, and the Queen Mother was the mother of the present Duke of Lancaster and the wife of the previous Duke of Lancaster, her much-loved husband King George VI. My first memory of the Queen Mother is of the time that I saw her when all the schools in Burnley went to see the King and the Queen, as she then was, when they visited the town at the end of the second world war. The royal family played a great part in the war and certainly boosted the morale of the country. Indeed, the present Queen, as Princess Elizabeth, gave a special speech on the radio to the children of the nation, and every child at school received a certificate at the end of the war from the King.

It was the simple things that made the Queen Mother much respected and loved. I recall her visit to Manchester in the late 1960s or early 1970s when she attended a banquet. I was in a group of about a dozen people when I was introduced to her and each person in that group thought that she was speaking to them alone and to no one else. She had the knack of being able to speak in that way.

One man was introduced to the Queen Mother and she told him that she had met him before. He said yes, but just as he was about to tell her where and when, she said, "Don't tell me." She carried on chatting to him for three or four minutes, and then suddenly said, "Did I meet you in Manchester during the blitz?" He said, "Yes, you spoke to me when I was helping to clear up Manchester cathedral after it had been bombed the night before. I was in the ARP." She had that knack of remembering people. I have an appalling memory for names and people, but she remembered many years later that she had spoken to that man.

The Queen Mother also made a most simple gesture at that banquet. It was attended by 500 people, a large number of whom were not especially pro-monarchy—indeed, some were clearly republican. We had the toasts and the function was drawing to a conclusion when she suddenly and unexpectedly pushed back her chair and proposed a toast to the city and people of Manchester. That hall of 500 people was electric at that moment, with everyone standing and cheering. Such simple gestures, so warmly and genuinely meant, made her the most respected and loved of all the royal family. We pay tribute to her. She will be a sad loss to the nation.

1.16 pm

Mr. Roger Gale (North Thanet): In supporting the Humble Address, I hope that I speak on behalf of many when I express my thanks for the work that the Queen Mother did for so many charities. I could not go through a litany of them all, but it is a source of great astonishment for those of us associated with any of them that she managed, in her busy and committed life, to become so personally involved in so many organisations to which she gave a great deal.

Much has been made of the Queen Mother's commitment to children. When she visited the Royal School for Deaf Children in Margate, she quickly put her young hosts at ease when others, more shamefully, found it difficult to communicate with them. She immediately struck a chord with them all.

The Queen Mother was patron of the Children's Country Holidays fund and took a passionate interest in the work that that little organisation does to provide holidays for the underprivileged children of east London. In this, the final year of her life, she allowed her name to be given to a rose bred specially for her called "Queen's London Child". When hon. Members on both sides of the House visit the Chelsea flower show this year, they will see that rose twinkling in the sun as a living memorial to someone whom the children of the east end of London believe to be a very great lady. They will miss her dreadfully.

1.17 pm

Peter Bottomley (Worthing, West): Lest it is thought to be an individual quirk of the Father of the House or a one-sided comment, and although we cannot debate other things today, the House and the people of this country expect the usual channels to arrange a debate at the earliest possible opportunity on the matters to which he delicately referred.

We cannot list all the 300 organisations with which the Queen Mother was associated, but she was supported in all of them by her personal and household staff. In particular, I want to mention Sir Martin Gilliat, her devoted supporter for many decades.

I saw the Queen Mother in military, civilian and voluntary service. People do not fully understand or articulate how thousands of ordinary people doing ordinary things use the inspiration of someone in her position—whether as patron, colonel or a supporter of an organisation—to achieve extraordinary results.

It is not just about what she alone did for the east end, but about the inspiration that she gave to people to put up with hardship or to do that extra bit for those around them.

The best tribute that we can give is to ask whether we can do more of what she did and what she inspired others to do.

1.18 pm

Andrew Selous (South-West Bedfordshire): Like many hon. Members and our constituents, I did not have the privilege of meeting the Queen Mother. Many of our colleagues have contributed to this debate on the Humble Address. Indeed, my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Soames) made a most moving speech on how he knew her for more than 40 years. Yet to me, all hon. Members and all my constituents, the Queen Mother was a very special lady: she was, indeed, the nation's favourite granny. One of her unique gifts was to take the love, the support and the delight that she so clearly took and gave to her own family to everyone that she met and came across. If we, as we go about our business, can just follow her example in some small way and make everyone we meet feel as special as she did, and if we can continue those small acts of kindness that she performed for all those she knew, we will have served her memory well.

1.20 pm

Mr. Jeffrey M. Donaldson (Lagan Valley): I rise to support the Humble Address, and on behalf of my constituents I should like to extend my sincere sympathy to Her Majesty the Queen and the royal family.

March 2002 will long be remembered by my constituents as a month of mixed emotions. Early in March, the honour of city status was conferred on the borough of Lisburn by Her Majesty the Queen, in this her golden jubilee year. We celebrated the new city of Lisburn, especially in light of our close association with the royal family, with the village of Hillsborough being the official residence of Her Majesty the Queen and having played host, on many occasions, to Her Majesty the Queen Mother. We remember those visits with affection.

As my friends and colleagues have said, those visits came at times when the people of Northern Ireland were facing great uncertainty and adversity, with the shadow of violence hanging over our part of the United Kingdom. When the Queen Mother and other members of the royal family came to visit Northern Ireland, we took hope from their interest and the time that they spent among us, and not least among the royal family was the Queen Mother who gave her time and showed her affection for Northern Ireland.

As my hon. Friend the Member for South Antrim (David Burnside) said, we were inspired by the Queen Mother's Christian faith and by the fact that she prayed for the people of Northern Ireland. We very much appreciate that, and we appreciate the contribution that she made to the life of Northern Ireland and to the life of our nation. We will greatly mourn her passing. It is at times like this that we are reminded of the contribution that the royal family make to the life of our nation. It is a contribution that many of us in Northern Ireland deeply appreciate, and we will miss the Queen Mother. She was a very special lady, and she meant much to my constituents.

1.22 pm

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): I cannot hope to match the eloquence of a number of those who have already contributed. Nevertheless, as a recently elected Member of the House, I should like to pay a brief tribute to Her Majesty the Queen Mother. She served as the Colonel-in-Chief of a number of regiments in the Army, including the University of London officer training corps and the Royal Anglian Regiment, in both of which I had the privilege to serve. All the people who served in those regiments, and indeed in all the armed forces, including those who served in two world wars and who still survive, will greatly mourn her passing.

I met the Queen Mother only once when she paid a formal visit to the London OTC several years ago. As a young second lieutenant I was deputed to have the honour of introducing her to some of the cadets in the regiment. I freely admit that when I came to this place I was slightly nervous on the day of my maiden speech, but that was as nothing to the butterflies that I experienced when the Queen Mother visited the London OTC. I pay tribute to her great skill, which others have mentioned, of putting people at ease. When she met me she immediately put me at my ease and made it very simple for me to perform my duty. On a personal level, I will always be thankful to her for that.

I conclude with a very gentle story. Some hon. Members may have heard this before, so I crave their indulgence. Several years ago, when she was in her 90s, the Queen Mother was asked by a journalist, "Your Majesty, you have travelled the world, you have met so many people and done so many wonderful things. Is there anything at all to which you still aspire?" She is reputed to have replied, "Yes—I would very much like to receive a telegram from my daughter." Of course, she did receive that telegram, and we are all very grateful that she did.

I think that Her Royal Highness the Queen Mother was something of an institution in her own right. We are all the poorer for her passing, and as a House and as a nation we will miss her tremendously.

1.25 pm

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): I rise to make a brief contribution to what has been a most amazing and moving sitting of the House.

Yesterday afternoon, I attended a reception at the town hall in Macclesfield where I met the under-18 schoolboys who are to play for England against the under-18 schoolboys of Wales. In fact, I should be there to watch the match, which will start in a few moments' time, but I felt it appropriate to be here. I am pleased to be in the Chamber to share the occasion with Members of Parliament of all political parties. During that visit to Macclesfield town hall, the mayor, the leader of the council and I signed the book of condolence. It was a moving occasion not because we signed the book of condolence, but because of the many dozens of people, young and old, who were there to do the same thing, and the simple messages that they entered in the book.

The Queen Mother has held a special place in the life of our country. She loved its people. She loved this country. She fought for this country—metaphorically speaking—during the war, when she refused to leave London. As we all know, she said, "I cannot leave without the children. I cannot leave without my husband the King, and he will not leave." Her indomitable spirit shone forth then and continued to do so until last Saturday. Her life was full to the brim with service, duty and love, of family, and of her country. She will pass to her place of perpetual peace and rest on a wave of love and affection which will be remembered for ever.

1.27 pm

Sir Michael Spicer (West Worcestershire): I have listened with growing awe to the wonderful tributes that have been paid today. Because of them, I cannot understand why the Queen Mother's funeral is not to be designated a state occasion. She was arguably the greatest female British citizen of the 20th century, and I hope that those who are responsible for such decisions will reconsider the status of her funeral.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved, nemine contradicente,

That an Humble Address be presented to Her Majesty expressing the deep sympathies and condolences of this House on the death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother, whose life was given unstintingly in devoted public service to the Country and the Commonwealth; who with his late Majesty King George VI rallied the nation in the darkest days of war and who in times of peace was a unifying figure for Britain, inspiring love and affection in all she met.

SITTINGS OF THE HOUSE

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 25 (Periodic adjournments),

That this House, at its rising this day, do adjourn till Wednesday 10th April.—*[Mr. Sutcliffe.]*

Question agreed to.

ADJOURNMENT

Resolved,

That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Sutcliffe.]*

Adjourned at twenty-eight minutes past One o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Tuesday 19 March 2002

[SYLVIA HEAL *in the Chair*]

Parish and Town Councils

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Mr. Woolas.]*

9.30 am

Mr. Mark Prisk (Hertford and Stortford): The Local Government Act 1894 established parish councils for villages of more than 300 people. That Act followed a series of substantial late Victorian local government reforms. During the 108 years since then, parish councils and their urban equivalent of town councils have become established in every corner of the country. They have evolved over that time, but to their credit they have retained their distinctive character.

Effective local councils represent some of the best practice in good governance. First, they are part of the communities that they serve, which ensures accountability. Secondly, they are focused on the provision of local services and amenities, which is what people want. Thirdly, they are often independent of Whitehall and the political party machines. Fourthly, and perhaps most important, they are diverse: they genuinely reflect the different urban and rural communities for which they are responsible.

I am fortunate that in my constituency of Hertford and Stortford and the area covered by the East Hertfordshire district council we have some excellent parish and town councils. The four town councils represent from 8,000 people to about 31,000 people. The parish councils are similarly varied. Some represent one single village; others represent a series of villages and hamlets. All of them, however, share a common sense of public service and, in good times and bad, they have striven to do their best for their communities.

I take this opportunity to record my thanks to the hundreds of men and women who, down the years, have served as councillors, clerks or staff, and for the wonderful public service that they have provided. In a quiet manner—dare I say it, in a barely active way, but none the less effectively—parish and town councils have helped to shape the character of their communities. I am sure that hon. Members on both sides will join me in extending their thanks for that public service. Indeed, as the very future of public service is in question, we should pay tribute to those who have given so freely of their time and talents.

The role and organisation of local councils are now changing. During the past two years, the Government have published a series of consultation papers and statutory documents on how our parish and town councils should operate. Those plans include changes in their powers, funding and organisation—and even on how councillors should conduct themselves. Taken together, those changes represent a significant redefinition of the role of the local council. That is why I was delighted to learn at the end of last week that I had secured today's debate. It is a shame that hon. Members from some political parties are not able to take part.

Mr. Malcolm Moss (North-East Cambridgeshire): Mention them.

Mr. Prisk: I wish to retain a degree of independence, but as my hon. Friend points out, it is a shame that the Labour party seems to be sleeping this morning.

Mr. Moss: Inactive.

Mr. Prisk: Inactive; my hon. Friend is quite right.

Mr. Peter Luff (Mid-Worcestershire): Certainly not vibrant.

Mr. Prisk: Certainly not.

I shall consider three aspects of the Government's plans. The first is the funding system known as quality councils; the next is the management system termed best value; the last is the code of conduct for councillors. Each aspect may seem minor—they may even sound dull—but together they represent a major change in how local councils will work, and therefore in how our local communities will develop.

I shall begin with quality councils. Initially, they sound great, do they not? Who could possibly object to encouraging higher standards among local councils? Yet when one examines the scheme in practice, one realises that the main means of promoting the higher standards that the Government propose is the hypothecation of funding. Local councils would therefore be forced to comply with Whitehall rules to be eligible for funds. The Government have remorselessly practised that classic Whitehall tactic in almost every aspect of our public services. The result has been less local decision making and more power vested in Whitehall.

That is not the way to encourage people to become involved in our local communities, because it sends the message that Whitehall knows best, and Ministers do not trust local people to make the right decisions for their communities. That is clear from the way in which the Government fund education, health and our police services, which are losing good people who feel that Ministers do not trust them to take decisions. The same will happen in our parish and town councils if the Minister pursues the policy that he has in mind.

The second of the Government's plans relates to the system known as best value. For those who are unfamiliar with it, I should explain that the best value management system is intended to raise performance standards through—I hope that hon. Members will excuse the ridiculous management jargon—continuous performance, performance planning and service reviews. Like many management consultancy fads, it turns a simple common-sense idea into complex bureaucratic language that all too often sounds like gibberish.

[Mr. Prisk]

If I may, I shall give a brief example of that gibberish from the Government's consultation paper on quality in town and parish councils. In discussing the proposal's benefits, it says:

"In order to support the process of developing partnership arrangements for the improved delivery of services on behalf of principal authorities by local councils, our proposals need to be underpinned by the statutory performance management framework for principal authorities."

It is early in the morning, so I appreciate that that is not easy to comprehend, but I think that in English, it means that we must pass new laws to make the provisions work.

If such management waffle is bad enough in large multinationals, it is even worse when it is imposed on small local councils. That is not simply my view, but that of many of the respondents in the study that the Government recently published. The study was conducted by the Institute of Local Government Studies through the university of Birmingham. It examined 41 councils involved in the best value programme and took a detailed look at the first year. It stated:

"While, as indicated, there was broad acceptance of the basic principles of Best Value as representing good management, the overall experience to date has been mainly negative. In particular, the regime is perceived as being far too demanding, unduly rigid and insufficiently attuned to the specific circumstances and needs of local councils. Most respondents argued that, in their experience to date, the costs of Best Value had far outweighed the benefits gained. Furthermore, they saw little prospect of the costs being recouped through efficiency savings achieved through Best Value reviews."

The study went on to ask the councils detailed questions. One finding was that the yearly cost for the average council would be between £20,000 and £40,000. The respondents were somewhat more concerned about value for money. The study stated that in the six councils that were visited for follow-up purposes

"the argument was heard that the direct costs of compliance with Best Value requirements . . . had far exceeded the value of the service development benefits . . . Moreover, as indicated, equally widespread was the view that many of those service development benefits would mostly have been achieved anyway through less resource-demanding and more routine practices of good management."

I want to highlight the nature of the use of performance indicators, as they seemed to be especially unsuccessful. There is a case for using them in management, but they have to be selected carefully. They must be meaningful, in terms of what they measure, and of real help. Another important quotation from the report will show that, sadly, that is not always the case. The report states that

"there was no doubting a widespread scepticism about the value of performance indicators . . . at this level of local government . . . As one councillor said with regard to monitoring standards of upkeep in the local cemetery: 'when the grass is long, the paths need weeding or the graves are untidy people tell you in no uncertain terms. We make sure they don't have to tell us. I walk through that cemetery every day, every single day, so I can keep an eye on it. I don't have to measure it to know when the grass is too long'."

That summarises the way in which the system has gone mad. I hope that the Minister will explain what lessons the Government have learned from the study on a system that, far from providing best value, seems to have little or no value in the eyes of those asked to implement it.

The Government's plans to impose a code of conduct on local councillors are shortly to be debated elsewhere in the House. The code seems remarkably prescriptive. It introduces a register of parish councillors' interests that will include their employment, business and property. It will require them to register any gift or hospitality worth more than £25, so presumably raffle prizes at the local fete will be somewhat restricted. It also contains a requirement to disclose any personal interest, or interest of their spouse or relatives, and to withdraw from the room if those interests are discussed.

Everyone in the House seeks the highest standards of behaviour in public life, but those measures are clumsy and draconian when applied to local councillors. They are disproportionate to the budget involved, and fail to distinguish between major and minor breaches. Also, they could not work as drafted in many small parishes. If someone in a small community is asked to declare his interests and those of his spouse and all his family, I can envisage some parish councils having no one left in the room to discuss the issues. That is the silly nature of the proposal.

Perhaps worst of all, the code creates an enormous sense of disquiet among the vast majority of hard-working and law-abiding councillors. They feel that the Government no longer trust them.

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch): Does my hon. Friend accept that one of the biggest problems with the code of conduct is that it is mandatory? It was originally envisaged that local councillors would have discretion as to which elements of the code of conduct they wanted to adopt locally for their own circumstances.

Mr. Prisk: My hon. Friend is right. He has underlined the critical point, which is that under this Government, the days of discretion and variety are gone. The system is all about compulsion and imposition, and that is one of its weaknesses.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): Does my hon. Friend agree that the plethora of reorganisation is causing a problem, in that many people are asking why they should bother giving up their time to serve the community and take all the hassle of being parish councillors? Indeed, is that not what the Government set out to bring about? I think that the Minister for the Environment recently asked what role parish councillors had. Under this Government, they have no role, and the code is an attempt to see them off.

Mr. Prisk: As always, my hon. Friend hits the nail on the head. As a new Member, I might want to give Ministers the benefit of the doubt, but more experienced colleagues clearly understand the issues better than I do. There is a danger that what my hon. Friend described will be the result. I hope that the Minister will categorically state that it is neither the intention nor the wish of the Government to see that take place.

These examples of the Government's plans highlight how they seem to have chosen what my hon. Friends agree is a centralising and bureaucratic agenda that will curtail local freedom and destroy the diversity that makes our parish and town councils distinctive. That is the wrong approach. Instead of meddling in management systems, the Government should be improving local services. Instead of imposing a bureaucratic code of conduct, they should be tackling known offenders, and instead of enforcing conformity—as my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) has pointed out—they should be celebrating the diversity of our towns and parishes.

In the last 108 years, parish and town councils have become the foundation of many local communities. I hope that the Minister recognises that many of his initiatives have lost their way. It is time to give back to councils the freedom to build for the future and the confidence that that will engender.

9.45 am

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): My hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Prisk) has done the House a service in calling for this debate. The more I look into the matter, the more fired up I get, and the more I have listened to my hon. Friend and thought about the Government's underhand surreptitious policy, the more angry I have become. I think that that is true of my hon. Friends as well.

It is a tragedy that the Government are sneakily trampling on the decency and traditions of organisations that do an enormous amount of good in the communities that they serve. The Government call for "community" and "voluntarism" and other aspects of good citizenship, yet they are destroying all that, and undermining much of the quality of life that we—particularly those of us who represent rural constituencies—value highly.

I have more than 100 parish councils in my constituency. Some of them have lovely, former Viking names—Thorpes, Byes and Little by the Rivers, and so on. These little organisations serve the genuine needs of people who live there, without the hassle—until now—and supervision of an overregulated governmental system. They are enormously valuable to the people on their doorsteps. After 10 years, I like to think that I know every corner of the 500 square miles of my constituency. However, the other day I discovered one that I had not realised existed—a hamlet of about 15 houses at the end of a cul de sac. It has a vibrant parish council that looks after the mundane things that most bother the residents about the community in which they live—the views that they see every day, the paths that they use and the fields in which they have always walked their dogs.

Parish councils, by their very nature, are varied—as my hon. Friend has said. They are diverse. They have value because they do not fit into the straitjacket of some theoretical governmental pattern. They have evolved to suit the needs of their communities. They can be tiddly or big, busy or dormant, and they can suddenly rise up and get angry when they need to because an issue affects them. They do not have to harass the Minister actively every day about this or that policy or consultation document. They are simply there to respond, when needed, to the demands, requirements and feelings of those who live in the area. They are small, cuddly, and harmless, but they are genuine community organisations that exist to serve their people. The more they are interfered with, the less effective they will be.

Let us consider what parish councils do. They have no executive authority and cannot set a budget, decide where a house is to be built, move a road or build a building. All that they can do is express an opinion, and act as a pressure valve for locals who want to express their opinion, who tend to get especially hot under the collar about planning matters. The most that they can do is to stick a tiny precept—a fiver or a tenner—on the borough or district council budget to fund things of particular concern to small communities, which have gained popular consent and approval. That money might go towards a flagpole on a village green, or to restore the wagon wash or an ancient wall that has crumbled over the past 50 years. It might be put towards repairing the local church—they lychgate, or a wall, for example. At any rate, it will go towards something that exercises the feelings and views of those who live in the parish.

What are those councils doing at the moment? Most are organising jubilee celebrations. They will probably not have a precept for that, because all the money coming into the celebrations will be voluntary, but the focal point for the expression of community enjoyment and party organisation—putting up the bunting and the lights at Christmas, for example—remains the parish.

The Minister does not seem to be interested in what I am saying, but I hope that he is listening.

Mr. Prisk: Not only is the Minister apparently uninterested in what my hon. Friend is saying, but it is appalling that not a single Liberal Democrat Back Bencher is in this Chamber today. They claim to have an interest in local matters, but where are they? I am sure that my hon. Friend shares my concern.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Hon. Members should not need to be reminded that we are debating a subject, rather than who is in the Chamber.

Mr. Duncan: Yes, Madam Deputy Speaker, but my hon. Friend is right, none the less. We can count, and on this occasion we do not even need all the fingers of one hand to count with.

Let me address another issue to which, this time, the Minister might pay some attention, which has affected my constituents and may have affected those of other hon. Members. I am talking about flooding, which has bedevilled so many local communities over the past three or four years. Surprising instances of flooding have occurred: suddenly springs start bubbling up through the tarmac, and a plain is flooded that has not been awash with water for decades.

Parish councils are the source of knowledge and understanding about the direct effects of water flows in their immediate vicinity. They are where the wisdom lies. Some old farmer who has been cutting the daisies—rather than pushing up the daisies—for decades, knows where the water goes and can explain to people imported into the planning authority the effects of different types of building.

Mr. McLoughlin: My hon. Friend has hit on an important point. In Ashford in the Water, which is in my constituency and which suffered flooding last year, the main point of contact for people was a parish councillor, with whom the Environment Agency also corresponded. The parish council provided a useful contact point.

Mr. Duncan: My hon. Friend is right. The combination of the diligence of a local Member of Parliament and the activity of a local parish will ensure that Ashford in the Water is not for ever Ashford under Water.

Parish councils provide valuable information and act both on things that might ruin the lives of people in the parish and on simple things. At this time of year, one walks into a village and sees the daffodils blooming under an oak. They did not come to be there because of some district council or Member of Parliament, but through the activity of a parish council, which cobbled together a few quid to make the village a lovelier place in which to reside.

My point is that all that work is at risk of being destroyed. What fires me up—and clearly fires up my hon. Friends too—is the Government's underhand policy of completely destroying the historic and useful activities of parish councils. Let us start with this putrid, stinky, disgusting little document, in which some civil servant has arbitrarily categorised every parish council in the land on the basis of no decent quality information whatever. The terminology of categorisation is designed to deride. Parish councils are described as "inactive", "dormant", "barely active" or, just occasionally, "vibrant".

I do not mind my parish council being slightly inactive or only half vibrant; what I want to know is that it will represent my interests as a resident efficiently and honestly when necessary. So if it is dormant but can rise when the need provokes it, that does not mean that it is less good as a parish council. This entire document—this vague and arbitrary, although supposedly specific, listing—is deeply offensive and insulting to many people. What would happen if I were to categorise Labour Members of Parliament as dormant, inactive, vibrant, or even thick? I could draw up a comprehensive list, based on far better information than we find in this document about our English parishes.

I want to take up the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford about declarations of interest. One can argue that people who make executive decisions should declare their interests, whether those decisions are about planning, whether they enable people to put money in their pockets or whether their decisions may be misunderstood—

Mr. McLoughlin: Especially in Doncaster.

Mr. Duncan: In Doncaster, as my hon. Friend says, there is a track record of that sort of thing—but not in parish councils, because they do not have executive authority. They are glorified, but none the less helpful and valuable, residents associations—a useful but harmless safety valve for the expression and channelling of opinion. The suggestion that the local squire or former schoolteacher, who does his or her decent duty as chairman of the parish council, should have to list their assets and declare their interests, and those of their spouse, is obscene. That is a grave intrusion into privacy and an abuse of human rights. It shrouds the decent work of the entire community of parish councils in a cloud of suspicion that they do not deserve. It amounts almost to an assumption of guilt. I, and many people who serve on parish councils, find that offensive.

Thirdly, I want to say something about audit costs. We now have the absurd situation in which the little "residents association" parish council must submit audited accounts to the district auditor. In one case in Clipsham and Stretton, in eastern Rutland, the Audit Commission billed the council £250 for submitting the accounts, but the total balance in the accounts was £238.20. This ridiculous Government are telling parish councils that they must submit their audited accounts, but they do not need auditing. Does the parochial church council belfry account or kerbstone account need auditing? Cannot a local accountant just tick the box to certify that the accounts, set out on one page, are honest? Expenditure on daffodils, £5.50; cash in hand, £128; donation to the bell tower, £50. Do such accounts need auditing? They do not. The Minister is shaking his head, so we look forward to hearing him confirm that people who serve on parish councils will not be required to declare their interests, that no audit fees will be imposed to clobber parish councils, and that they will be left alone.

The Government's agenda, working from a socialist theoretical point of view, is to ensure that all the organs of government are tidily structured under one pattern of thought, but as my hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford said, Conservative Members value the diversity—and almost the inexplicability—of parish council structures. Whether they are tiddly or big, active or inactive, does not matter; they are a force for good.

I am suspicious that as the agenda for bigger and more regional government is pushed forward, and it is argued that anyone who has anything to do with public service must put their assets on the line for all to see, the people who will be destroyed are those who do their duty, as a public service, by serving local communities on parish councils. The hidden agenda of the Minister and his Government is to destroy the parish council as we know it. That is a crime. The parish council is of value, and is a force for good. Can the Minister confirm that it will be left alone to do what it has always done as well as it has always done it?

10 am

Mr. Peter Luff (Mid-Worcestershire): It is a great pleasure to catch your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker, to speak on a rural issue for the second time in less than 24 hours. I do not want to cause offence to my friends in the hunting world, but this is probably a more important long-term issue than that which we were debating on the Floor of the House yesterday.

I ask the Minister to take the matter seriously. He has heard a characteristically passionate speech from my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan). I share his anger because what he

described was right. I hope that the Minister will not conclude from the lack of support in the Chamber from his hon. Friends, or from the Liberal Democrats, that there is a lack of passion in the countryside on the issue. Genuine worry exists in the countryside. I do not know whether the Minister's constituency of Southampton, Test is arranged in parishes. *[Interruption.]* It is not. I am grateful to the Minister for admitting that.

One problem is that the Government do not understand parishes—that is not a criticism, but an observation. We have a necessarily urban policy-making elite in the civil service, and an urban-dominated Government. Such a Government should be careful about rushing into policy judgments on rural institutions that are not represented at policy-making or ministerial level.

Parish councils are strange and diverse animals; they are the small platoons about which Edmund Burke wrote, and they comprise the fabric of our community. I rely heavily on them for advice on a range of issues. I make it my point to write to the chairmen and clerks on a regular basis, and I listen carefully to what they say. When I am invited to take a role in a planning decision, I will do so only if the parish council confirms that it would be right for me to become involved. I visit parish councils as regularly as I can, and I celebrate their diversity—they are an extraordinary range of organisations. When my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton said that the Government were trying to fit them into a neat policy framework—a series of boxes—he hit the nail on the head. I am a charitable soul so I am inclined to believe that they are doing that out of ignorance, not malice, but perhaps I am too charitable.

If one did characterise parish councils, one could take four levels: the micro parish council, which is typically a parish meeting; the standard village parish council; the large village parish council; and the town council. I shall quote a letter from Abberton parish meeting that I received a couple of weeks ago. I have sent a copy to the Minister, who may not have received it yet. It is a response to the Countryside Agency's survey of parishes. The Minister will say that that survey was not of parish councils, but of parishes. However, parish councils see the survey as a measure of their effectiveness, and the vibrancy of parish councils is one of the indicators through contested elections. Therefore, although the Minister's legalistic defence may hold good in court on a point of law, it is not common sense. Parishes in my constituency are up in arms about the agency's analysis.

Abberton parish meeting is not up in arms, for the reasons stated in chairman Mr. James Taylor's letter. He writes:

"May I give you a brief picture of the parish of Abberton, which I hope will give you the background to our apparent somnambulant posture."

He goes on to describe the small, 999-acre hamlet of Abberton, which has not greatly changed over the past 40 to 50 years. He paints a picture of its two farms, which employ only seven people, two of whom travel in daily. He says that the parish meeting is called when required, and most recently that was to debate speed limits in the village—an important issue in several rural communities. He says that those at the meeting objected to the urbanisation implied in the speed limit system that the county council wanted to impose.

Mr. Taylor explains that planning applications are circulated by hand to interested parties. When problems arise such as the flooding of the highway—my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton made a powerful point about the role of parish councils and flooding—direct contact is made by the parish council, there is no need to call a meeting, and matters are sorted out. He talks about the church, St. Edburga's, where the monthly service is all that it can manage. Members of the parish go to the neighbouring parish of Bishampton to take part in drama and choir activities. Those people are pretty vibrant, even if the parish meeting is not particularly so. A local choir comes to practice in the church, it is true, and there is an occasional bus service to Pershore and Stratford, although that causes some concern in the village because it apparently damages the kerbs. There was a bonfire in 2000 for the millennium and that will happen again for the Queen's golden jubilee.

Mr. Taylor says, at the end of his letter:

"I hope this gives you a flavour of our community. We do go to some LA meetings and receive large amounts of mail"—

I expect that most of that is from the Government—

"but if I judge my neighbours right, we as a parish are quite happy to be left asleep."

That is the point. Many such organisations are happy to do precisely that. To understand parish councils as a coherent entity is to misunderstand them when there is such a diverse range of them.

At the other end of the scale of villages is Broadway parish council, to which I shall return later in my remarks, and large town councils such as Evesham and Droitwich, each with a population of more than 20,000. Those are wildly different organisations, and to apply the same set of rules, whatever those are, to all those different types of organisation is a fundamental policy error. The Minister denies that he is doing so, but that is what the parishes see daily in the letters that they receive from the Government.

Mr. Prisk: Is this problem not compounded because the Minister involved admitted that

"consultation was not done directly with the individual communities"?

Someone decided the nature of the parish remotely. Is that not insulting?

Mr. Luff: I have had a very detailed letter from the Minister and his colleague at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Minister for Rural Affairs, about that process. Reading between the lines, it is quite clear that they admit that it was deeply flawed. The Minister for Rural Affairs told me how many parishes in my constituency responded: only 22 out of 56. I have to say that of the 22 that he said responded, most do not remember responding and most do not remember having received a survey in the first place. I suspect that that was because the Government used an out-of-date list of parish council clerks—a real problem. The survey came at the height of the foot and mouth disease crisis, when the parishes in rural England were up to their necks, dealing with a whole range of problems. They did not have time for another Government survey. That was a barmy time to do that exercise.

[Mr. L[redacted]

The Minister for Rural Affairs, in a letter to me, highlighted three parish councils that had not responded, as if that was a criticism of them: Bishampton and Throckmorton, Hill and Moor and Wyre Piddle. The reason that they did not respond was that the Government had dumped on them a major foot and mouth disease burial site without any consultation with those parishes whatsoever. When I discovered belatedly that that was happening, at my suggestion they were invited to the press conference to have the details revealed. That is the attitude of the present Government to parish councils—they just do not feature in the Government's thinking.

The Minister says that the Government are not treating all parish councils in the same way, but I have a letter in my hand from Nicky Holland, the clerk to Abbots Morton parish council. That is one of those small village parish councils, bigger than a parish meeting but smaller than the council of a large village like Broadway—a typical parish council. She says:

"Over the past two years, we feel that Abbots Morton Parish Council has become a vibrant Council. As the Clerk I have attended a year's course at Worcestershire College; the Chairman has attended various training courses along with other Parish Councillors. We have increased our meetings to six a year to cope with the extra workload from the White Paper, have adopted Standing Orders and dealt with employment issues. We have responded to comments regarding Government documents and other papers that have been brought to our attention."

Yet, of course, that was a parish council that was characterised as "sleeping" in the Government's analysis.

How can that be? The work load described there has come about because the council is being forced to respond to Government initiatives at a level that just does not concern parish councils. The Minister is probably being briefed by his officials, and I understand that. I have every sympathy for him—he does not understand parish councils and does not have them in his constituency—but I urge him to look at the reality and not the fine words that he gets from his officials. I urge him to open his eyes to the reality of what is going on.

I have already mentioned the Government's failure to consult parish councils at times of great crisis. I re-emphasise their failure to consult parish councils. Failing to consult Pinvin parish council at the time of foot and mouth disease when imposing a burial site in my constituency was a monstrous breach of their duty. Parish councils want to be consulted. Why have they not yet been given the power, for example, to be statutory objectors to the grant of operator licences to heavy goods vehicle companies? In the vale of Evesham, in south-east Worcestershire in my constituency, there is a huge problem with heavy goods vehicles. Yet when an operator licence is applied for and the parish council seeks to make its view known to the licensing authorities, it is not allowed to do so because it is not a statutory objector or consultee. Only an individual—not a parish council—who is adversely affected may express a view.

I raised the matter with the Government, probably two years ago, and was told that they would take steps to correct it. They have not yet done so. They find time to put all kinds of impositions on parish councils but not to give them what they want. I plead with the Minister to reconsider the role of parish councils in the HGV licensing process. They desperately want and need the power and would really appreciate having it.

We have talked about the Countryside Agency's analysis of parish councils, and I explained why the Government would defend it. However, it is wrong to defend it. It has caused huge offence. I write to my parish councils regularly, and I seek to be honest and straightforward with them. They are not party political animals. If the Minister thinks that members of parish councils are all Conservatives, he is wrong. Despite the absence of the Liberal Democrats today in Westminster Hall, they are a powerful force on many parish councils, as are Labour activists. Parish councils are not party-based organisations, and I try to deal with them in a non-partisan way, as one must. Their anger about the survey should not be understated.

I have a letter from Evesham town council, which shares the deep concerns about the issue. Very kindly, it sent me a copy of the March 2002 edition of a publication that I had not seen before, *Clerks and Councils Direct*, which is probably targeted at the larger councils. An article with the headline "Sleepy tag is 'grave insult'" explains the survey and indicates that councils know what it is all about and have not misunderstood it, as the Minister might think. It says:

"Community leaders are fuming as a result . . . many councils who have fallen into the first two categories"—sleeping or barely active—

"say the labels are nothing more than an insult because of the countless hours they spend working to improve their communities."

Although I am grateful to the Countryside Agency for its reassurance that more reliable methods will be used when the exercise is repeated—as it will be—to help the Government develop indicators of community vibrancy, it fails to understand that one does not need such indicators, for the reasons given in the excellent speeches by my hon. Friends the Members for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Prisk) and for Rutland and Melton. We do not need more bits of information and bureaucracy. Parish and town councils work as they are. They do not need to be tinkered with, nor do they need control from Whitehall. They just need to be left to get on with the job that they have done so effectively for so long.

The article continues:

"Windleston and Rushyford Parish Council, in the heart of Prime Minister Tony Blair's Sedgefield constituency in Durham, found itself described as dormant. Its members meet four times a year".

I think that the council will be a little insulted by the description. In fact, we know that it is, because the chairman has complained:

"Great Aycliffe Town Council serves 28,000 people, with a £2 million budget and employing 80 staff. Yet it is in the same third-tier category as parish councils such as Windlestone and Rushyford.

Deputy council leader Alan Grey said that the town council offered a variety of services, including recreational facilities, parks, a golf club and large sports complex, and play groups."

Its survey rating is absolutely extraordinary.

I accept that the exercise was trivial. I was told in a parliamentary answer that it was conducted in only two days, which is amazing, considering that there are 6,000 parish councils in it. However, the Minister must understand that, though trivial, it matters, because it has crystallised the concerns that have developed among parish councils during the past three or four years about the Government's attitude to them.

I am not often upset by letters from Ministers, because they are not often very robust. They are written by the same civil servants who brief Ministers, and they always try to avoid being too confrontational. However, I received an extraordinary letter from the Minister for Rural Affairs. It was written about three weeks after I issued a press release. To get a letter from a Minister in any Department, let alone DEFRA, within three weeks of a press release is surprising. I wait three months for parliamentary answers and three or four months for letters from DEFRA, which is one of the worst Departments in Whitehall for responding to parliamentary questions.

The Minister for Rural Affairs accused me of sending out a Conservative central office handout, which is simply not true. The document was entirely my own work—every single word of it. The Minister accused me of saying things that I had not said, and concluded:

"I hope you will now join me in supporting and promoting the role of parish and town councils. Their role is too important to be used as a political football, as indeed is the role of the Countryside Agency."

We are not using parish councils as political footballs but are desperately trying to stand up for their interests against an uncomprehending Government. Instead, we are using the Government and, to an extent, the Countryside Agency as political footballs.

I find the Minister's remarks deeply offensive and wrong. I have written a four-page letter to him in response, which I hope that he will personally read. I hope that he will apologise, but somehow I doubt it.

Parish and town councils are not adequately consulted. They have been insulted by the Countryside Agency and the Government and are being forced into a straitjacket through the quality initiative about which my hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford spoke so eloquently. I have asked all the parish councils in my constituency to show me their responses to the quality initiative. One or two of them are not particularly concerned about it, but the vast majority of them are profoundly worried. They regard the measure as a further encroachment on their traditions and on what they have been good at for so long. That spirit informs their responses. I urge the Minister to read them carefully and not rely on large national organisations for advice. He will be surprised by what he finds.

We all know the story about the boy who cried wolf, and I do not want to be accused of crying wolf today. The Minister points at my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton. I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman, because the Government are beginning the process of disintegration of parish councils. The straw that broke the camel's back was the wretched document, the Parish Councils (Model Code of Conduct) Order 2000, which we shall debate in a statutory instrument Committee later today. I cannot believe that the Government really know what they are doing with such a document. The code is more prescriptive than that for Members of Parliament. If we compare what we and what parish councils are required to declare, we find that the order of magnitude for parish councils is worse. The Minister must first understand one practical consideration. Even if the declaration were required, let us consider the work load that will be placed on the poor, overworked clerks who do so much excellent work for local communities, often for low remuneration. It is extraordinary how much will be involved in keeping the code up to date.

The Minister explained in a letter that the duty to declare £25 gifts would apply only to those given during the course of parish council duties. That is not what the code says or how we interpret it. I repeat the warning that I made in a recent letter to him. There are often local disputes in parishes; people may not get on well. They are not always happy places. Parish council politics can be pretty brutal; those who listen to "The Archers" know that. By the way, the Minister may wish to know that that programme is set in my constituency and that of the Minister of State, Department of Health, the hon. Member for Redditch (Jacqui Smith).

There are often petty rivalries and jealousies at local level. I will not name names, although I am tempted to; but I can think of one or two rivalries in which the code will be a very powerful tool for vexatious constituents. People will take entirely spurious complaints to a new national body. The complaints will receive massive publicity in local newspapers but will then be dismissed at great cost to those involved. Such action will cause great stress to individuals who were falsely accused. The Minister will be ill-guided if he pursues the provisions under the code of conduct.

The Minister seems to consider that the code is reasonable and that, under the Nolan rules, matters should be transparent. As has been made clear, the budgets of parish councils are typically piddling or non-existent. I accept that it is regrettable and wrong for someone to make a fiver out of the odd grass-cutting contract that is handed out, but does that justify such provisions? The communities would find out about such matters pretty damn quickly. Such networks do not need formalisation; they are informal. There have been cases of fraud, such as the one in my constituency in which a parish clerk ran off with a lot of money. I accept that some powers of control are needed, but in those circumstances public bodies had bent over backwards to lend her money without checking whether her applications were legitimate. The proposed audit requirements will not change that behaviour because it was how the money got there in the first place that should have been examined.

[Mr. Luff]

The Minister must know what is contained in the code. For example, never mind the declarations of

"any land in which he has a beneficial interest"

or whether a person has

"one hundredth of the total issued share capital";

never mind

"the name of any corporate body which has a place of business or land"

in the area, or

"the name of any firm in which he is a partner . . . the address or other description . . . of any land",

or any land in which the person has a licence

"(alone or jointly with others) to occupy for 28 days or longer";

the person must also declare

"his membership of or position of general control or management in any—

(a) body to which he has been appointed or nominated by the authority as its representative".

That will be in the minutes, so why does it have to be declared? It is more bureaucracy—there will be more forms to be filled out.

What is a

"body exercising functions of a public nature"?

I do not know. People would also have to declare membership of any

"company, industrial and provident society, . . . charity, or body directed to charitable purposes"

and any

"body whose principal purposes include the influence of public opinion or policy".

What on earth are those? I do not know whether the Abberton parish meeting will know what they are. People must also declare membership of any

"(e) trade union . . . or professional association."

Anyone who joins or resigns from a trade union or professional association must register and unregister that within 28 days. A breach of that would be a solemn breach of the rules.

The Minister may think that none of that matters, but it does. The regulations are the straw that broke the camel's back. In the past few weeks, more and more parish council chairmen have said to me, "We're thinking of giving up." The first has now decided to do so. I have a letter from Salwarpe parish council. I appreciate that Salwarpe parish council might not seem very important to Whitehall, but it matters a lot to the people of Salwarpe and the surrounding area. In a formal letter to the monitoring officer at Wychavon district council, the parish council chairman says:

"I am writing to tell you therefore that, following extensive consultation and discussion on an individual and collective basis, no member of this Parish Council finds the provisions of the new code of conduct acceptable in its present form.

Salwarpe Parish Council accordingly passed a resolution unanimously at its meeting on 11th March that it does not intend to adopt the new code of conduct that comes into effect on the 5th May. In the circumstances it follows that no individual councillor will have given the written undertaking that is required by the deadline of two months after this date. We have received also three months notice of the resignation of our Parish Clerk."

The letter then says that Wychavon district council will have to take over the administration of Salwarpe. It continues:

"It is a matter of great sadness to all of us on Salwarpe Parish Council that this situation should have come about. We recognise the importance of the role of Parish Councils in the life of the community and in the maintenance of the most local form of democracy. The years of voluntary and unpaid service that we have given are evidence of this. We also recognise that all local Councils must operate to the highest standards of integrity. However the provisions of the new code of conduct, particularly in the form of the public disclosure of assets and the provisions of the complaints procedure, are such as to create a wholly unacceptable basis for our continued involvement as Parish Councillors."

I tell the Minister that there will be more such councils. I know of another—Broadway parish council—that is planning to do the same thing. In that case, some may take the place of those parish councillors who resign, but the parish council will become unrepresentative and will lose its power as a result. My constituency has been fully parished for as long as anyone can remember, and the Government have started ending that. I find that utterly unacceptable.

The Minister hears anger from us; that is because we feel angry for those parish councils. I urge him to think again. He is not getting an accurate picture of events on the ground. More parish councils will go, as Salwarpe has done, unless he changes his mind this afternoon in Committee. I beg him to withdraw the statutory instrument.

10.22 am

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Prisk) on initiating this excellent debate.

Hon. Friends who have joined in the debate have put pressure on the Minister. I speak to him in the spirit of friendship; we have both spent much of our political life in Southampton. When I was a Local Government Minister, I represented Southampton, Itchen, which is a wholly urban constituency. I now represent a constituency that is largely parished and also has some town councils. I admit that when I was doing the Minister's job I had no understanding of what parish and town councils and their councillors contributed to our national life. The fact that he has come here with his brief does not mean that he understands the impact that the regulations that he is imposing will have on ordinary people who are doing their best for their community.

I have always taken the view that those in parish and town councils are the unsung heroes of local government, because they work voluntarily and know that they must raise every penny that they spend through their parish precept. They have absolute accountability—an accountability that does not extend to other areas of local government, in which it is distorted by the grant mechanism and by the lump sum awards given by various tiers of central Government. Local town and parish councillors know that there will be tight scrutiny of every pound that they spend. The consequence is that only the most responsible people and volunteers participate in town councils.

The code of conduct has given parish councils the impression that the Government do not appreciate their work, and that they think that they are all like

Doncaster councillors and are on the make. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Elmet (Colin Burgon) keeps referring to a London councillor. I hope that he will not make the same mistake that the Deputy Prime Minister made the other day by slurring people who have not been convicted of criminal offences and tarring them with the same brush as those who have: the Labour councillors in Doncaster who have been convicted of criminal charges of corruption and who are now in prison. It is pointless to try to slur other unnamed councillors in the way that the hon. Gentleman is trying to do. The Government's agenda is driven by their understandable embarrassment about Doncaster. They say, "We must not allow Doncasters to occur elsewhere." Our parish and town councils are the last places in which such events might occur.

With almost a slip of the tongue, my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) dealt with residents associations. Some town and parish councils will ask, "Why should we bother to be a town and parish council? Why don't we set ourselves up as a residents association? If we do, we shall be relieved of any requirement to conform to the code of conduct." That might be a consequence of the implementation of the code of conduct.

A further insult to town and parish councils came from the latest Green Paper on planning. The current edition of *Local Council Review*—the newspaper that is produced by, and for, local town and parish councillors—says that the Green Paper contains no reference to local councils' role in planning. However, we know that they play that valuable role. Such councils do not decide on planning cases, but they play an important consultative role. They can take the temperature of local opinion on planning, and refer that to the district council or county council that takes planning decisions. That role is fundamental to town and parish councils, but there is not a single line referring to it in the planning Green Paper. That is a further example of the Government's cavalier approach to people who operate in town and parish councils.

I ask the Minister to find out about the major contribution that town and parish councils make to the fabric of life in this country from his colleagues who have such councils in their areas. I give him a strong message to take from the debate: get your bureaucratic hands off our parish and town councils, and let them get on with the job that they are doing so well.

10.27 am

Colin Burgon (Elmet): I am sorry that I spoilt the line of some Conservative Members who desperately hoped that no Labour Members would turn up.

Mr. Alan Duncan: You are on your own, mate.

Colin Burgon: I am on my own but I shall battle on.

There are more than 15 parish councils and one major town council in my constituency. I do not understand the picture that has been portrayed. Since the Labour Government came to power in 1997, a parish council has been set up in Allerton Bywater, which is the village that I live in, and the neighbouring village of Kippax is in the process of setting up another one. I am sure that the Minister will give us statistics that show that the number of parish councils has increased since 1997.

I value working closely with parish councils, as do some Conservative Members. Recently, I worked with Clifford parish council to oppose an unsuitable development in that village, and I hope that it will prepare a village design statement. The neighbouring East Keswick parish council recently won a national award for its village design statement, and the people who put in the work, which was voluntary, are certainly well regarded by me.

There are two model parish councils in Swillington and Micklefield, which are in the neighbourhood of Allerton Bywater. I support their work in running a host of activities for elderly and young people at Christmas and throughout the year to ensure that a village community is preserved in the parishes.

I shall now discuss the declaration of interest. I have spoken to local parish councillors, and I checked the matter with Mike Auty, who is the chairman of Micklefield parish council and represents the small area of parish councils on the Yorkshire association. He said that he would have no problem with the declaration of interest, and that he would not oppose it. He is well versed in the way in which the legislation is being developed. What is the Minister's response to the contrasting statement by Gerald Wilkinson, a Wetherby town councillor, who said that he wanted the register of interests to be kept not in Wetherby but 12 miles away, in the centre of Leeds, to keep busybodies from looking at it? Councillor Wilkinson said:

"This list of interests should not be held by the town clerk or parish clerk but by the city council's legal department . . . This will still be open to the public but they would be likely to view it only if they have a genuine reason and not out of idle curiosity. It should keep away the busybodies who want to go and look at the councillors' interests and perhaps . . . to stir up trouble."

It is laughable that someone in Wetherby who is interested in the status of Wetherby representatives must make a 24-mile round trip to Leeds for the necessary information. There is a paradox—if parishes are local, information should be gathered locally.

Although I welcome the debate and acknowledge the tremendous work done by many town and parish councillors, it is obvious that some claims of their impending doom and death are exaggerated.

10.30 am

Mr. Adrian Sanders (Torbay): I congratulate the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Prisk) on securing this important debate. We have concentrated on parish councils. I will talk more about town councils, but I agree with much of what has been said about parish councils.

In the 1890s, the citizens of London alone elected 12,000 people to local boards, committees and councils. Today, approximately the same number serve on boards that oversee local services in London. However, little more than 1,900 of them are elected—the vast majority are appointed by central Government.

We seem to be moving away from local provision. In the 1940s, health care, electricity, gas and social security were nationalised. Today, education, housing and policing are becoming more centralised, and the people who make up the centralised bodies are generally given their positions by the Government of the day and are not elected by, or accountable to, the people affected by

[Mr. Adrian Sanders]

their decisions. That has resulted in a democratic deficit. The best way to correct that is to put power back into the hands of those in the best position to exercise it with understanding and accountability—government at the lowest possible level. It makes sense for local issues to be dealt with by those directly affected by, and most knowledgeable about them.

There are approximately 70,000 councillors serving on England's 8,159 town and parish councils, and approximately 14 million people come under the auspices of those councils, which vary widely based on unique local circumstances. Although people may associate town and parish councils with small rural villages, the benefits of that grass-roots democratic network are enjoyed in many larger towns and suburbs. It should not stop there. Such councils encourage community involvement and are as relevant in larger cities as small towns.

The need for parish and town councils has become greater with the creation of unitary authorities, which represent wider areas with fewer councillors. They are increasingly unable to take into account the specialised characteristics and needs of communities under their governance, which is why we should extend the network of town and parish councils so that everyone has access to them. At the same time, the power of such councils must be augmented. Local bodies should not be so tightly bound by limitations in jurisdiction and expenditure, as some currently are and as the Government appear to be proposing with recent initiatives. Our view is to let the ballot box be the arbiter, using a proportional voting system, rather than the Secretary of State.

Parish and town councils have an important role to play in liaising with other groups, such as local authorities, voluntary organisations, community bodies, the highways authorities, the police and the health services—in short, all the other agencies that deliver services to the citizens who live in the parishes and the areas that are covered by the town councils.

There are cases in which it would be more efficient for parishes to undertake some of the tasks that are currently carried out by higher-tier authorities. The goal should be to further the principle of subsidiarity, and to ensure that higher tiers of government undertake only the duties that the lower tiers cannot—or do not wish to—carry out on their own. To achieve that goal, it is important to branch out and find new ways for parish and town councils to provide services for their communities; sometimes they will do so independently, and at other times they will do it in collaboration with voluntary organisations or local businesses, or in partnership with the higher authority.

Town and parish councils do not face capping and, generally, do not receive grants from the Government. Thus, they often have more freedom with regard to spending than do the local authorities above them, as the Government have less direct financial control over them. However, parish spending is considered to be part of the expenditure of the district council. That can result in a district council that is struggling financially pressurising the parish to cut back on its spending. Additionally, some parishes receive a grant from their district council, and that limits their independence.

There is also the issue of double rating. That occurs when the council tax collected by the district council is not properly abated to account for the tasks that are done by the parish or town council and paid for by the parish precept. The Liberal Democrats would like the parish to levy its own precept, as that would lead to greater control over what it is spent on. Of course, where parishes are taking on duties from other bodies, they should receive the appropriate reimbursement for their work directly from those bodies. We are aiming to achieve transparency.

Parishes should actively promote community participation. All decisions should be taken at meetings that are open to the public, well advertised and held in an accessible meeting place. That is often the case with regard to the meetings of parish and town councils, and I do not see the harm in central Government's setting a guideline that says that that is how it should always be done. Citizens should have the opportunity to make representations directly to the council and any of its committees, and all meetings should include a period for public questions.

There is a need for a nationwide basic standard of service that is offered by all parish and town councils. However, too much Government prescription defeats the purpose of devolution, and it is important that parishes have the flexibility to tailor their services to local needs and wants. They also need the leeway to make innovations, to ensure that services are provided in the most appropriate and effective ways. Therefore, we are arguing for diversity with regard to local government: no single, clear model should be forced to suit all.

Some parish councils have been termed "sleeping". That has offended many councils, as the criteria for evaluation were crude, and no constructive suggestions for improvement were offered. It is important to ensure that parish and town councils are doing their jobs well and efficiently, but they should be accountable to the people that they represent: having the Government breathing down their necks is not conducive to making improvements in the way that they conduct their business.

Whether parish and town councils should be included within the best value regime is questionable, even where they have an annual budgeted income of over £500,000. We should also question whether they should be included within the new ethical framework, the main elements of which are now in place. That framework includes a code of conduct that all parish councillors must sign up to, and a new independent body, the standards board, which will investigate breaches of the code.

On the face of it, how could anyone object to that framework? However, subjecting parish councillors to standards that are higher than those that Members of Parliament are expected to meet is either going too far or—some hon. Members may hold this view—not going far enough. I think that we are going too far with regard to parish and town councils.

The Liberal Democrats believe that parish government at its best is true grass-roots government and facilitates active participation by individuals from all sections of the community. It helps to articulate the needs and aspirations of that community, especially to

other service providers. It contributes strongly to the development and improvement of the area, and can support or deliver well targeted services with high value added and at low cost. Management-speak is not needed to see that that is the case where councils have taken on such responsibilities.

We believe that anything of concern to or that has an impact on the local community is the business of town and parish councils. They are the bedrock of our democracy and the foundation stone of civilised communities.

10.40 am

Mr. Malcolm Moss (North-East Cambridgeshire): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Prisk) on securing a vital debate, and all my colleagues on the powerful arguments that they deployed. It is unfortunate that the Minister will not have that much time to answer all the excellent points made. However, the debate is the first of two bites at the cherry, as the statutory instrument on codes of conduct will be dealt with in Committee this afternoon. The issue is much larger than the Government realise, and they may have totally miscalculated their policy on the relevant level of local government. The code of conduct is completely misguided, but I shall come to that later.

At the heart of the matter, the Government do not seem to understand and appreciate the importance and value to communities of the lowest tier of local government, which parish councils represent. Their heavy-handed approach to the issue—their control freakery of wanting to micromanage everything from the centre—overlooks the public service that individuals are prepared to contribute to their local communities, unpaid. The Government do not seem to understand that politics is not an issue at that level. We are talking about the independent voices of individuals in a local community who are prepared to stand up, be counted and serve their community out of a sense of duty.

Labour's record on promoting the interests of parish councils is poor, and various forms of Government rhetoric have been used over the years. In 1999, they talked about neighbourhood forums replacing parish councils, and then went on to consider appointed officials and neighbourhood managers rather than voluntary representatives elected by local people. They backtracked on all that. Today, various pieces of legislation threaten parish councils, which have to cope with a barrage of Whitehall regulation, interference and increasing red tape.

We believe that that could be the first step of a Government hidden agenda to do away with parish councils altogether. It is important that the Minister answers that claim, which has been made by many Members today, certainly all those from the Opposition. We do not know what the Government intend to replace parish councils with, but the Minister should come clean and tell us their long-term agenda.

If the hidden agenda is not to bring about the demise of parish councils by putting pressure on them, how will the Government respond if parish councillors resign in huge numbers as a result of the imposition of the legislation? That would effectively render that tier of government useless. Are the Government prepared to face that? Letters from parish council chairmen and clerks provide evidence to suggest that they are not prepared to serve further under the duress that the legislation, certainly that on the code of conduct, appears to impose on them.

We believe that the hoops through which parish councillors have to jump should be removed entirely. Councils should be given freedom automatically, rather than having to earn it, because earned autonomy is a bad concept. Only if they fail should their freedoms be curtailed.

Colleagues have mentioned the performance grading done by the Countryside Agency, which is a Government quango that will have done the work under the aegis of the Government. That demonstrates yet again their lack of openness on the issue. The Minister for Rural Affairs wrote to colleagues to say that

"it is juvenile and irresponsible to suggest that the Countryside Agency is 'secretly' measuring the effectiveness of parish councils".

Yet he admitted in answer to parliamentary questions that

"the list had not been previously published",

consultation

"was not done directly with individual communities"

and individual

"parish scores were not intended to be published"—[*Official Report*, 24 January 2002; Vol. 378, c. 1033-34W.]

Mr. Luff: Pretty secret.

Mr. Moss: Absolutely. That demonstrates a considerable lack of openness across the board.

This afternoon, hon. Members will debate the statutory instrument that implements the code of conduct, and every aspect of the legislation is draconian. It introduces a register of parish councillors' interests, which should include details of their employment and their business and property dealings. Councillors are required to register any gift or hospitality worth more than just £25, disclose any personal interest or interest of their spouse or relatives and withdraw from any proceedings where such interests are discussed. It has been put to me that the interpretation of the code of conduct is such that parish councillors who work higher up in local government, particularly at district or county level, are told to leave the room and to take no part in debates pertaining to district and county responsibility. I am not sure whether that is true, and it would be helpful if the Minister said unequivocally that councillors will not be precluded from debating issues that relate to the other council tiers that they represent.

The code of conduct is seriously flawed and should, at the very least, be redrafted. We would expect extensive consultation with parish councils across England before that happened. The statutory instrument that implements the code is due to come into force on 27 May, six months after it was laid, so we are close to the date on which the code trips in. Twenty-eight days after that, all councillors must sign up to it. Like those of us in the shadow Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions team, the Minister has no doubt received letters that provide mounting evidence that many parish councillors are not prepared to do so.

[Mr. Moss]

That would render many parish councils inactive, and I cannot believe for a moment that that is what the Government intend.

When parish councillors stood for election two, three or four years ago, they did so under the terms that pertained at the time. For those in the middle of their period in office, the whole ball game has changed, and they strongly resent that. The Minister should, at the very least, say that the completely different regulations that pertained when some parish councillors were elected are to remain in force until new elections are held.

Overwhelmingly, we believe, parish councillors are well intentioned and honest, but the code of conduct implies that many have ulterior motives for involving themselves in council work. The implication of that for their integrity has angered many people; it could be the reason for a number of resignations as we approach 27 May.

Many important points have been raised on that issue, which strikes at the heart of democracy in local government. It should be debated on the Floor of the House, rather than for an hour and a half here and another hour and a half in Committee. The scandal is that the statutory instrument was intended for negative resolution. If we had not prayed against it, it would have sailed through without debate. That shows the insulting way in which the Government treat local government at all levels—in this instance, those who serve on parish councils.

10.50 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Dr. Alan Whitehead): I concur with the hon. Member for North-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Moss) that it is a shame that we have only a relatively short time for this debate and that I have little time in which to respond, because I would like to comment on a number of issues.

I thank the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Prisk) for initiating this important debate. Opposition Members made a number of interesting and important points about the current and future roles of parish and town councils, challenging the Government's attitude to them. Of course we have no hidden agenda. On the contrary, our policy is clear: town and parish councils are an essential part of the structure of local democracy, and they will continue to play a key role in many towns and villages.

Our rural White Paper, "Our Countryside: The Future—A Fair Deal for Rural England", set out how local councils can become equipped to take on a stronger role as representatives of all parts of their communities. It contained a number of significant new proposals, including the creation of quality parishes, which will involve principal authorities and dynamic parish councils working together better to meet the needs of their communities.

My hon. Friend the Member for Elmet (Colin Burgon) drew attention to the increase in the number of parish councils. Since the Government came to power, 82 have been created and we are considering proposals that could result in the creation of a further 22. The accusation that the Government are stifling parish councils, or attempting to remove them, is erroneous.

Further to indicate the Government's concern that parish and town councils should play a substantial role in local democracy, we are putting money into grants, training and support for them—for example, £15 million over three years in community services grants, £15 million over three years for parish transport fund grants of up to £10,000 towards the cost of local transport projects, £5 million over three years to help about 1,000 rural communities to prepare parish plans and £2 million to establish a national training and support strategy.

I must put to bed the canard that the Government have a secret agenda for parish councils. It is absolutely untrue that the Countryside Agency vibrancy indicators are to be used to stifle parishes or to downgrade them; the opposite is the case.

Mr. Prisk: Will the Minister give way?

Dr. Whitehead: If the hon. Gentleman wants to hear my responses to the points that have been raised, I should not give way to any great extent. However, I do so briefly.

Mr. Prisk: The Minister said that the study was worth while. Does he not understand that undertaking it without consulting local communities insulted those communities? The nature of the process seems bizarre. Can he explain the purpose of a further study?

Dr. Whitehead: Yes. Community vibrancy is one of 15 headline indicators that were established to measure progress in implementing commitments made in the rural White Paper. That is why that indicator was included and why that research was undertaken. There are no implications for the future of parishes or suggestions that the Government have a hidden agenda in measuring developments in the role of parishes and setting other indicators of local vibrancy in rural areas.

Despite its being clear that parishes are diverse—there are large parishes, small parishes and town councils—this debate has been dogged by some hon. Members speaking as if all parishes are the same and of the sort described in the ridiculous speech of the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan). Of course, there are several large parish councils, but the suggestion that all parishes are being subjected to the best value regime is untrue.

There are 41 best value parishes—the largest town councils—with a turnover of £500,000. Parishes are not being subjected to the quality parish initiative, but they can take part if they wish. The aim is to help them to strengthen the work that they are doing. Indeed, benefits will accrue from quality parish status.

It is true that parishes are diverse and have a varied role to play in the life of our communities. Some do the sort of work that the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton suggested; others are involved in a wider range of activities, so it is important to acknowledge their diversity.

Mr. Alan Duncan: Audit requirements?

Dr. Whitehead: The Government acknowledge that several different audits should apply to parishes and

recognise that it is inappropriate for the same scrutiny to apply to parish councils and principal authorities—scrutiny should relate to the risk identified. We are, therefore, working closely with the Audit Commission to introduce a lighter-touch audit regime for parish and town councils. The commission has already undertaken extensive consultation on proposed changes to parish council audits and the intention is that the majority of parish councils will undergo a basic audit relying on self-certification. That should lead to lower audit fees for most parish councils.

With our agreement, the commission has put in hand amendments to its code of audit practice to implement that lighter-touch regime. Where changes to parish council conduct are necessary to implement the new regime, we will consider amendments to the Accounts and Audit Regulations 1996. We plan to consult extensively on proposals to amend those regulations later this year. That is in addition to the announcement that we made last October to increase from £5,000 to £50,000 the financial threshold above which parish councils are required to prepare income and expenditure accounts.

Hon. Members raised concerns about the model code of conduct—as the hon. Member for North-East Cambridgeshire said, we shall debate the matter further this afternoon—but several of those suggestions are wrong. Indeed, the suggestion in a recent article in *The Sunday Telegraph* that people should declare a good dinner with a good claret is quite erroneous. Clause 1 of the model code shows that the requirement for declarations relates to business carried out by the parish council.

Hon. Members are labouring under a misapprehension about registration. Members will have to declare interests relevant to any debate, but that will not preclude them from taking part in the debate, and is no different from the declaration by the last Conservative Government that requires pecuniary and non-pecuniary interests to be declared, and on occasions requires members to leave the chamber when things are being discussed.

Hon. Members: Chamber?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Nicholas Winterton): Order.

Dr. Whitehead: I am referring to the chamber in the parish council, when things are being discussed that relate to the conduct of the parish council. The hon. Member for North-East Cambridgeshire is incorrect in suggesting that members of other authorities will be required to leave the parish council meeting if certain business is discussed.

Parish councils should be at the forefront of identifying their communities' needs.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am afraid that time is up. We must now move to the next debate. I am pleased to see that the hon. Member for City of York (Hugh Bayley) has just made it for that debate, as he initiated it. Several hon. Members from various parties have said that they would like to participate, and if hon. Members are disciplined, I shall be able to call all those who want to speak.

New Partnership for Africa's Development

11 am

Hugh Bayley (City of York): This is the third debate that we have had in this place about the New Partnership for Africa's Development. I was fortunate to secure a short debate on the subject last July, and the hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry), who is here today, secured a debate six weeks ago. We have the opportunity for a longer debate today, because many hon. Members requested that we should discuss the new partnership in the run-up to the G8 meeting in Canada in June. It is appropriate that Back Benchers should be able to guide the Government on the issues that we should like them to discuss at the meeting.

This debate was originally supposed to be called "New African Initiative", but may I ask *Hansard* to retitle it, "New Partnership for Africa's Development", because the new African initiative has been renamed in that way?

There are many reasons to be pessimistic about the development prospects for Africa. The burden of poverty in sub-Saharan Africa and the prospects of overcoming the causes of poverty are matters of real concern. Many African countries are poorer in real terms than they were decades ago, and the value of aid has fallen in real terms over the past 10 years, from about $19 billion a year 10 years ago to some $11 billion today. However, I shall not waste time repeating figures, as all the hon. Members in the Chamber are experts on the subject, and the figures are familiar to us all.

There are many reasons to be optimistic, however. Botswana has the world's highest growth rate, for example. Diversification in the economies of sub-Saharan African countries is an important factor. For too long they have been reliant on primary products whose prices have fallen on the world market. Non-traditional exports from Uganda have been growing at some 70 per cent. per year. There has also been strong growth in non-traditional exports from Ghana, Mozambique, Madagascar and other countries. That underlines the point that not all African countries are in the same situation, and that a one-size-fits-all development strategy is simply inappropriate. Development strategies need to be tailored to the needs of each country to capitalise on the natural resources and strengths of individual African states.

There are political as well as economic reasons for optimism. The New Partnership for Africa's Development comes from African leaders, who recognise that they and their countries must change. In an address to the South African National Assembly and the National Council of Provinces in October last year, Thabo Mbeki, the South African President, had this to say about the New Partnership for Africa's Development:

> "This programme is premised on African ownership, African control of the projects and programmes, with African leaders accepting openly and unequivocally that they will play their part in ending poverty and bringing about sustainable development. We are agreed that we must strengthen democracy on the continent; we must entrench a human rights culture; we must end existing conflicts and prevent new conflicts. We have to deal with corruption and be accountable to one another for all our actions."

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): Does Thabo Mbeki's endorsement of Mugabe's rigged election last week, and the hon. Gentleman's experience of corruption in Nigeria last week, when we both visited that country with the International Development Committee, lead him to greater optimism or less?

Hugh Bayley: The hon. Gentleman raises issues that must be tackled if the partnership is to work. There must be change in Africa, as there must be in the policy response of developed countries. I would have mentioned Zimbabwe in a moment, but as the hon. Gentleman has raised the subject, and as it is clearly in our minds because of today's talks in London, now is a good time to mention it.

The Commonwealth observers' report highlighted serious flaws in that election. However, our response, which the media have emphasised and underlined, is a response that Africans are all too weary of hearing. That is because we have taken up the case of white farmers but have forgotten that the vast majority of Mugabe's victims are black Africans.

Mr. Robathan: Who has forgotten that?

Hugh Bayley: Seventy thousand farm workers have been affected by the evictions and violence in the countryside. The denial of human rights that affected journalists, which we read about in our newspapers, also denied many black Zimbabweans their vote, denied opposition organisations the right to organise and express their views, and denied employees the right to organise trade unions or strike. Those are human rights issues for black Africans, and we must take up the cudgels on their behalf just as much as on behalf of white farmers. We must consider human rights, not only the arguments of kith and kin.

I hope that the hon. Gentleman will agree with me on another point. For most sub-Saharan African countries, it is 40 years since independence. During that time, Europe's former Asian colonies have thrown off the dependency culture and forged ahead economically, but too many African countries are still ready to blame colonialism for their present difficulties. One of the encouraging things about NEPAD is that it states clearly that Africans are in the driving seat. They are responsible for their countries, and for their countries' policies and development. Yes, they need partnership with people from outside Africa on trade, aid and conflict resolution—but they are the primary movers.

Another reason for optimism is that the leaders of the developed world are now taking a greater interest in Africa. It is decades since a British Prime Minister has made Africa a major foreign policy priority. To find a Prime Minister with an interest in development similar to that of our present Prime Minister, we would need to go back to Harold Wilson, who set up War on Want. It is also a long time since a Chancellor has taken such a lead on such issues as has the present Chancellor, who has made proposals on debt relief, and, in response to the Zedillo report, proposed to the Federal Reserve bank in New York in November 2001 that a global development fund should be created. Indeed, last year our Prime Minister was the key person responsible for persuading the G8 to invite the African authors of the new partnership to come to the G8 summit and explain what they were proposing. As a result, the G8 commissioned work to enable it to respond to the NEPAD proposals at this year's summit.

What do I think are the ingredients for the partnership's success? First, Africa must use its own resources to the full. The International Development Committee returned on Saturday from a visit to west Africa, and I give one example of what we did there. In Kintampo, Ghana, we visited a health research centre working in partnership with the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, John Hopkins university and Harvard in the United States, and other universities around the world, to lead high-quality clinical trials. Those have established that vitamin A supplements for pre-school children aged up to five can reduce deaths and morbidity from infectious diseases by some 30 per cent.

That has now been picked up by the Department for International Development and international aid agencies in their health policies. I pay tribute to Dr. Paul Arthur, the director of that institute, an inspired and talented doctor who, sadly, died just days after we met him. People such as Paul Arthur are absolutely vital to African development, and something that we can do is talk to the vast diaspora of African professionals and intellectuals who live in Europe and other parts of the developed world and encourage them to return home to provide support for their countries' development programmes.

It is important to encourage stronger domestic saving and investment. In Nigeria we met several commercial bankers. The private sector has a role, but African Governments must promote investment and revenue collection. We discovered in Nigeria that 92 per cent. of the state's revenues come from levies on oil extraction. Oil has been a blessing to Nigeria in many ways, but also a curse, because the rest of its revenue collection has all but disappeared since. Nigerian Members of Parliament whom we met asked us to increase aid to Nigeria. In certain circumstances, we should do so. The Department for International Development is spending £22 million this year on development assistance to Nigeria, which will rise to some £35 million next year—and I applaud that. However, we must also ask Nigerians and the Government of Nigeria what they are doing to raise resources themselves.

There are many poor people in Nigeria for whom paying tax is not a possibility, but people in this country start paying tax when they earn about £4,000 a year. I can make the case for people in my constituency to pay slightly more tax to enable our Government to increase the resources going to development, but it is extremely difficult for me to argue that people on £4,000, £5,000 or £6,000 a year in the United Kingdom should pay more tax for development, when people on £40,000, £50,000 or £60,000 a year in Nigeria pay no income tax at all. We must raise such questions directly and clearly with the developing countries in which a proportion of the population are in a position to make contributions through taxation to their own country's development.

We also need greater transparency. Before we consider the case that the Nigerians are making for the relief of debt, we should clearly know where their oil revenues are going. We should also know that, were we to relieve some of the debt burden, the resources

released would be used to help poor people in Nigeria. There is a strong onus on the Nigerian Government to do that.

There is also a large role for private investment. In Enugu we saw vast investments by the brewery companies Heineken and Guinness. Such investment can be encouraged by the rule of law, so that outside investors know that if they invest, their assets will be safe and respected.

Our half of the partnership requires substantial change in the rules on trade by the Governments of rich countries. Had Africa maintained its share of trade from the late 1960s, its income would be about $70 billion a year more than it is today. NEPAD identifies a resource gap of some $64 billion, which would not exist if Africa had the same share of world trade that it had 35 years ago.

At the World Economic Forum in New York last month, Niall Fitzgerald, the chairman of Unilever, called on G8 Governments to respond immediately and open their markets to African products. When we were in Ghana, we learnt that raw cocoa beans could be imported to this country with no tariff, but that manufactured chocolate imported from Ghana to the EU carries a 70 per cent. tariff. It is not surprising that it is extremely difficult for Africa to sell its products in Europe.

The Quad countries, comprising the EU member states, Canada, the United States and Japan, have food and agriculture subsidies worth more than the gross national product of every country in sub-Saharan African put together, so the commodities that Africa could most easily export—agricultural produce—are locked out of the developed world. That must change, and I hope that the G8 meeting will address the matter.

Alone among G8 countries, the United Kingdom is increasing the proportion of its gross domestic product that is given to aid, albeit from the low base that was inherited from our predecessors. For NEPAD to work, there must be greater aid resources. The United States announced an intention to increase aid by $5 billion a year. It is important that we talk to their Government about how much of that will go to Africa, and how much will be used for the alleviation of poverty and the achievement of the millennium development goals.

During the first Africa-Europe ministerial meeting in Brussels last October, the ministerial communiqué said:

"The Ministers welcomed the new African initiative as a partnership programme which should be one of the bases for future co-operation between Europe and Africa."

If the European Union wants that to happen, it must reallocate aid from the near abroad, particularly central and eastern Europe, to sub-Saharan Africa.

Tony Baldry (Banbury): Hear, hear.

Hugh Bayley: Indeed; just six weeks ago in the Chamber the hon. Gentleman made a case about the 10 largest recipients of EU aid. If I remember his figures rightly, seven are in eastern and central Europe, and only one—Uganda—is a sub-Saharan African country.

The EU also needs to focus more on using aid to achieve the millennium development goals of targeting aid on poverty alleviation and it must improve the efficiency with which EU aid is applied in the field. For example, we were not impressed by the efficiency with which the EU office in Nigeria operated.

It is important that EU aid is used efficiently, and is targeted on places in which it will have the greatest impact on poverty alleviation. Aid donors must therefore make choices. In Nigeria, the Department for International Development made choices about which four Nigerian states would be partner states for UK aid. That was done to prevent our aid from being spread too thinly. We looked for partners that were seriously committed to reform, and we organised a competition in which different states made proposals to us. Four states were successful at the end of the competition. I would like the Government to consider the merits of allocating more aid on the basis of competition, because the method emphasises to the recipients of aid their responsibilities to use it to achieve agreed poverty alleviation goals.

11.19 am

Tony Baldry (Banbury): I understand, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that self-discipline means five minutes.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Nicholas Winterton): Or less.

Tony Baldry: Very briefly, the debate is timely, against the backdrop of Monterrey, and I congratulate the hon. Member for City of York (Hugh Bayley) on securing it. I entirely agree with everything that he said and particularly endorse his final comments about competition. There is a lot to be said for a structure in which people do not think that development aid is a right but something that they must demonstrate can be put to the best possible use. I do not intend to repeat all that I said on 6 February but just wish quickly to share some impressions from the Select Committee's visit to west Africa.

Partnership involves both sides meeting obligations. We have had much discussion in the Chamber about the obligations of the rich north, the rich west and the developed countries. We had some good news last week when the Chancellor announced that increased development aid will be forthcoming in the Budget. We look forward to learning whether the increase will be in real terms or just cash terms. It was also good news that the Council of Ministers announced in Barcelona that the EU states would seek to achieve 0.39 per cent. of gross domestic product for development aid as soon as possible. Those are steps in the right direction.

However, our African colleagues also have obligations under the partnership: they must be realistic about debt, encourage democracy, bear down on corruption and promote enterprise economies. From a meeting with members of the Nigerian National Assembly, we learned that there is not a realistic attitude about mutuality on debt relief. Debt relief, which we all encourage, does not remove the need for countries to follow sensible fiscal policies and recognise their obligations. As far as the United Kingdom is concerned, much Nigerian debt is guaranteed by the Export Credits Guarantee Department. People have borrowed money on commercial contracts for commercial purposes, but there seems to be no acknowledgment that our

[Tony Baldry]

taxpayers will have to pick up the tab for contracts that fail. We must ensure that colleagues in Africa understand that debt relief involves obligations on them as well.

On encouraging democracy—setting aside countries such as Zimbabwe, where the facts speak for themselves—it seemed to us that in Ghana and Nigeria the democratic system was very much one of patronage, with money coming down, and petitioning, without the accountability that we have. There is a role for us as Members of Parliament to play. We must remember that Nigeria has been ruled by a military dictatorship for much of the past 40 years. Many members of its National Assembly have been in office for only two years.

When the Berlin wall fell, we in this place did an enormous amount through the Westminster Foundation for Democracy to help colleagues in eastern Europe acquire skills to become effective parliamentarians. We may need to do more through organisations such as the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association to help Commonwealth colleagues in Africa to develop skills as parliamentarians so that they can hold governments to account, work out their relationships with their constituents and participate in functioning democracies. All six of us who participated in the Select Committee visit have indicated that we would be willing to support individual members of the Nigerian National Assembly who come here, to help them in the way in which the Westminster Foundation for Democracy helped parliamentarians from eastern Europe.

On bearing down on corruption, we met the Nigerian commission that has been set up to tackle corruption. It is well intentioned but very slow, having been affected by two years of constitutional wrangling as to whether legislation is consistent with the Nigerian constitution. We must continue to send the message to colleagues in Africa that corruption is not only insidious in its own right but frightens off inward investment. The continent of Africa receives a tiny amount of direct inward investment; I suspect that part of the reason for that is concern about corruption.

On encouraging enterprise economies, we were all struck by the fact that in Nigeria, apart from oil, and in Ghana, apart from cocoa and gold, there seemed to be little new enterprise. We came across factories that had closed down because, people said, of a combination of Government interference and management incompétence. Most of the companies that made money in Nigeria were parastatals.

Through our aid policies and so forth, we must find ways of encouraging greater enterprise in such countries if they are not simply to become aid dependent. Partnership involves both sides meeting obligations. We must encourage our colleagues in Africa to see that the New Partnership for Africa's Development involves meeting their obligations on debt, democracy, bearing down on corruption and encouraging enterprise.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Again, I make a plea for very short speeches.

Tony Baldry: It was short, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Robathan: Only five minutes.

11.26 am

Mr. Mark Lazarowicz (Edinburgh, North and Leith): I begin by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for City of York (Hugh Bayley) on securing this debate on a subject that has concerned him for many years. I join him in congratulating the Government, especially the Prime Minister, on showing such a strong commitment to the New Partnership for Africa's Development.

The significance of the new partnership should not be underestimated and although the importance of the initiative for African countries is clear, it also has wider significance. The principle underpinning the partnership is that only through enhanced forms of co-operation and mutual dependence between states can sustainable and secure development be achieved. That principle has a global resonance, so it is essential that G8 countries give the initiative the type of practical backing necessary to make it a reality.

I should like the Minister's response on two issues that trouble some non-governmental organisations about the new partnership. First, I understand—and hope that the Minister will correct me if I am wrong—that the G8 timetable for the continuing implementation of the new partnership is in advance of that currently taking place in Africa. The G8 discussions are due to be finalised by the end of April, whereas discussions within African states will in no sense be complete by then. The danger is that the processes in G8 and African states could be decoupled, which would not be in the interests of a successful partnership.

Secondly, the NGOs are concerned about the apparent lack of involvement of African civil society in the process. At the recent African development forum in Addis Ababa, a fear was expressed that the new partnership was too donor driven. If it is to stay true to its original aim of improving the lot of ordinary Africans, we should quickly formalise the participation of civil societies within Africa and G8 countries. There has been little opportunity for such consultation to date; I hope that the position will be remedied before the G8 formulates its official position next month.

The need for the new partnership to mean something to wider African civil society is illustrated by recent developments in Zimbabwe. As hon. Members are aware, some people suggest that events in Zimbabwe undermine the case for a new partnership. I argue that we should reach a different conclusion. We should not let the actions of an increasingly isolated despot such as Mugabe undermine what has ambitiously but rightly been described as the relaunch of Africa. Zimbabwe shows us precisely the need to achieve reforms in governance if potential for growth and development in Africa are to be achieved.

We are right to call for Africa's leaders to demonstrate in their approach to Zimbabwe the seriousness of their intention to change Africa for the better. I was pleased to see reports in today's papers about the tougher line that the South African and Nigerian Governments appear to be taking. Let us put pressure on those Governments and support opposition movements and civil society in Zimbabwe, but let us not write off what is meant to be a long-term initiative just because of the current and, let us hope, short-term difficulties in Zimbabwe.

Africa faces a huge development challenge but, as my hon. Friend the Member for City of York said, it has enormous potential for growth and development. There are countries in Africa with growth rates that are well above the world average. G8 countries have a common interest in the peoples in Africa and in promoting development and stability in that continent. I welcome the Government's support for the process to date, and I urge them to make further advances in the ways that I have described.

11.30 am

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): I would like to bring everybody back to the first of the four core elements of the new African initiative, which is:

"First and foremost, there is a clear awareness that peace, democracy, and good governance are preconditions for investment, growth, and the reduction of poverty."

I applaud that, and I am sure that we all would. However, are the Presidents of Algeria, South Africa and Nigeria serious? They put the initiative together and are the leaders of it.

We have heard about Zimbabwe. Was there peace in Zimbabwe? Was democracy exercised in Zimbabwe? I do not think so, and nor does the SADC observer mission that said:

"The climate of insecurity in Zimbabwe since the 2000 parliamentary elections was such that the electoral process could not be said to adequately comply with the norms and standards for elections in the SADC region."

That is pretty clear. Unfortunately, President Mbeki would rather placate the tyrant Mugabe than stand up for the poor Africans who are being oppressed, intimidated and killed in Zimbabwe. That leaves aside the question of peace and what on earth the Zimbabwean army is doing in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Mbeki has ignored that, and unless he is willing to stand up on it, I do not put much store by the great words that he put into the New Partnership for Africa's Development.

As we have heard, the International Development Committee was in Nigeria last week. That was the most depressing African country that I have visited; I was deeply depressed when I returned. Today, President Obasanjo is seeing whether he can get reconciliation in Zimbabwe.

According to Transparency International, Nigeria is the second most corrupt country in the world. We saw that—God, did we see it. Allegedly, $100 billion has been looted from oil revenues. The country is largely run by a kleptocracy. President Babangida, as he then was, who led the military dictatorship for eight years, is still living in tremendous comfort and enjoys enormous wealth that was looted from his country of Nigeria. No action is being taken against him. President, or General, Abacha, who died famously four years ago, was condemned out of hand as a corrupt dictator—even the Commonwealth condemned him. However, his portrait still hangs at Abuja airport. That also speaks reams.

The hon. Member for City of York (Hugh Bayley), with whom I agree largely about what we saw in Nigeria, put the case for tax extremely well. Nigeria's external debt is about $28 billion. No tax is levied on the rich, although $100 billion has been looted. Its annual oil revenue is something like $18 billion, but the people to whom we spoke had no concept that they, rather than the international community, should do something about that.

I echo the hon. Member for City of York—I should call him my friend—by asking why poorish people in the United Kingdom should pay tax to allow bigger rip-offs by that klepocracy, where members of the National Assembly recently voted themselves a tax-free pay increase of up to about £50,000 or £60.000, in addition to a free car and a house in Abuja.

I give an example. A large new stadium is being built in Abuja. The cost of that is spiralling out of control in a way that makes the dome look well organised. It is absolutely astonishing. There is no transparency and nobody knows where the money is going. However, everyone talks about it because they can make a pretty good guess.

There is a stench of corruption around that and everything else. Will the Minister write to me, rather than responding in the debate, about the position of Julius Berger, which is a German company? Germany is our ally and partner in Europe. According to everyone whom I met in Nigeria, the company is closely associated with infrastructure contracts in a way that gives cause for concern—I shall say no more than that.

Corruption—the stench of which is everywhere—is institutionalised throughout Nigeria. If Obasanjo is to be serious, he must tackle it. I applaud the fact that he has set up a commission, but I am not left with any optimism that it will take on such serious issues.

I thought that the Department for International Development was doing well in aid. Its two focuses on AIDS and governance are good. I have already stated my position on governance in Nigeria and, candidly, it is probably the Government's position, too, although I would not necessarily expect them to say so. Everyone knows that AIDS is the terrifying black death that is stalking Africa. Nigeria has a HIV infection rate of more than 5 per cent., yet 95 per cent. of people use no contraception. That will seriously hit Nigeria. We all wish the New Partnership for Africa's Development well. It is the only game in town. I want Africans to take control of, and responsibility for, their own destiny. However, last week left me with the belief that I should like to see positive action in order to justify optimism.

11.35 am

Paul Goggins (Wythenshawe and Sale, East): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for City of York (Hugh Bayley) on securing the debate and on setting such an optimistic tone for our discussions. It is easy to become depressed when we hear such evidence and statistics.

I wish to make four points. First, what has been happening in Zimbabwe, however depressing it may be, must not be allowed to derail the New Partnership for Africa's Development. Its progress depends on good governance and the behaviour of Mugabe is the exact opposite of that. It would be wrong if a mood of pessimism among the G8 countries or a difference of opinion between African and non-African members of the Commonwealth were to reduce support for the new partnership. My strong message to the Minister is that, whatever has happened in Zimbabwe, support for the new partnership must continue if we are to deal with the

[Paul Goggins]

half of Africa's people, who still live on less than $1 a day. The nub of the issue is that, if Mugabe's re-election was a defeat for democracy, it must not be allowed to become a further defeat for the poor people of Africa.

Secondly, if good governance is an essential aspect of the new partnership so, too, is the need for more generous development assistance. In 1994, that assistance formed 11 per cent. of Africa's gross national product and, by 1997, it had fallen to 5 per cent. I welcome President Bush's announcement of an extra $5 billion for the United States aid budget. It is not an unconditional welcome, however, because we have yet to see what strings are attached to it and the United States starts from an appallingly low level of just 0.1 per cent. of gross national product. None the less, the announcement is an encouraging sign of a new understanding of the need to tackle not only terror, but global poverty.

I was also pleased, as were other hon. Members, to hear of the agreement in Barcelona with the new commitment for all European Union countries to reach an average of 0.39 per cent. by 2006. As a signatory to early-day motion 586, I hope that the Chancellor of the Exchequer will confirm that the United Kingdom's contribution to that effort will be at least 0.4 per cent. of GNP by 2006 on the way to 0.7 per cent. by 2012. As the Chancellor has confirmed, unless we take such action, we will not meet the millennium development goals by 2015.

My third point is that aid alone is not enough. We need deeper debt relief. Thirty-four of the 42 highly indebted poor countries are African. Although considerable progress has been made over the past four or five years, lower growth rates and the fall in the value of exports have clearly hit some African countries hard. There is a need to review the HIPC initiative constantly in the light of that. Of course, debt relief should not be unconditional, but far too much is still repaid in interest that should be going into the development of education and health in the poorest countries.

My fourth point relates to that made strongly by the hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan). The United Nations estimates that 16.3 million people have died from AIDS in Africa, and that more than 3 million of them were children. It also estimates that 28 million people in Africa are living with the disease, and that in some southern African states the infection rate is perhaps as high as 25 per cent. I am appalled by that figure, and I often wonder what our constituencies would be like if we were faced with such an infection rate for HIV.

It is clear that something must be done. The time, energy and resources that poor people in Africa are spending on combating AIDS are time, energy and resources that are not being spent on combating poverty. Therefore, I hope that the G8 will support better preventative and care programmes, particularly for children who have been orphaned as a result of AIDS. I also want to see an increase in the global health fund to improve the health infrastructure.

Many other issues have been touched on, such as conflict resolution, the need for trade reform and the need to reform the arms trade. However, my final point is that—whatever the G8 decides with regard to aid, debt, peacekeeping or trade—the most important aspect of the new partnership is the shift that it is effecting in the balance of power and responsibility. The situation is no longer about what the rich countries can do for the poor countries; it is now about what we can do together. That new situation is based on a plan that has been owned and shaped by a new generation of African leaders, and I believe that it will be their leadership—as much as the resources of the rich world—that will determine the outcome of the ambitious partnership project.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I make a further plea for speeches to be as brief as possible.

11.41 am

Mr. Michael Moore (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): This has been a useful debate, and I congratulate the hon. Member for City of York (Hugh Bayley) on securing it and on making such a thoughtful contribution. He was right to point out that the New Partnership for Africa's Development has lots of positive aspects, and we hope that they will be developed.

None of the Labour Members who are present has quoted from the Prime Minister's speech at the Labour party conference of autumn 2001, but I will not apologise for quoting from it. He said:

"The state of Africa is a scar on the conscience of the world. But if the world as a community focused on it, we could heal it. And if we don't, it will become deeper and angrier."

That is true, and all the statistics, trends and arguments that we have heard this morning reinforce the points that the Prime Minister was making.

Many hon. Members who are present have personally witnessed the state of the economy and the politics in different African countries. I recently visited South Africa with my hon. Friend the Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb), where I saw the sharp contrast between the wealth of Cape Town and the poverty of surrounding areas, and when I visited Kenya with the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), we saw the wealth of parts of Nairobi sitting cheek by jowl with the horrors of the slums of Kebira.

The entire situation is grim. For generations, things have tended to be done to Africa, rather than with it, and that has happened with regard to a variety of subjects, such as humanitarian aid, development assistance and international capitalism in the raw.

As many hon. Members have said, recently there has been a welcome shift of emphasis in politics in southern Africa—and that change has been especially marked in South Africa. That has been a key development; it has led to a growing self-confidence and a recognition that Africa's future should be about self-determination and taking charge of the agenda. The clearest manifestation of that is the new partnership, and it is welcome that the Government have been supportive of it.

The Prime Minister backed up his conference speech with his tour of Africa in February, but how such enthusiasm sits with arms exports and support for Tanzanian air traffic control is unclear. Perhaps the Minister can square that circle, when he responds?

Since the meeting in Genoa in 2001, the G8 has also been enthusiastic. Just a couple of months ago, at the world economic forum, half a billion US dollars were committed to a fund to support the new partnership.

There is such enthusiasm that one might think that some kind of backpackers' convention for world leaders could be organised in Africa. The continent is certainly receiving a lot of attention. The need is there and the international will is clear, and, therefore, the circumstances should be right for a major push. However, at this very moment, the political conditions in Africa are crumbling. As the hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) pointed out, NEPAD depends on key conditions—peace, security, democracy and good political governance. The situation in Zimbabwe is surely crucial, and the reaction to it perhaps more so. As Walter Kansteiner, the US Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, memorably said:

"The road to NEPAD runs through Harare".

Like the voters before them, the evangelists for NEPAD now find that the road is blocked. The international community is either dazzled by the blinding activities of the election process or deliberately turning its back.

The judgment on Zimbabwe will surely be key to the success of NEPAD, but we are getting confused signals. Observers witnessing the same events somehow saw different things. The European Union talks about tightening smart sanctions, and the Commonwealth—well, what exactly is it doing? The timeliness of the debate is uncanny and perhaps rare for an event in this place. The troika of Nigeria, Australia and South Africa meets in London today. Those countries have a huge responsibility to themselves and the wider African community. Not that Commonwealth suspension is the worst threat on earth; it is unlikely to topple Mugabe. Surely what is more important is the signal that it will send out.

President Mbeki is in a particularly tight spot. The African National Congress may have supported the election result, but the President has so far been silent—judiciously so. He knows that the crisis has already laid waste to the South African economy. If a wrong decision is made now, the situation will be exacerbated. The intensity of his diplomatic initiatives in the past 24 hours is to be welcomed and shows how seriously he is taking the issue. Beyond this crisis, the future of NEPAD could be at stake. Its credibility is on the line, and although the G8 is unlikely to withdraw support as a result of what is happening in Zimbabwe, it will send out very damaging signals.

The reaction of private investors is surely of more significance. It is most alarming. No big-bang sanctions are contemplated; that is not at issue. It would be damaging if investors and traders in Africa starved the country of funds. That would undermine the initiative before it got much further. If southern Africa fails the test, what of the east? In Kenya, which has elections this year, the economy is in tatters and the prospects are grim. If Zimbabwe is tolerated, what message would it send to the leadership in Kenya?

We can—and, rightly, do—agonise over our role in all this. However, even in the short debate on the issue this morning, it has become clear where the focus must lie. The United Kingdom and the Commonwealth can make their points of view clear and can protest vigorously, but it is southern Africa that counts. Mbeki is key. NEPAD is rightly about Africa taking the lead. Never has that been more necessary than now.

11.47 am

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): As we meet, the G8 conference on financing for development is taking place in Monterrey. It is vital that the G8 increases the resources provided. Otherwise, the millennium declaration—under which the rich countries pledged themselves to halving poverty, providing primary education for all children everywhere and reducing infant mortality by two thirds by 2015—will be unattainable and more than 50 million children, mainly in Africa, will die of hunger and preventable diseases by 2015.

I welcome the American President's extra $5 billion announced this week, but it is worth noting that that is less than a tenth of the latest annual increase in America's defence spending. Egypt and Israel receive three times the aid that America gives to all sub-Saharan Africa. I do not wish to mention only America; I want our country and all the G8 countries to do more. However, I want to focus not on the G8 and resources from the top, but on what can be done to build strategies from the base, rethinking the process of development and what the word "partnership" might mean.

Take the example of Ghana. Some 40 per cent. of the population are poor, a third are in extreme poverty and more than half of those living in northern Ghana are classed as the rural poor. The scale of poverty in northern Nigeria, too, is shocking, and the standard of living in that increasingly semi-arid desert land is pre-biblical. People are trying to scratch a living on the face of the earth in areas where streams have dried up. I mention that because the Department for International Development strategy papers on those countries are encouraging in their radical analysis. Disempowerment, of the poor in particular, is a key focus, and other issues include lack of knowledge, skills and resources and unfair global trading policies.

I shall focus on the disempowerment of poor people. The DFID country strategies for Nigeria and elsewhere refer to tackling extreme poverty in rural areas. In such places, agricultural policies have fluctuated or been variably implemented so that there is policy confusion, as DFID puts it. There are multiple, overlapping institutions with conflicting mandates. Environmental and common property resources—pastoral lands, water and forests—have been squandered. How does one get a grip on all that? There will be a political accountability gap where new Governments make the transition from military rule to democracy, but elected Assembly Members are not the only ones who do not know their real democratic powers. The people themselves do not know their role in the process.

What shift can we see from primary capital development projects to the development of participatory techniques that engage the poor? We cannot simply build capital projects; I have seen clinics in Africa standing empty because there are no revenue resources to keep them running. We must, of course, face the challenge of what to do about countries that do not have enough staff because those people have come to Britain, and that is particularly true of Ghana. That

[Mr. John Battle]

aside, however, clinics are useless if villages do not have the resources to keep them running, even if the governor thinks that building a clinic is the best option for the area.

In other words, economic growth alone will not help, and we must introduce local administration, distribution and control systems that engage the people. We should target action for change at the local level, where there is still a strong tendency towards self-help. Some people build their own villages, and the tiny Birni Gwiri village in the Kaduna national park in Nigeria built its own clinic without any outside resources whatever.

I should briefly mention how DFID can do more—not by helping as such, but by using the radical and far-sighted process that it is developing. How can the voices of the poor be included to a greater extent so that the poverty reduction process is theirs? The challenge is to develop a vibrant civil society in which the poor can properly engage in poverty reduction, and the key is to involve them in a structured way in developing the strategy so that they own it at local level. There are signs of hope in Rwanda, for example. The Ubudehe process, which takes its name from a local word, builds on the local devolution of power, engagement and resources to the micro level of 100 families. That radical strategy has been built from the base.

DFID has worked with the World Bank on community involvement strategies in Nigeria, and it has also worked on such strategies in Ghana. The way forward is to build from the base—the development of local participation and local governance is the key to the future. Why? We are developing a real partnership and a real sense of mutuality. We are not helping the poor so much as finding out how they can work on their own circumstances.

The DFID officials whom I have met around the world are superb and have a far-sighted, radical outlook. They are doing pioneering work on pro-poor civil organisations and on developing participation strategies to enable the voices of the poor to be heard. In that, they are perhaps building on the work of the university of Bath centre for development economics.

All that work can help to illuminate what we need to do on basic community development in our inner cities. In other words, it is not one-way traffic and not simply a question of us helping Africa. Community development initiatives and the participation of the poor in rural villages in Africa can show us how to engage people here so that, even in my city of Leeds, they do not see the single regeneration budget as a middle management project that is being imposed on them. Good, well-intentioned officials come along to help, but the people do not own the process.

We can learn from Africa. That will help us to make sense of the expression "new partnership for development", because I am not convinced that we are all that developed in Britain.

11.54 am

Mr. Stephen O'Brien (Eddisbury): First, I congratulate the hon. Member for City of York (Hugh Bayley) on securing the debate; I endorse much of what he said. It is a privilege to follow the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle), whose contribution is particularly important with regard to support for local initiative rather than the imposition of top-down solutions that might not be received in the way in which the donors patronisingly expect them to be.

I, too, welcome the New Partnership for Africa's Development. The choice that faces the Secretary of State and the Department—the Minister might allude to it—is whether to give good governance the incentive and encouragement that it needs to be rewarded. The hon. Member for City of York touched on the point when he talked about aid competition. Good governance is patently an essential element of trust for those who wish to help the heavily indebted poor countries, and examples of it should be preferred pour encourager les autres. Many such countries do not have perfect systems; many are as poor as the countries under tyrannical regimes.

That is a hard choice for the Department and one that I have raised with the Secretary of State on the Floor of the House. In considering it, we must accept that it involves a complex series of issues—aid, trade, good governance, health and debt relief must ride together in a package. I couple my remarks with those of the hon. Member for Leeds, West. Pump priming for education and health programmes, particularly in relation to AIDS, must concentrate on people at ground level. The importance of training and skills has been mentioned, but I urge hon. Members to focus on malaria, because it is killing off both old and young, leaving a sterile and static "middle" population, often blighted by AIDS. That is one of the most difficult economic challenges that such countries face.

If we focus only on education, health and poverty eradication, all of which are important and necessary, we risk losing what is, ultimately, the greatest asset in boosting poverty eradication—trade. Aid can do much, but trade is the ultimate solution. Getting those countries to participate in the global economy in a way that is real for them is one of the biggest challenges. We must be able to trust each other on peace and security and the eradication of international terrorism, which allow good governance and democratic traditions to flourish.

As chairman of the all-party Tanzania group, and having been involved in third world debt relief, not least because I was born in Tanzania, it is fair to say that no hon. Member or party has a monopoly on compassion, concern or interest in those matters. While we can debate the precise percentages of aid given by this and previous Governments—I do not make the point pejoratively—having a realistic and sustainable commitment that is supported across the House is what matters.

Like everybody, I am disturbed by the endorsement given by the leaders of South Africa, Nigeria and Tanzania to the so-called deserved victory in Zimbabwe. That is disappointing, but it could be said that there was not perfect good governance in the United Kingdom given the problems in Northern Ireland over many years, so we must be careful not to be purist.

I shall take Tanzania as an example; it does not have perfect good governance, as there are problems in Zanzibar. The serious issue of the air traffic control

system has been raised on the Floor of the House. I have tried to look into it in detail, because it seems to generate a lot more heat than light. There are tensions, which I can understand, and, quite properly, there have been discussions in the Government. I welcome that, because it is proper to have the debate.

The Tanzanian Government went through what they consider to be a perfectly good due diligence process. They put out to international tender, obtained a preliminary export licence from the Ministry of Defence for the preferred bidders and consulted the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund on a dual civil and security system. I could have used the word "military", but in Tanzania the military aspect is irrelevant, because it does not have the military capability to respond to a threat. The greatest difficulty is smuggling, because smugglers export 15 tonnes of gold from Tanzania each year.

It would have been better if Tanzania had paid for the civilian aspect of the air traffic control project, costing £9 million, and the international community had paid the other £18 million. Such a dual approach would have offered a solution, but I was happy to see jobs secured for this country's manufacturing industry.

I apologise for having gone over my time by a minute. I urge support for the package approach of looking carefully at aid and we must consider the organic initiatives on health and the threats to it that were mentioned earlier. We must continue debt relief and, above all, in celebrating good governance, we should take an organic-plus approach to developing countries and poverty relief, rather than adopt a patronising approach of granting aid downwards, which is counter-productive.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: If the hon. Member for South Swindon (Ms Drown) gives me an unofficial assurance that she will not speak for more than three minutes, I am happy for her to contribute before I call the Liberal Democrat spokesman to wind up.

12.1 pm

Ms Julia Drown (South Swindon): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As chair of the all-party group on third-world debt, I was recently invited to the Netherlands to meet parliamentarians and representatives of non-governmental organisations from Africa and elsewhere. We debated debt relief and the new partnership for Africa. I may need to declare an interest, because I have not yet refunded the cost of my accommodation, although I am in the process of doing so.

I welcome the new partnership for Africa, but, like other speakers, I believe that the civil society issue must be recognised. The partnership document was not translated from English into other languages until last month, four months after publication of the original. Furthermore, it is important that we do not raise expectations. The document refers to one voice for Africa, but Britain and France cannot agree on the great lakes, so it is unrealistic to expect African countries to agree on everything.

I hope that the Minister will answer a few questions about debt relief. There is increasing recognition that the heavily indebted poor countries initiative is not good enough and will not by itself achieve the millennium goals on debt. If that is the case, why does the new partnership document refer to going through the HIPC and Paris Club process first? It may be appropriate to pursue that process concurrently, but much more needs to be done if we are to achieve those important goals.

How are we to get help to Ethiopia, which needs to spend $2.5 billion on health to achieve its goals, but is currently spending less than $100 million? How will we deal with the situation in Malawi? The HIPC programme sets a growth rate of 6 per cent., but Malawi's growth rate is about 3 per cent. and getting worse. There is a massive famine there and people are dying right now, but deaths could be avoided if we got more help to such countries.

Will the Minister confirm that the reference in the partnership to a long-term objective, linking debt reduction to costed poverty reduction outcomes, is the same as linking debt reduction to the millennium development goals? If so, why can that not be confirmed at Monterrey to eradicate current concerns about the goal being watered down?

There has been much talk about Nigeria and recognition that we could and should do more, but something needs to happen on both sides. Although we should not underestimate the power of civil society and parliamentarians, we need information. I have been pressing for specific answers for some time. My hon. Friend the Member for City of York (Hugh Bayley) has given us some of the most useful information about taxing people. Nigeria is talked of as oil rich, but it receives less than 27 cents a day per person—less than a dollar a day—and about 90 per cent. of the population have no access to essential drugs. Nigeria is still owed ecological debts, although many debts were paid under military rule.

The hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) referred to loans being given for bad projects. There is responsibility on both sides, however, as people here should have known that we were giving loans for bad projects. We must play our part.

The stadium in Nigeria was mentioned. Senators in that country oppose building it and we must support them if they are to be able to talk out loud. Unquestionably, much more needs to be done and we must continue to consider the matter closely. We should also tackle the problem of money that is stashed away in western banks and do more on money laundering so that we can return the money that is owed to Nigeria and other countries.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Edward O'Hara): I trust that the three Front Benchers will divide the remaining time equally.

12.5 pm

Norman Lamb (North Norfolk): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I add my congratulations to the hon. Member for City of York (Hugh Bayley) on securing the debate. The timing could not be more fortuitous, with President Obasanjo of Nigeria, John Howard of Australia and Thabo Mbeki, President of South Africa, meeting today in London to decide the Commonwealth response to the fraudulent election in Zimbabwe.

[Norman Lamb]

I note the comments of the hon. Member for Wythenshawe and Sale, East (Paul Goggins) about not allowing what happened in that country to derail the process, but the judgment that those leaders reach will have profound implications for the achievement of goals by the New Partnership for Africa's Development. The two issues are inextricably linked, which presents President Mbeki with an enormous dilemma, as he has championed the concept of an Africa-led recovery programme. Failure to show leadership now, when the principles underlying NEPAD face such a stark challenge, could leave the process stillborn and destroy the credibility of a necessary element of securing inward investment.

Of course, Zimbabwe is not alone on the continent in failing to follow the principles of democracy and indulging in corruption. There is a danger of the west striking a hypocritical note if we do not challenge other countries, which are regarded as our friends, where democracy has been woefully lacking.

Why should we regard the continent's reaction to this election as so important? First, change is so badly needed in Zimbabwe. So many people in Africa are offended not only by the flawed election, but by the hopelessly corrupt economic mismanagement and the vicious crushing of dissent over so many years, which have brought that country to its knees. Once a proud exporter of food, it now relies on food aid to feed hundreds of thousands of its citizens, with 500,000 in danger of starvation.

Secondly, we regard the election as important because of its timing. As NEPAD struggles to take off, Mbeki and others simply must meet the challenge to give the project credibility. This is its first big test. There is no doubt that Mbeki recognises that challenge; the only question is, has he the will and ability to act?

As the hon. Member for City of York said, Mbeki's speech last October was impressively clear on NEPAD's potential value as the best and, indeed, only available framework for development in Africa. He stressed that the essential precondition of any renaissance in Africa is that the programme be led by Africa. I shall not repeat the quotes used by the hon. Gentleman, but Mbeki also said:

"Clearly, these measures of ensuring democracy, good governance and the absence of wars and conflicts, are important both for the well-being of the people of Africa and for the creation of positive conditions for investment, economic growth and development."

Mbeki recognises the essential link between democracy and good governance as well as the creation of positive conditions for investment. If the wrong message is sent out now, those conditions will simply not exist.

It is suggested that Mbeki is pursuing a policy of engagement and softly-softly diplomacy because he fears a collapse in Zimbabwe that might tumble over the borders of South Africa, bringing in tens of thousands of refugees, and the impact of that on the South African economy. However, it is plain for all to see that prevarication and lack of leadership might themselves destroy the South African economy.

Africa getting its act together will not be enough for NEPAD to succeed, because it involves partnership with the developed world. The G8 is already engaged in the process, but a massive challenge faces the developed world as well as Africa. Too often, our approach to Africa has been characterised by cynicism and hypocrisy. We must take a more transparent, more honest and more intelligent approach to fulfil our side of the bargain.

The level and purpose of aid for Africa have too often damaged development rather than helped it. It has been tied to trade, and it has been paid to our friends rather than given where it was most needed. Aid for low-income countries with policies that are better than average according to World Bank criteria fell from 1.9 per cent. of recipients' gross domestic product in 1991-95 to 1.2 per cent. in 1996-99. The role of the United States and the European Union in payment of aid moneys to Africa has been lamentable.

Arms sales feed conflict in Africa, which in turn makes escape from poverty impossible. Simon Jenkins recently wrote a powerful article in *The Times*, pointing out that UK arms exports to Africa increased from £52 million in 1999 to £125 million in 2000, and are likely to rise to more than £200 million next year. How is that paid for? By increasing those countries' debts. The shocking case of Tanzania, and the sale of the £28 million air traffic control system, is the latest shameful example. I pay tribute to the Secretary of State for International Development and the Chancellor for making a stand against that.

The combination of US and EU tariffs and subsidies is effectively a massive barrier to Africa selling its goods on the world market. So much needs to change on our side for NEPAD to be given a fair wind, but why should we bother? We have to bother because of the moral case for engaging in Africa, but a case can also be made that is based on intelligent self-interest. A massive challenge lies ahead and it is essential that the G8 remains engaged, but both sides must recognise what is needed for this important initiative to have any chance of success.

12.12 pm

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): It has been an interesting debate. Like other hon. Members, I congratulate the hon. Member for City of York (Hugh Bayley), who has always taken a great interest in these matters. Fortunately, many hon. Members have been able to contribute to the debate. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry), who does a distinguished job as Chairman of the Select Committee on International Development. I pay tribute also to the hon. Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz), my hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan), whose powerful remarks I shall return to in a moment, the hon. Members for Wythenshawe and Sale, East (Paul Goggins), for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Moore) and for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle), my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Mr. O'Brien) and the hon. Members for South Swindon (Ms Drown) and for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb). In a short debate, we have managed to pack in a variety of speakers and a wide range of views.

When we look at the way in which the New Partnership for Africa's Development is supposed to work, we are bound to consider the first test of it. Sadly,

I agree with the pessimism expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Blaby; those of us who have been watching the sad but all too predictable events in Zimbabwe are bound to say that the aspirations for NEPAD have not been borne out. My hon. Friend spoke about his experiences when he and the hon. Member for City of York visited Africa as members of the International Development Committee a week or so ago. He said that he came back more depressed than he had ever been about the prospects for the development of good governance.

One concern shared by my hon. Friend the Member for Blaby and the hon. Member for City of York was the view of the British taxpayer. The hon. Gentleman said that he was quite happy to make a case for his constituents to pay more tax in order to have more money for overseas aid, but that the case would be more difficult to make if his constituents knew that some people in Nigeria earned £40,000, £50,000 or £60,000 and paid no tax at all. My hon. Friend the Member for Blaby suggested that there was no real understanding among the elected politicians that he met in Nigeria of a need to tackle that problem and move to a system of democratic accountability and proper taxation. That is not only depressing, but all too familiar to those of us who have seen how so many countries in sub-Saharan Africa have descended into virtual countries, as a constituent of mine who has great experience in Kenya described them.

Although Her Majesty's Opposition want to see the underlying aspirations of NEPAD succeed—who could not wish something with genuine good intentions well?—we worry that the concerns that we have expressed about NEPAD's emphasis on Government-to-Government aid, rather than support for reputable non-governmental organisations, have not been listened to. As we have said, when the Department for International Development considers its future contribution to initiatives such as NEPAD, there should be much more clear support for NGOs and charities. Those are more accountable and cost-effective, and less corrupt, and they often have greater experience of working on the ground. Almost every speaker in the debate has talked about the extent of corruption. We know that when aid is given Government-to-Government, what happens to it when it reaches the recipient Government is, sadly, the problem.

There must be a much greater commitment from African countries to good governance if any of the targets or aspirations that underlie NEPAD are to be met. I have spent some time in South Africa, and have seen the contrasts that the hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale rightly mentioned between grinding poverty in some areas and wealth in others. If we are to tackle those contrasts, we must wish the President of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki, well. Also, it would be reassuring if the leadership of sub-Saharan African countries were prepared to condemn the appalling recent abuses of democracy in Zimbabwe. I share the pessimism of my hon. Friend the Member for Blaby, who said that one cannot take aspirational statements seriously if, faced with that first test, all we see are expressions of support for the rigged Zimbabwe election.

The Foreign Secretary said that

"there has been every sign of ZANU-PF-backed violence and intimidation, right up to the close of polling, as well as many reports of irregularities, including a shortage of polling booths in urban areas, and harassment of opposition election agents in rural areas."—[*Official Report*, 12 March 2002; Vol. 381, c. 740.]

Sadly, it appears that many African countries pretend, at least publicly, that they do not agree with that assessment. There is great concern that the Government of South Africa have been reluctant to criticise the tyrant of Zimbabwe, as my hon. Friend the Member for Blaby rightly called him. That Government are thought to have put pressure on their official election observers to declare the election free and fair. The South African Minister with responsibility for the police, Steve Tshwete, tried to persuade observers that the elections in Zimbabwe were "credible" and "legitimate". A South African observer was quoted in our national press on 11 March as saying:

"We feel uncomfortable. The pressures are going to be enormous".

Aziz Pahad, the deputy Foreign Minister, has called on South Africa's press to stop "demonising" President Mugabe. One member of the South African election observation team said that the media had exaggerated the violence, and that the notion of a free and fair election was

"a product of Western liberal political processes".

What hope for a move towards good governance if real democracy is traduced in that way?

President Obasanjo of Nigeria is, as many hon. Members have said, closely linked to NEPAD as one of its chief backers. Before the close of voting, the head of the Nigerian observer team of the Zimbabwean elections, Ernest Shonekan, said that he was "particularly impressed" by the conduct of the election, despite some "skirmishes".

He said:

"It will be very difficult for anyone to come and tell us that it was not free and fair".

Senior aides to President Obasanjo were quoted by the press as saying that the Nigerian leader was unlikely to back the suspension of Zimbabwe from the Commonwealth.

Nigeria exhibits the difficulties inherent in NEPAD. President Obasanjo is the first civilian head of state in more than 15 years, but has struggled to implement even the basic tenets of NEPAD in his country. Nigerians are still caught up in the worst cycle of ethnic, tribal and religious violence since the civil war in the 1960s. Thousands have died. At the start of last month, at least 100 people were killed in the commercial capital, Lagos, after three days of ethnic clashes.

Although we recognise the aspirations underlying NEPAD, as I have said, and should like it to succeed, in the light of the failure of its first test in Zimbabwe we are bound to be very pessimistic. I hope that the Minister will say at least that he is prepared to put much more effort into supporting the work of NGOs and charities on the ground in Africa, which might be a better way of causing NEPAD's real underlying concepts to succeed in future.

12.21 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development (Hilary Benn): May I join other hon. Members in congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for City of York (Hugh Bayley) on having secured the debate and on the clarity with which he analysed the challenge? I genuinely welcome the fact that I have a short time in which to respond to the debate, because that is a product of so many hon. Members' wishing to participate. All contributions have added something to our understanding of the challenge that Africa faces.

We know that half those living in sub-Saharan Africa live on less than a dollar a day and that one in five have their lives blighted by conflict. Conflict is the scar on the back of the continent. We know that 25 million people live with AIDS, a disaster for Africa. My hon. Friend the Member for Wythenshawe and Sale, East (Paul Goggins) was absolutely right about that. It is a disaster not least because, in some countries, it is causing the wiping out of almost all that was gained in life expectancy during the past generation.

Economically, Africa is the only continent that has gone backwards. Its share of world trade has halved in the past generation. Some 40 per cent. of the savings generated within the continent of Africa leave it every year, and it is not the case that Africa has been over-exploited by trade and foreign investment. The truth is that it has had too little of either. The hon. Member for Eddisbury (Mr. O'Brien) rightly and forcefully made that point.

As if all that was not enough, there is also corruption, poor governance and unfinished, or in many cases unstarted, reform. The hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan), reflecting on the recent visit to Nigeria, spoke with enormous passion about the sheer scale of corruption. I can add to what he said only by pointing out that during the period of General Abacha's regime, the international community put $1.1 billion of aid into Nigeria, while he and his family looted $6 billion from that country.

I think that we are all agreed that Africa is, quite simply, the greatest regeneration challenge that we currently face in the world. It is all too easy to be transfixed by the headlights of the statistics on the state of Africa. I am glad that several hon. Members have referred as well to the beacons of hope in the continent, including the progress made on reducing poverty in Uganda. We could also mention the growth rates in Botswana and Mozambique, which offer us hope. The New Partnership for Africa's Development offers us a chance to build on those successes for the future.

The most important things about NEPAD, an initiative made in Africa for Africa, are: first, as hon. Members have said, that it represents a commitment to solve the continent's problems; secondly, that it recognises the need to take a regional approach to poverty reduction and greater equality; and thirdly, that it is an approach that works with the international community in forming what is, in essence, a deal. The hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) was absolutely right in saying that it is a deal with obligations on both sides. The deal is that Africa will seek to resolve its problems, particularly in areas of conflict and governance, and in return the international community will respond with support for NEPAD's priorities, with increased resources that are better targeted and with trade reform.

NEPAD is a long-term initiative. I understand completely the impatience that several hon. Members expressed in their contributions and their concerns that early tests may indicate a cause for pessimism. However, if we are to respond to the challenges that Africa faces we cannot afford pessimism. We must put it to one side, renew our optimism—even in the face of adversity—and recognise that we will have to give the partnership time to fulfil its potential.

The UK's development aid to Africa is rising; it has nearly doubled since 1997. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is in Monterrey at the G8 conference on financing for development, which is a real test of the world's response to poverty alleviation in general, as my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) said. Aware that aid to Africa has actually declined in recent years, we have worked hard to encourage other donors to increase the aid that they give.

We have seen some progress. Under pressure of the advent of the Monterrey conference, the EU recently agreed to raise its average overseas development assistance gross national income figure from the current 0.32 per cent. to 0.39 per cent. by 2006, which represents an increase of about $7 billion a year. The United States has announced an increase in its aid budget of $5 billion during the next three years although, as my hon. Friend and others pointed out, that is still a very small share of its national wealth.

On debt relief, I assure my hon. Friend the Member for South Swindon (Ms Drown) that it is delivering progress: 25 countries have benefited—Ghana is the latest—from $50 billion worth of debt relief. The biggest single obstacle to the remaining countries in Africa accessing the relief for highly indebted poor countries is conflict.

I reassure my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz) about the timetable. The G8 plan for Africa will be launched at the summit in June and will be followed by the African Union summit in July. Much effort is being made to ensure that the two processes work in parallel, because each must support the other.

Money is part of what is needed, but it is not everything. We must try to build peace in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan and Angola. The news from Angola over the weekend gives some cause for hope. We must open up trade opportunities, as the hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) said, particularly by giving the African countries access to G8 markets.

Governance has dominated the debate, and the issue of Zimbabwe has been raised. All of us are deeply worried by what has occurred but, in truth, the outcome is unlikely to reverse the desperate economic and social decline in that country, which is greatly affecting the poor. However, I share the view of those who have said that, although Zimbabwe is an important test for Africa, it is not the sole test against which we should judge the success of the New Partnership for Africa's Development, because the issue of governance will remain important.

Several issues have been raised. On patronage, the hon. Member for Banbury was absolutely right about the culture that exists in some countries. However, let us be honest: it was part of our culture not all that many years ago, and we should try to remember how we moved to where we are today. The hon. Gentleman spoke forcefully about the need to support elected representatives in making the transition from one way of doing business to another.

The hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins) mentioned tax. I can only say "hear, hear" to his suggestion that the well-off should pay more tax. His comments were a particularly pleasant feature of the debate.

I am not sure that I would go as far as agreeing with the suggestion about bidding that was made by my hon. Friend the Member for City of York. However, we should take account of those who are committed to reform in deciding where to put our money and our priorities.

I heartily endorse the passionate comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, West about regeneration. If we want to regenerate successfully—be it in an inner-city ward, a country or a continent—ownership must come from the bottom up. We need a long-term commitment. NEPAD represents a commitment on the part of Africa, but we need action rather than words.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Dunkeswell Airfield

12.30 pm

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): High up in the Blackdown hills, an area of outstanding natural beauty in my constituency, Dunkeswell airfield, which was built during the second world war, is still used today by light aircraft. It has a small museum that is funded and supported by local people. I pay tribute to the museum chairman, Mr. Claude Caple, and many local residents for their tireless support. For the past few years, the museum trust has been trying to acquire some of the remaining buildings on the site, so that the museum can be extended to include the important buildings that are part of its history.

The anti-submarine operations centre at Dunkeswell played a pivotal role in the second world war during one of the momentous events in European history. It was the only United States navy administration base and anti-submarine bomber command centre in the United Kingdom. It kept open the vital sea lanes to England, protecting the convoys from attack by Hitler's U-boats during the dark days of the war. Today, the historic operations centre is testimony to the valour of the airmen of the US navy fleet air wing 7 who were stationed at the former Royal Air Force airfield, which became known as Air Facility Dunkeswell, US Atlantic fleet. Those airmen flew 6,424 hazardous bomber missions, day and night, far out into the Atlantic ocean, between September 1942 and June 1945.

In recent years, there has been concern about the future of the buildings, particularly the operations block. I have sought the support of Defence Ministers, who have been very helpful. However, we seem to be at an impasse. Genuine concern is felt in my constituency that Defence Estates is running out of patience. It needs to dispose of land assets. It is waiting for English Heritage to decide whether to list some of the buildings on the site and has said that some of them may not be safe on the grounds of health and safety. My worry is that the bulldozers will roll in and deprive the museum of its opportunity to create a permanent visitor centre, which will be of historical and educational benefit to United Kingdom citizens, as well as a fitting tribute to the many United States veterans and their relatives who visit or contact the museum each year.

I wish to outline some of the key points in my correspondence with Ministers at the Ministry of Defence and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport in recent years. In 1996, a report by Paul Francis, entitled "The Blackdown Hills Airfield Survey", was produced for Devon county council and East Devon district council, which commended the retention of, among others, the operations block. The report is substantive and its high quality is still relevant today. In February 1998, the museum's trustees alerted me to the possible threat to the buildings on the site. I telephoned the Ministry of Defence and was informed that the buildings were considered unsafe under health and safety rules. I raised with Ministers the request on behalf of the museum's trustees to pass the title of the buildings to the museum trust, a registered charity. The then Under-Secretary of State for Defence, now the Minister for Transport, sent me a helpful letter dated 18 March 1998 inviting me to outline the museum's concerns.

[Mrs. Angela Browning]

At the request of the MOD, the museum set about producing a feasibility study on how the buildings would be used as part of the museum site. The Minister agreed to a site meeting with officials from both the Ministry of Defence and English Heritage.

The meeting, which I attended, was held on 6 July 1998 and it was very positive. The principal conservation architect for Defence Estates explained that a national military aviation thematic study was being carried out, and, at the time, I understood that about 150 sites would be considered for preservation as part of the study. That was part of English Heritage's monuments protection programme and it was scheduled for completion by the end of 1998.

Following the site meeting, Mr. Lake of English Heritage, who had not seen the buildings before, wrote:

"Personally I thought the site meeting was a positive and useful event, and I was very impressed by the determined enthusiasm of the Museums members. On behalf of the MoD, I remain available to provide assistance as required."

By 14 December 1998, a representative of Defence Estates had written to the museum saying:

"I can confirm that the Royal Marines would be willing to sell the WW2 Command Centre (Ops Bldg) to your Museum. However, in order to achieve such a sale which would be on a private treaty basis, it would be necessary to obtain our Headquarters and Ministerial approval to a private treaty purchaser without offering the site for sale on the open market. Should our Headquarters and Ministerial approval be given to a sale, it would be necessary for us to make a joint submission to the District Valuer to assess the value (if any). I am unable to pre-empt a Ministers decision in this case and therefore could not give you an unequivocal letter of intent as indicated. However, I would be prepared to take the case up to Ministers if you could provide me with a detailed case for purchase. Such a case should include details about the Museum and its objectives together with its future plans and reasons for wishing to purchase the Ops Buildings at Dunkeswell. It would also be useful to include a letter of support from your local MP and Council Authorities supporting your purchase. I believe we should restrict our action to the Ops building at this stage."

I confirm that the museum had not only my support, but that of Devon county council, East Devon district council, the Blackdown hills joint advisory committee, Dunkeswell parish council and, of course, the many veterans who are in contact with the museum. Over 500 of them are alive today and receive regularly the FAW7 newsletter.

By 7 January 1999, Tony Whitehead, the principal conservation architect, had written to the museum saying:

"I have been enormously impressed by the dedication of the members of the Museum Project supported by the local community in developing an active memorial for the actions of the US Navy's anti-submarine Bomber Command. Finding sympathetic new uses for historical buildings remains one of the most important challenges facing Government Departments such as the Ministry of Defence. We are therefore very grateful for the initiative shown by organizations such as yourselves in championing imaginative projects which in addition will afford social end educational benefits derived from historically significant sites.

The timing of your initiative is particularly notable, in that it coincides with the English Heritage Aviation Thematic Study. Whilst there are many surviving buildings from WW2, their future can only be sustained through the enthusiasm and commitment of organizations such as yourselves. Without local backing, prevailing but often fragile WW2 sites will inevitably decline and disappear. Commitment such as yours acts as an insurance policy to ensure future generations do not forget the sacrifices made at a crucial part in the nation's history.

You have important challenges ahead, and in my capacity as MoD's building conservation specialist, I remain available to assist in seeing this project through to fruition."

On 12 January 1999, Jeremy Lake of English Heritage wrote:

"Thank you for your letter . . . Our thematic survey of military aviation sites and structures has drawn our attention to the special significance of this site."

He continued:

"Our work is largely focused on a very small number of the best preserved sites, but association with the three principal air battles of the second World War (the Battle of Britain, the Battle of the Atlantic and, to a lesser extent, Strategic Bomber Offensive), is enabling us to identify substantially complete examples of key building types on the most historically significant sites. Dunkeswell is one of this very small number, due to its unique role as the only US Navy airfield in the United Kingdom and close association with the crucial battle of the Atlantic. I am, therefore writing to confirm our support based on an extensive programme of documentary research and fieldwork, for the historical importance of this site."

On 15 February 1999, the museum alerted me to the fact that the marines from Lympstone, who had operational access to the site, were inspecting it for future demolition. Again, a different Minister was in charge at the time—I was on to my second Ministry of Defence Minister about the matter. Late one Saturday night, a telephone call to the duty officer, who was based in Belfast at the time, prevented the demolition and the museum set up an appeal fund to acquire the buildings. Admiral William Crowe, the former US ambassador who had attended the site meeting with us, became the patron.

On 11 June 1999, the Minister wrote to me saying:

"The Royal Marines, having now completed an internal review of their training requirements at Dunkeswell, have concluded . . . the site is potentially surplus to their requirements. This clearly has an impact on the future operation of Dunkeswell".

So, from what had started in hope, especially following that useful, important and constructive site meeting, things were again going wrong and there were constant worries that the buildings were somehow going to be removed. The need to list the buildings and the thematic review seemed to slip down the timetable. I realise that a different Goyernment Department is now dealing with the issue, but one would hope that different Departments talk to each other. As I wrote to MOD Ministers, I automatically copied my correspondence to the DCMS. It wrote and told me that the thematic review would not end until the end of 2001 when the listing would be considered.

In the meantime, Defence Estates in Plymouth pressed the case that it wished to dispose of the site. The reply that I received from DCMS on 17 September 2001 was not terribly helpful. At one stage, Baroness Blackstone, the Minister, explained that she could not understand why the museum trust could not start an appeal for new money to buy the buildings. Obviously, it is difficult to raise public funds without a commitment that the buildings can be bought. There is a lot of interest in supporting an appeal, especially in the US, but there must be some recognition that the trust would be able to acquire the buildings in the first place.

I have seen a letter dated 10 February 2002 to the DCMS from Defence Estates, south-west region, that concludes, among other things, that

"English Heritage have already acknowledged the difficulties for the MOD and a conclusion to the Dunkeswell Management strategy is now imperative. I would refer to Tony Whitehead's letter to Eleanor Hodge dated 3rd September 2001. To that end, I will be discussing a timetable for the partial demolition with the Service Authority to coincide with the existing planned works for the remainder of the airfield."

I understand that partial demolition means taking the buildings down to a height of 3 ft.

"I will advise that no action be taken prior to 1st April to afford interested parties a further opportunity to photograph, survey and record the buildings".

That sounds to me, as it does to the people in Dunkeswell, as though a photographic record of what was there is suggested. However, there is a clear indication that unless matters are quickly resolved, there is a deadline of 1 April, only a fortnight away, when action and authorisation may be taken for the buildings to disappear altogether.

As the Minister will be aware, the site and the museum epitomise all that was best about those who served there more than half a century ago. Today, people in the local community of Dunkeswell, many of whom never met those brave young men, have given of their efforts to ensure that Dunkeswell is remembered. All too often in political life, bureaucracy, delay and poor communications between Departments mean that things fall through the net. With the 1 April deadline just round the corner, I ask the Minister to use this opportunity to ensure that good progress can be made. If there is a political will, that can be achieved. As the newsletter of the veterans states:

"Many returned home, Some stayed forever, None shall be forgotten."

12.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): First, I congratulate the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) on securing the debate. For reasons that I shall explain later, I welcome the chance to talk on the subject. There is no doubt that Dunkeswell airfield is an important part of our heritage from the second world war and the defence of the Atlantic seaways. One of my great regrets about my job is that although I am responsible for defence estates, I do not get the chance to visit as many sites as I would like to.

Mrs. Browning: I cannot resist. I must offer the Minister a personal invitation to come and see Dunkeswell airfield for himself. A visit to the airfield is a lovely day out.

Dr. Moonie: I had a feeling that I was leading with my chin on that one. I hesitate to say that I will come in the very near future, but I promise the hon. Lady that, given the opportunity, I shall attempt to visit the airfield and see it for myself.

The hon. Lady raised concerns about proposed work that is to be carried out at Dunkeswell airfield. We have exchanged correspondence on the subject in the past; indeed, as she recognises in her speech, she has exchanged extensive correspondence with quite a few defence Ministers and others on this matter. I hope that my remarks will serve to reassure her that it remains the case that nothing will be done on the airfield without continued, close and careful liaison with all the interested parties.

We in the Ministry of Defence take our responsibilities for historic and heritage properties seriously. My Department has responsibility for more such sites than any other Department. We have in excess of 650 statutorily protected historic buildings on our estate. That number includes both listed buildings and scheduled monuments. We strive to maintain those to the highest standards that we can, and to build on Government-wide good practice. The "2001 Annual Report on Historic Buildings" published late last year illustrates that commitment. To that end, we maintain close contact with English Heritage and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.

When buildings are retained, we try to devise ways of using them that are both sympathetic and practical. If there are no other practical options and we have to dispose of buildings, we work closely with public and voluntary organisations to try to ensure that their future is secure. I have spoken of the strong partnership and liaison that exists between my Department and others and the statutory bodies concerned. When we can, we go further than that, and take into account as far as possible the interests of more general stakeholders. I fully recognise how much an airfield like Dunkeswell means to a wide range of people who live locally or have served on the base.

As the hon. Lady said, the airfield, near Honiton, was constructed during the last war, and was used as a base from which coastal-command aircraft could counter the submarine threat. In 1943 it was transferred to the United States air force and then to the US navy fleet air wing before flying operations ceased in 1946, although we used it as a satellite for RAF Merryfield until 1955. Most of the airfield, including the majority of its runways, was sold in the 1980s. Private aircraft operate from a section of the old runway and several industrial units have been constructed on what was the technical site. The retained area, known as the Dunkeswell airfield training area, is now surplus to requirements, and is being prepared for disposal. The Dunkeswell Memorial museum resides in a temporary building at the entrance to the airfield, and I understand the concerns of the museum's chairman, Mr. Claude Caple, for the future of the site, and his wish to preserve as much as possible of the historical environment. Indeed, the hon. Lady will be pleased to know that I am supportive of the museum's aspiration to acquire some of the buildings.

The site also forms part of the military aviation thematic study by English Heritage, which commenced several years ago. We await a decision from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport on two groups of buildings that were proposed for listing—the control tower complex and the operations block.

Defence Estates has formally expressed concern about the operations block, and its potential for sustained use in the future. I can tell the hon. Lady that the Dunkeswell case was discussed by Defence Estates—the Ministry of Defence agency that is responsible for the defence estate—and English Heritage at a liaison meeting as recently as 12 March. I also understand that officials of the Department for Culture, Media and

[Dr. Moonie]

Sport are currently considering whether a listing decision is required on the control tower complex and the operations block in advance of the final report of English Heritage on the military aviation thematic study.

I understand that the Dunkeswell buildings are being considered as part of a nationwide review of similar sites, and I accept the difficulties that that poses for determining a particular case in advance of the main review, unless there is an immediate threat to the buildings.

Mrs. Browning: I understand that when this review started there was consideration of 150 airfields, and that that has been reduced to 100 as a result not of what is on the airfields, but of the necessity to dispose of more of them.

Is it true that there is pressure from the Treasury? I do not suppose that the Minister will give me a clear answer to that, but if he were to wink or nod, that would be good enough for me. Have they reduced the number from 150 to 100, and if that is the case, does that put a question mark against Dunkeswell? When we talked about it three years ago, we were not so concerned that it might be at risk.

Dr. Moonie: I am happy to say that I have no great wish that the Ministry of Defence should retain ownership of land for which we have no need. It is up to English Heritage to recognise which of the historic sites associated with the second world war are worth preserving. I do not think that there should, a priori, be an assumption that because something is of historical interest it should be preserved for all time, but a full and representative sample of those sites should be preserved, and, from what I know of the Dunkeswell site, it would appear to fit that category. That is a personal view.

Such sites are being considered as part of the nationwide survey, and as the hon. Lady knows, national surveys can take an inordinately long time to deal properly with matters. That is not meant to imply any criticism of colleagues in other Departments. It is simply the case that such surveys take a long time to resolve matters, and that is why I am happy that the Dunkeswell case is being looked at as a matter of urgency.

I turn to recent communications from Defence Estates about our intentions with regard to the site. I can assure the hon. Lady that we have no intention of demolishing the control tower. What is proposed is that certain dangerous structures associated with the operations block should be removed to permit explosive ordnance clearance to be carried out. At the moment, health and safety concerns prevent the relevant experts from entering the block to carry out that work, which is essential if we are to be able to dispose of the site. Ironically, because we cannot give an assurance that the block is clear of explosive ordnance, even contractors employed to make the block safe would have to work from the outside. That clearly indicates the problem that we have.

Mrs. Browning: I am particularly pleased to hear that the control tower is safe, because I said that I would chain myself to it if I did not get a satisfactory answer, as the Minister knows. I understand that a certificate is needed for explosive ordnance clearance in the operations block and that other health and safety matters must be tackled. When those issues are dealt with, however, will it be necessary to demolish just one wall or will the whole building be razed to just 3ft above the ground, which is virtually the same as demolishing it?

Dr. Moonie: If I can proceed, I believe that I shall refer to that. If I do not, I shall certainly give the hon. Lady a detailed response later.

We are sensitive to the issues involved and have refrained from taking action until the views of all stakeholders have been taken into account. That does not, of course, mean that action is not urgently required. My officials have made representations to DCMS, highlighting the precarious state of the operations block and the fact that an early decision is required on whether it is to be listed. The museum has been kept fully informed about that correspondence and about developments that might affect its interests.

None of the parties involved has objected to our proposals to date, but despite the passage of time, we are still not in a position to move forward. For that reason—and because we are conscious of our health and safety responsibilities, which cannot be taken any less lightly than our responsibility for preserving heritage—my officials proposed a reasonable time scale within which they believed action needed to be taken. They gave 1 April as the date on which we would commence contractual procedures to effect vital health and safety work.

Health and safety considerations and our duty of care to members of the public who visit the airfield mean that we must consider the future of several other buildings and structures, which are not included in the thematic study. The hon. Lady will appreciate that those were put up in haste during the second world war and that their construction is very basic. Those temporary structures were intended for the duration of the conflict and have, consequently, declined to a very poor state of repair; indeed, some of them can be described only as dangerous.

I regret any undue alarm to which our proposals may have given rise, but I cannot apologise for seeking to resolve a difficult issue. Doing nothing is not an option that we can sustain for much longer. We could put up fences around the dangerous structures, but our experience elsewhere shows that they cannot be guaranteed to keep out the inquisitive. Sadly, such an approach would not discharge my Department's heath and safety responsibilities or significantly reduce the risk to the public, including trespassers. Nevertheless, I assure the hon. Lady that it was never our intention to take unilateral action on the commencement of demolition. I am therefore happy to confirm that no action will be taken until all interested parties, including the hon. Lady, have had the opportunity to attend an on-site briefing, at which my officials will explain the proposals and demonstrate why they are necessary.

I recognise that it is not easy to strike a balance between heritage and health and safety, but if my Department is to act responsibly, it must consider how

such a balance is to be struck. Were an accident to happen, it would hardly be excusable to say we were waiting for guidance. Equally, we cannot sell or transfer the site and its heritage buildings to another owner until the essential explosive ordnance checks have been carried out, which cannot be done while the current risks exist. We are in contact with DCMS and English Heritage on those important issues, and I hope that we can move rapidly to resolve the issues that affect Dunkeswell.

As the hon. Lady confirmed in her speech my Department has striven over the past three or four years to meet the various demands that have been put on it as regards Dunkeswell. We have involved all the key Departments, bodies and parties that have an interest, we have taken active steps to keep the museum aware of how matters were developing and we have tried to be sympathetic to all the aspirations that have been expressed. We have, however, also had to recognise and meet our obligations as regards health and safety and explosive ordnance clearance. That said, I give an assurance that we will take no action on demolition until I am satisfied that it is the correct approach. It is, however, essential that action is taken soon, because the present position cannot be maintained indefinitely, and the risks mount with each passing day.

I will take a personal interest in the issue, and I shall be happy to speak to the hon. Lady again if she wants to raise concerns with me. I welcome this debate and very much hope that it will be the catalyst that allows us to make speedy progress at Dunkeswell.

Asbestos (Scotland)

1 pm

John Robertson (Glasgow, Anniesland): Let me say at the beginning of my speech how helpful my hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Tony Worthington) has been. I commend him for all the work that he has done on the issue.

A year after Chester Street Insurance Holdings collapsed we appear to be no closer to meeting the needs of those who were affected—and that includes people who do not yet know that they have been affected. At business questions on 7 March I asked my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House whether he knew that companies that had agreed to pay compensation to asbestos-related disease sufferers, and to future sufferers, were now reneging on the deal. My right hon. Friend replied:

"I am sure that my hon. Friend will continue to pursue the matter and make full use of the facilities of the House to do so." — [*Official Report*, 7 March 2002; Vol. 381, c. 433.]

That I have done, in part, by securing this debate. I intend to do whatever else I can to ensure that people suffering because of asbestos will receive the money to which they are entitled.

Asbestos dust is responsible for more work-related deaths than any other cause. Doctors have warned that the number of deaths has not yet reached its peak. Use of asbestos has been widespread since the mid-19th century. As a result, victims are not confined to one industry but are spread through many industries, including and particularly shipbuilding, construction and energy. Asbestos-related disease creates a chronic respiratory problem for sufferers, resulting in impaired mobility, and the dust can also cause mesothelioma, a cancer for which there is no cure.

It is known that 90 per cent. of mesothelioma cases in the United Kingdom—some 1,500 a year—follow asbestos exposure. Years can pass before the effects on those exposed to asbestos become apparent. Because of that latent period, cases of asbestos-related disease will continue to rise. Furthermore, although the delay between first exposure to asbestos and the development of the cancer is likely to be 10 or 15 years, the cancer is usually fatal within two years.

Because of that it is vital that claims for compensation are settled speedily and in a straightforward manner. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, the Member for Southampton, Test (Dr. Whitehead), said in a debate in this Chamber on 16 January:

"There is a need to ensure that compensation, where it is required, is delivered speedily and effectively to those who have contracted those awful diseases as a result of their work, or . . . as a result simply of being in a certain neighbourhood where an industrial process is taking place."

In other words, delays to claims for compensation are not acceptable if time is of the essence.

People are now doubly victims. They are exposed to asbestos by their employer and then let down by the failure of insurance companies to compensate them. Thousands of people who worked at Upper Clyde Shipbuilders, John Brown in Clydebank or Fairfields had taken out policies, together worth up to £400 million, with Chester Street Insurance Holdings.

[John Robertson]

When Chester Street became insolvent and Iron Trades was sold off, hundreds of pre-1972 cases were left in limbo. A scheme was worked out with the insurance industry covering the pre-1972 cases left by the collapse of Chester Street. However, solicitors representing my constituents who are seeking compensation tell me that people who suffered as a result of the Chester Street collapse have not received a penny from the scheme.

The debacle raises several questions. I am concerned because the Financial Services Authority approved the Chester Street restructuring when it was quite clear that the company was heading for collapse. The FSA interpreted its duty as protecting the company and its shareholders, not the ultimate victims. How many times have we heard that in the last 20 years?

Cases such as Chester Street and Turner and Newell have highlighted what happens when things go wrong. Sufferers of asbestos-related disease endured a major blow in the Court of Appeal on 11 December 2001 as a result of the Fairchild case. The Court of Appeal stated that if two defendants had exposed a claimant to asbestos equally, the "guilty" fibres could not be identified, so both defendants escaped liability. As my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) said in an earlier debate on the issue, that is like saying that if two people shoot someone and we cannot tell which bullet the victim died from, both those people are innocent of murder.

Shipyard and building workers often work for a number of employers. Under that ruling, it is impossible to prove the source of the disease. As a result, such people have nowhere to go under current legislation. They stand no chance of receiving compensation unless a national compensation scheme is put together by national Government. What has happened to natural justice? Will the Secretary of State put pressure on her colleagues to introduce such a scheme?

The Court of Appeal's decision effectively overturned the principle that the courts have applied in such cases for many years. Previously, and in my opinion correctly, defendants were joined and liability was apportioned according to the time for which the person had worked with each employer. In the previous debate that I have already mentioned, my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions also said:

"The Court of Appeal commented that for the claimants not to receive compensation was a major injustice—it said that its own judgment was a major injustice—and that it was one that should be remedied by express statutory provision or by an agreed insurance industry compensation scheme." —[*Official Report, Westminster Hall*, 16 January 2002; Vol. 378, c. 87-88WH.]

Sadly, I feel the former will have to be the case.

I have seen no evidence of insurance companies hurrying to pay people compensation for catching any asbestos-related disease.

The move to ensure that one employer does not suffer unduly because of the negligence of another means that the victims have no protection; thus thousands of victims of fatal disease have been deprived of compensation. It is crucial that the Government introduce a national policy of compensation for asbestos workers. Again, I ask the Secretary of State to ensure that this happens.

It is time that someone in Government stood up for the victims, not the perpetrators of the crime—the companies and those who work so hard at not paying up. The ruling has left those seeking compensation in limbo; some lawyers in the insurance industry are working not to seek justice for the defendants but to find a route around the industry's liabilities and responsibilities towards its asbestos victims. I understand that the House of Lords is to hear an appeal in two cases relating to Fairchild on 22 and 23 April. I shall be interested to see the outcome; I hope that sanity will prevail and that the decision will be overturned.

I should also like to raise the issue of British Shipbuilders, which is very important to my constituents. British Shipbuilders is a public corporation, and it has concluded that it should not accept liability from other limited companies. I appreciate that the DTI does not intervene in legal cases, but we must ask whether the Department should hold an inquiry—or would that slow things down even further? I wonder whether that is what the insurance companies want; it fits their modus operandi.

The Government's pneumoconiosis scheme provides for the payment of compensation to sufferers of certain dust-related diseases who are unable to obtain redress in the courts because their employer has gone out of business so there is no one at whom they can direct a legal action.

I understand that in the light of the Fairchild case, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions has announced that the Government's compensation scheme will apply to Scotland. That is helpful, but the Fairchild judgment has manifold implications for that scheme. Is it right that as a first step, action should be taken against former employers of people who have contracted one of those diseases, and only when it is not possible to establish whether the employer is liable, or if a liable employer cannot be found, will the pneumoconiosis scheme take over? During that time, of course, the asbestos sufferer is dying.

I agree that the Government scheme should not allow companies to walk away from their liabilities, but in that limbo stage, what else can we do for the victims?

Mr. James Wray (Glasgow, Baillieston): Does my hon. Friend agree with me that one of the bugbears for the 1997 Labour Government concerning compensation was the small payment of £2,500, which did not carry the clawback tag? When we abolished that small payment, we gave those who suffered from pleural plaque, mesothelioma and asbestosis the opportunity to claim much larger sums.

John Robertson: I thank my hon. Friend for that information. He is much more experienced and knowledgeable in such matters than I am. Those small payments must have helped at the time, but they do not help people today, and it is those people whom we need to consider.

Insurance is about taking risks, and making payments when things go wrong. Some companies have already gone into liquidation, but others are using such tactics as going into voluntary liquidation in order to avoid

their liabilities. Turner and Newall and Federal-Mogul took that route to escape their responsibilities. The Government must consider what needs to be done to deal with that problem. We do not want the insurance industry to be able to abandon its responsibilities and leave them with the taxpayer. When considering compensation, we must remember that lump sums and periodic payments should be the equivalent of the compensation payments that courts award in negligence cases.

Almost 1,000 claims were made during the last complete year of the scheme, whereas fewer than 10,000 payments were made during the 20 years from 1980. Clearly, those payments are increasing annually. Considering the rise in the number of cases and in the number of claims for compensation, that could cost the Treasury tens of millions of pounds. The amount of money, however, is small compared with human life.

I end by asking a few more questions of the Secretary of State—questions that are of prime concern to my constituents and to those of the other hon. Members here today, and possibly throughout the country. What is being done in Scotland to allay fears that the Scottish courts may deal less favourably with asbestos sufferers? What action is being taken to safeguard the interests of asbestos suffers, who have seen Turner and Newall go into administration? We should collate a "name and shame" list, which would at least let the people know whom to trust when doing business with insurance companies. Why should the people of Scotland—or even the people of Britain—keep them in business? Honour would appear to matter only when money is not involved—but asbestos sufferers are not interested in honour, only in justice.

1.14 pm

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mrs. Helen Liddell): I begin by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Anniesland (John Robertson) on securing this debate. It raises a number of issues of considerable concern to people in the west of Scotland. I too associate myself with his remarks about my hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Tony Worthington), who led the campaign to get justice for the victims of asbestos.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Anniesland, I feel a deep sense of grievance about the events surrounding Chester Street Insurance Holdings Ltd. Chester Street, formerly known as Iron Trades Holdings Ltd., had significant exposure to employers' liability insurance, and almost all the shipbuilding firms that had used asbestos were insured through Chester Street. The circumstances surrounding the company's failure are interesting, in that two companies were formed, one with the assets and another with the liabilities. Guess which one was left with responsibility for the victims of asbestosis? When Chester Street failed, former employees were faced with a defunct manufacturing company and a defunct insurance company.

There was particular uncertainty for people employed before 1972. Employers' liability insurance became compulsory in Great Britain only from that year, and it was initially unclear whether any pre-1972 claims against Chester Street would be met. After careful examination of the company's assets and liabilities, the Chester Street administrators set the initial dividend for creditors at 5 per cent.—5p in the pound.

As an MP for the west of Scotland, I have received representations from several asbestos victims. Like many of those who had to challenge the insurance industry, they found that they had no voice. I am delighted that so many of my hon. Friends have taken it upon themselves to act as the voice of those innocent victims. I have some form in dealing with the insurance industry, as I dealt with issues relating to personal pensions mis-selling when the Government were elected in 1997, and the situation grieves me because I regard the insurance industry as a major contributor to the financial services industry, and such behaviour by rogue companies gives the whole industry a bad name.

I take this opportunity to pay tribute to the Association of British Insurers, to leaders in the insurance industry and to my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Treasury who, when the Chester Street situation became apparent, immediately took action with a view to securing some means of compensation for the victims. I am speaking to members of the Chartered Insurance Institute this evening and I shall reiterate those points in my speech.

I was absolutely delighted when I heard that we had arranged a compensation deal for victims. I know some of the victims, and some of the widows of victims, who are dealing with difficult financial circumstances, and it was a source of great irritation to me to discover that payments were not being made in a timeous manner. I know that there are complications in ensuring that payment will be made to the victims. The Government have responsibilities through their involvement with British Shipbuilders, and we are meeting our liabilities towards former public sector employees, but where a private sector company still exists, it is expected to meet its liabilities. Where the company no longer exists, the ABI and the financial services compensation scheme will meet those liabilities at 100 per cent. in respect of post-1972 employment, and at 90 per cent. for earlier periods.

John Robertson: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the time taken by the ABI to get the money to the people who need it is now bordering on the extreme? The victims need the money now. Unfortunately, next year will be too late for some of them.

Mrs. Liddell: I could not agree more. My hon. Friend has just made what is probably the most important point of all. Indeed, the High Court has already approved the scheme, and I can see no reason why there should not be progress in making payments. I accept that the administrator has a legal obligation to be fair to all the creditors, but I feel that one of the best ways of doing that is to get the payments made as rapidly as possible.

Annabelle Ewing (Perth): Will the Secretary of State give way on that point?

Mrs. Liddell: This is my hon. Friend's debate, and I am duty bound to reply to his points. If I have time near the end, I shall take the hon. Lady's intervention then.

[Mrs. Liddell]

The administrator has said that he is doing his best to keep fees and expenses to a minimum. I accept that, but we shall not see much progress until we see the actual cheques in the post to people.

I have received representations about delays in making payments through the Chester Street arrangements. I met my hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie, Frank Maguire of Thompsons solicitors, Phyllis Craig of Clydeside Action on Asbestos and Tommy Gorman of Clydebank Asbestos Group to discuss that and related matters. Following that meeting, I was so appalled at the stories that I had been told that I invited to Dover house various organisations involved in dealing with the claims, including Iron Trades Management Services, the service company that deals with the validation of claims and with settlement documents. It works for the Chester Street administrators PricewaterhouseCoopers. Other groups involved are the Association of British Insurers and the financial services compensation scheme.

The first point made was about the complexity of the process. I accept that it is a complex process. I have some experience of complex processes, having just had to deal with coal-related health compensation, with something like 200,000 claimants; the Government are currently paying out £1,000 a minute in compensation. I am receptive to points made about complexity, but not to people who try to hide behind the complexity of the process. The bottom line is very straightforward, and human beings are suffering from terrible diseases as a result of their former employment. They are right to look for the quick payment of compensation, and I see no reason why there should be a delay at all.

I have been given assurances that everyone in the claims process, including lawyers, will ensure that their procedures are as efficient as possible. I make the point again that not only those administering the scheme but the lawyers handling the claims must make sure that they are on top of things, and moving as rapidly as possible.

John Robertson: My right hon. Friend has just hit the nail on the head: part of the problem is that there is no communication from those people. Lawyers are not communicating with the people who are suffering, and there is no communication from PricewaterhouseCoopers. They must talk together. The people at the sharp end are those who are left to come to my surgeries to ask me what is happening—and I have to arrange a debate on the subject. That should not happen.

Mrs. Liddell: I take my hon. Friend's point. At that meeting two weeks ago, I told those concerned that I wanted to see them in six weeks—that is, four weeks from now—for an explanation of the progress being made and the action that they had taken. I take on board the fact that we must have concrete information. I want to see progress in paying claims, but I also want hard statistics on the number of claims and the outstanding claims. Iron Trades, PricewaterhouseCoopers, ABI and the financial services compensation scheme have agreed to produce a newsletter about the claims process. I shall ensure that my office distributes that to hon. Members with an interest in asbestos issues, so that they can ensure that the victims are given the information they require, and also so that those Members are on hand to let me know as rapidly as possible where there are pitfalls in individual cases of which I have not been made aware.

John Robertson: I make the point again that my constituents, and those of other hon. Members, do not want to receive a newsletter. They want something personal. They do not want their personal cases in a newsletter; they want to know what is happening themselves. I accept what my right hon. Friend says, which will be useful for me as an MP, but sufferers have to get personal letters before they see their case in a newsletter.

Mrs. Liddell: I agree with my right hon. Friend. There must be no question of personal details appearing in a newsletter—but as a constituency MP, I know that it is often useful to have routes for getting answers on individual cases. Hon. Members found that, in coal health compensation, helplines and access to lawyers proved extremely useful for speeding things up in complex cases. We have a responsibility and a role, which we willingly accept, to batter down the doors of bureaucracy to ensure that our constituents get a rapid response.

I shall respond to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Anniesland on personalised information by asking for a helpline to be established so that hon. Members and claimants have ready access to information on the status of claims.

My hon. Friend asked a number of other specific questions, which I am happy to answer. There have been past worries about Scottish court procedures when dealing with asbestos claims. However, the Lord President of the Court of Session recently appointed Lord Mackay of Drumadoon to oversee asbestos-related cases in the court. That has resulted in expediting cases. It is a devolved matter, and Richard Simpson, the Deputy Minister for Justice in the Scottish Executive, keeps a close eye on it. I am sure that he would not be averse to receiving requests from hon. Members for information.

My hon. Friend also asked about Turner and Newall, which is a difficult case that causes great frustration to hon. Members. There was a meeting of the Turner and Newall creditors on 11 February at which the administrators approved a proposal to continue to manage the business, assets and affairs of the company, and to work towards the development of a reorganisation plan. It is expected that that will provide a mechanism for managing asbestos liabilities. Creditors' committees have been established, and the interests of people suffering from asbestos-related diseases are represented on them. Administrators are trying to establish the employers' liability insurance that Turner and Newall had. Once that is established, they will consider whether consent should be given to enable former employees to prove their claims against the company. I give my hon. Friend my personal guarantee to monitor such progress.

My hon. Friend also asked me to name and shame laggards. If that proves necessary, I will not hesitate to do so, but I hope that it does not come to that. I would

rather congratulate companies on rapid progress than make it plain, especially to those who are considering doing business with them, that they have been laggards in paying out much needed compensation.

The legacy of asbestos is serious and tragic for many individuals and families in Scotland. The Government, who are working with the Scottish Executive, are taking steps to tackle the problem, and I assure hon. Members that it is top of my priorities. He is right that the clock is ticking for many victims, and that some of them will not see compensation. We must continue to apply pressure to ensure that they receive fair and rapid compensation.

John Robertson: I should like to ask about the interim payments that are made to people—I mean substantial interim payments, not a few hundred pounds. Perhaps the Minister has some ballpark figures from the ABI. We need money from it right away. Surely that can be done.

Mrs. Liddell: I am not aware of procedures for interim payments, but I shall raise them with the ABI, the financial services compensation scheme and PricewaterhouseCoopers. That is a good idea, which should be seriously considered.

I take on board my hon. Friend's point about channels of communication. I shall ensure that a channel of communication exists between the Government and asbestos groups in Scotland, and ensure that it is fast and efficient. I shall do everything in my power to ensure that we do not forget about the people who are suffering from those diseases. The Government will act in a co-ordinated manner to keep the spotlight on all the parties involved so that just compensation is paid as quickly as possible.

11 September (UK Victims)

1.30 pm

Mr. David Amess (Southend, West): All of us remember clearly what we were doing last year when aeroplanes crashed into various buildings in the United States of America. I remember only too well: I was at home, listening to the radio. Our house was being redecorated and I was amateurishly helping. When I heard the breaking news, I first thought that it was some sort of stunt—it was so unreal. I went downstairs to turn on the television and witnessed what I thought at the time was a remake of a Hollywood movie, so incredible were the scenes. Little did I realise that the terrible events that took place would affect several of our constituents, particularly those of my hon. Friend the Member for Rayleigh (Mr. Francois).

As politicians, we know that it is possible to forget such events too quickly. The terrible attack last year was undoubtedly the result of failure in all sorts of areas. If the world were in a good state, the planes would not have crashed into those buildings in the United States. I hope that people in all countries will never forget the events of last year, but will continue to work towards recreating the world order so that such a thing can never, ever happen again. That will not be easy to achieve, but it is something that politicians in the UK Parliament should not forget.

It is easy to forget the loved ones of the victims. I had no idea how closely we in Essex were involved in the matter until I received a letter just a few weeks ago from Mrs. Berenice Gould, who is the mother of Mrs. Gilbey. Mrs. Gilbey, the constituent of my hon. Friend the Member for Rayleigh, contacted him some considerable time ago.

I am in total command of the correspondence in which my hon. Friend has been engaged and wish to pay tribute to his efforts. He has done a magnificent job in bringing the circumstances of the widowed Mrs. Gilbey to the attention of the American authorities and in trying to get the British Government to do all that they possibly can to help her. I make no criticism whatsoever of the British Government's role in supporting the victims.

My hon. Friend and I spoke to Mrs. Gilbey last night on the telephone for more than an hour, so we are in a position to give the House an accurate account of how she feels at present. It was moving to hear her two small children aged three and seven in the background as we spoke with her. In one sense, she is entirely on her own, because her husband has no relatives at all. However, the local community has given her wonderful support. Her own circumstances were not particularly well managed. A short time after the tragedy, she was told to leave by the American authorities. Not only was she told that, but she was given no financial support. Even now, she has been given no financial support by the firm, Euro Brokers, for which her husband worked. She advised me last night that the only money that she has received has been from the Red Cross and United Way. Each week, she reports to them along with the other widows, giving them her bills. It is humiliating. I am not sure that there is any easy way around the problem, but her circumstances are dire.

[Mr. David Amess]

Unless Mrs. Gilbey becomes an American citizen, her life policy on her husband will be taxed at 60 per cent. Not only that, but the compensation will be taxed at 60 per cent. She wants to become an American citizen; it is what she wants for her children and, indeed, it is what she believes her husband, Paul, would have wanted. She said last night that she had spent the past nine years in America building a home that she believed would be a future for her family. The memories of her husband are still very clear in her heart. Her children, Max and Mason, were born in the United States of America. It is the only way of life that they know. Mrs. Gilbey believes that her little family have suffered enough. They deserve the issue to be resolved quickly.

The gentleman, Paul, was a hero. He could have got out of the building. He did, but he was told by the security people that it was safe to return. He was working on the 84th floor. The second plane hit that floor. However, we have first-hand evidence from his secretary that, during the 10-minute interval, he went to the fast elevator on the 78th floor and, together with a colleague, organised that the men went down the stairs and the women and the disabled went in the elevator. As a result of helping American citizens out of the building, he lost his life.

We can all imagine how devastated Deena Gilbey was when she spoke to her husband on the mobile telephone from the building, when he had given the impression that all was well and that he was just about to see people out of the building. Mrs. Gilbey received another telephone call and heard a man's voice before the caller rang off. She thought that her husband was safe. In fact, the voice was not that of her husband, but of her husband's friend who had also been in the building. He was telephoning the home of the Gilbeys to find out if Mr. Gilbey was safe. I end with the plea from Mrs. Gilbey. She said:

"Paul's body has not been found and is unlikely to be. His grave site will always be the World Trade Centre. My children and I are experiencing a genuine longing to reach out and be close to Paul, even if the only way to do that is by visiting his grave site. I simply cannot imagine not living in the country where my husband and father of my children is buried.

I realize that nobody can give me back my husband or my children their father, but in offering me citizenship it will enable me to start to pick up the pieces of our lives."

Mrs. Gilbey also said that, for her sons to heal

"or even begin to heal, they need to be surrounded by the wonderful support system that's come out of this tragedy. People back in England keep asking, 'Why don't you just come home?' I've said I am home. I've been home for a very long time."

1.39 pm

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): I congratulate my parliamentary neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess), on securing this important debate. I express my thanks to him and the Minister for allowing me to contribute.

My involvement in the matter is that Deena and her late husband Paul come from Hockley, which is in my Essex constituency of Rayleigh. Although Deena Gilbey has lived in the United States for nine years, she is still a British citizen and therefore, in effect, I am her Member of Parliament. My hon. Friend has approached the case from the viewpoint of Deena's mother—his constituent—but I am approaching it on behalf of Deena Gilbey herself.

The case was first brought to my attention last autumn by people who live in Hockley, including June and Roy Mills, and also by press coverage, not least in the local *Evening Echo* newspaper. I wrote to Deena Gilbey in November last year to offer any assistance that I could and we have remained in contact since. I wrote to the Prime Minister last week about her case and, not unreasonably, I am still waiting for a reply.

As we have heard, Deena's husband Paul worked in the financial markets and was murdered by terrorists on 11 September. According to several eye witnesses, he had helped to evacuate people, many of whom were American citizens, from the stricken towers before he lost his life. He left behind his widow Deena and their two sons: Max, who is aged seven, and Mason who is turning four. Both sons were born in the United States and have American citizenship. Although their parents had applied for residency under the American green card system, their application had not been finalised when Paul Gilbey was murdered. Consequently, the United States' immigration authorities argue that because Deena's husband died before the application was finalised, Deena Gilbey will have to leave the United States, even though her US-born children would be permitted to remain. It is perverse that after all the support that the United Kingdom has rightly given to the United States in the war against terror, the US authorities should place Deena Gilbey in such an invidious position six months later.

The Patriot Act, which was passed in America in the aftermath of 11 September, relates to the case. It provides for a grace period of one year for people in Deena's situation—the period expires this September. It also provides for the facility to exercise discretion in special cases to allow people to remain beyond that period. However, as things stand, officials of the US Immigration and Naturalisation Service refuse to interpret the discretionary clause in Deena Gilbey's favour.

Deena Gilbey has nothing in writing from the INS—or anyone else—to assure her that she will be allowed to remain in the United States beyond September 2002. My hon. Friend and I personally double checked that with her by telephone last night. She told me that she had been given endless warm words but that no one would give her a definitive letter to guarantee her right to remain in the United States. Moreover, even if she were given a temporary extension under the Patriot Act, she fears that the INS could revoke that at a later date because the power is discretionary.

Deena is still living in Chatham, New Jersey, and Senator John Corzine, who is a Democrat from that state, has taken up her case. He is trying to resolve the issue on Deena's behalf once and for all. He plans to introduce what is, in effect, a private Member's Bill in the US Senate to allow Deena Gilbey to be naturalised as a US citizen and, thus, to remain in the United States indefinitely without relying on the whim of the INS. That would give the additional advantage of clarifying her personal financial and tax position, which would allow her to be taxed more advantageously as a US citizen along the same lines as the other US widows of the attack.

I have been in touch with Senator Corzine's office for some time about the draft Bill. If it is to stand a chance of becoming law under US procedures, it requires the initial sponsorship of 12 Senators. It currently has five sponsors—both Democrat and Republican—including Senator Corzine and Senator Hillary Clinton from New York. Deena has strong support from local residents in Chatham, including US families who lost relatives on 11 September. The mayor and the local chamber of commerce have written to US senators in support and 500 local schoolchildren have written to President Bush asking him to help.

Deena Gilbey has done nothing wrong. Her husband was a brave man, arguably a hero, who died trying to help others—mainly US citizens—to live. As a result, she is now a widow with two small children, caught in a bureaucratic trap that is not of her making. Her husband intended to raise their children in America as US citizens and she wants to carry out his wish.

The United Kingdom has stood shoulder to shoulder with the US in support of the war against terror. I therefore ask the Minister if anything can be done through diplomatic channels to support Deena Gilbey and, ideally, to back Senator Corzine's Bill to settle the matter once and for all. I reiterate my thanks to my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West for helping to raise this crucial issue and I look forward with great interest to the Minister's reply.

1.45 pm

The Minister of State, Department for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr. Richard Caborn): I congratulate the hon. Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess) on securing this debate and the hon. Member for Rayleigh (Mr. Francois) on his contribution. Both have a personal as well as constituency interest and they put their cases extremely forcefully. As both hon. Gentlemen know, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport was asked by the Prime Minister to oversee the co-ordination of appropriate support arrangements for the families of British victims of the terrible tragedy. She was keen to take part in this debate, but unfortunately had to fulfil a previous engagement outside London, so she asked me to respond on her behalf.

It is six months since the tragic events of 11 September that were so graphically illustrated, and we can all remember where we watched those appalling images unfold on the television—they were surreal. After the initial shock, when the numbness was beginning to wear off, we quickly moved into action, and the hon. Member for Southend, West congratulated the British Government on the action taken. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State went to the US and set up a network of support mechanisms for the families and victims. We took every possible step, which has now been recognised. Although we will never return those families to how they were before 11 September, most people acknowledge that the steps that we took were effective and provided some form of help.

On the question of Mrs. Gilbey's request for US citizenship, I have been in contact with the hon. Member for Southend, West because of the personal nature of the case and I understand that other hon. Members have also written to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and to the Prime Minister. All of the letters will receive a full reply and, in the best interests of hon. Members, copies will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Last night, the British consulate in New York spoke to the Immigration and Naturalisation Service, which offered this statement:

"Mrs Gilbey has been invited to file for permanent residence under the Patriot's Act. Filing a written application will result in the Immigration and Naturalisation Service (INS) offering a written decision either granting or not granting her application based on the facts and evidence she produces. This has long been the agency's policy, and this is the procedure provided for by the Patriot's Act. Policy guidelines explaining the application process were faxed to Mrs Gilbey's attorney on 8th March 2002. They have also been faxed to the British Consulate-General, New York, on the 18th March 2002. The INS look forward to assisting Mrs Gilbey once she has taken the pro-active steps provided for her by the Patriot's Act".

The British embassy in Washington has worked with the White House, the State Department and Congress to ensure that Mrs. Gilbey and other British family members whose immigration or resident status in the US may have been affected by the terrorist attack are treated fairly and sympathetically. The British ambassador in Washington raised that and other cases with the chairman of the US Senate Judiciary Committee on 9 October 2001. Following that, the US Congress passed, and President Bush signed, anti-terrorist legislation—the Patriot Act—which allows all British family members affected by 11 September to continue living and working in the US.

The US Immigration and Naturalisation Service has assured Mrs. Gilbey that she does not face deportation. The British consulate general office in New York, which is in close touch with the INS and Mrs. Gilbey, has confirmed that she has not been served with a deportation notice. However, as the statement makes clear, she has been invited to make an application for permanent residency under the Patriot Act. I understand that papers about that were forwarded to her attorney on 8 March 2002. Once she has submitted her application, it will be up to the INS to make its decision. The British consulate general continues to monitor the situation closely to ensure that she and others like her do not have to suffer any further.

We will take up the points made by the hon. Member for Southend, West with both the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and our representatives in New York. I cannot give answers to some of the points raised this afternoon, but I shall make sure that responses are made to hon. Members and put in the Library for public scrutiny. In conclusion, our sympathies are with such families, both in the US and the UK, and we will do everything that we can to make sure that their circumstances are regularised as quickly as possible.

Mr. Francois: We have heard that some further checking needs to be done now that the full facts are available. The Minister says that he will follow that up both with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and our people in New York. We are grateful for that. However, does he appreciate that the best way to round off the issue and close off all the anomalies would be for Deena Gilbey to be allowed to become a US citizen?

Mr. Caborn: That may well be the resolution to the matter. As I said, I am not sure what "permanent

[Mr. Caborn]

residency" means in its legal context, and whether it brings the security that the hon. Gentlemen have asked about. They raised questions about life policies and 60 per cent. taxation. I cannot answer those technical questions now, but I will make sure that we get answers to them. I shall also ensure that we raise the matter with the companies that had responsibility, as the hon. Gentlemen mentioned. If the case is as the hon. Gentlemen say it is, the issue of short to medium-term support should be revisited, and we will take it up with those companies.

Mr. Amess: I would like to thank the Minister for his courtesy on that matter. Perhaps he will pass on our thanks to the ambassador and all those who have worked so hard. Will he also bear in mind—he will not be aware of this—that the Patriot Act allows some leeway that, as Mrs. Gilbey explained last night, was included to deal with undesirables. She was a little concerned that, because of the personalities of those dealing with the matter, her case was being focused in an inappropriate direction.

I hope that the Minister will keep up the pressure, and that Mrs. Gilbey becomes an American citizen. Finally, I hope that Paul Gilbey is awarded a medal by the US Government.

Mr. Caborn: I am sure that those points will be taken up. I have no doubt that many people will read the *Hansard* report of the proceedings, will take those points and sentiments to heart, and will be able to act on them. The points made in this debate will be forwarded to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his thanks to those who worked so hard in the US—they went beyond the call of duty in trying to ensure that everything was done for the families and victims in a way that is commensurate with what we expect of our diplomatic service.

Mr. Francois: I thank the Minister again for his courtesy. Time will now be spent double checking some of the things that the Minister agreed to undertake. He agreed to inform my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West and me of the outcome of his investigations. I would like to remain in touch with him because the problem will not be resolved overnight. Without wishing to become a pest on his diary, I wish to remain in touch as the situation develops, as does my hon. Friend.

Mr. Caborn: I have absolutely no problem with that. The overall policy of looking after the concerns of and facilitating support for the British families of the victims falls to my Department, but the specific issue of Mrs. Gilbey's citizenship is a question for the FCO. To be honest, when the debate was tabled, we were not sure what the hon. Gentlemen were seeking, so we took it in the round, so to speak. When the issue became specific, it became a focus for the FCO rather than the DCMS. However, if the hon. Gentlemen write to my Department we are more than willing to answer their questions, and, if we do not have the information, we shall get it from the FCO.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at four minutes to Two o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 20 March 2002

[SYLVIA HEAL *in the Chair*]

Walsgrave Hospital, Coventry

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

9.30 am

Mr. Jim Cunningham (Coventry, South): First, I thank Mr. Speaker for granting me this debate, which is the third on Walsgrave hospital. I know that a number of hon. Members wish to speak, so I shall try to get through what I want to say as quickly as I can. My hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, North-West (Mr. Robinson) has been held up because of a road accident, but he is definitely on his way here.

The debate has cross-party support and there is nothing political about it, as it involves the welfare and well-being of the people of Coventry. I shall be jumping in and out of the Commission for Health Improvement report; hon. Members will not want me to go through the whole thing and bore the heck out of them. We welcome the management and personnel changes and the management restructuring that have taken place at the hospital. We also welcome the fact that steps have been taken to implement the CHI report.

The impression has been given from time to time that we have been critical of the hospital staff. To the best of my knowledge, no hon. Member has criticised them. Indeed, we believe that they have done an excellent job in difficult conditions. According to my postbag, the public have always praised the medical treatment they received from the staff.

I ask my hon. Friend the Minister, why has there been a delay in publishing the CHI implementation report? We expected it in January, but it was not made available until March. I am at a loss to understand the reasons for that delay. Why was there a delay in signing the contracts for the new hospital? There might be a perfectly logical reason for that, but the people of Coventry would be worried if the project were delayed, because they are anxious to have a new hospital.

Hon. Members are aware that a number of concerns about the hospital have been raised over the years. For example, the style of management and the relationship between consultants and management is highlighted in the report. Another worry is the suspension of consultants, the cost of those suspensions and the loss of the consultants' skills for long periods. Legal redress has a financial cost. That money—thousands of pounds—could be recycled into the national health service, rather than being spent on long-winded procedures that try to gain someone redress and justice.

Then there is the general cost to the trust of the loss of good will. The CHI report touches on that when it mentions the relationship between consultants and previous management. Next is the question of how long it takes to deal with the suspensions. For example, not too long ago, in the case of a consultant in Coventry, it took up to two years. Those are long-winded procedures. There is also a cost to individuals—to their self-esteem and pride. More important, the families also suffer, whatever the outcome, and they are often innocent. I hope that the Minister studies those procedures and speeds them up.

Over the past few weeks, another consultant has been suspended, although we cannot judge why. Again, however, the trust and the hospital have been denied the services of a top consultant in his field. There is concern about what is happening. The previous management suggested that they could not deal with some problems at the hospital because planning and programming the new hospital diverted their attentions. I do not know how true that claim is, but I certainly question it.

About two years ago, we had a problem with bed blocking. I became involved during the parliamentary recess. I readily acknowledge that we cannot simply blame the trust, because three agencies are involved, but the issue requires more attention. The three agencies co-operate as best they can on a problem that creates anxieties among families who, because of lack of co-operation or of social workers, must wait for relatives to be discharged from hospital. It is a difficult issue, but we must nevertheless tackle the concerns.

There has been a lack of consultation between the trust and local MPs about not only the new hospital, but matters of common concern, so I hope that efforts are made after the debate to involve local MPs much more. People know that we are in the business of trying to help the NHS, not of knocking it. My hon. Friends and I are concerned to work with the trust and the management locally to provide the best health service for the people of Coventry. That is what this is all about and why we have constantly raised those issues over the past two or three years.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister responds to another concern about consultants. When does whistleblowing become serious misconduct? I know one or two consultants who blew the whistle in the best interests of their hospital or trust, but found themselves charged with misconduct. I am sure that my hon. Friends know of similar instances. Where the charge is not misconduct, employers have invented a new charge of bullying. My hon. Friends know that the trade union movement has pushed for several years for something to be done about bullying, certainly in the classroom and the workplace. I have no evidence of this, but I would not like to think that employers are using the charge of bullying as a catch-all, just as some employers charge individuals with gross misconduct, which is a catch-all and very serious. We must give a lot of thought to the charge of bullying.

I recently introduced a ten-minute Bill based on the Kennedy report about Bristol. I thought that it would be useful to include two aspects of the report in my Bill, which is still proceeding through the House. For example, it provides for trusts to have two additional members or for two members to be designated with responsibility for upholding the public interest, regardless of what the trust may do. As I am sure my hon. Friends know, trusts have a dual function, which I want to remove. Again based on the Kennedy report, the second part of my Bill would allow facilities to be provided for staff to upgrade their skills after two or three years. I know that my hon. Friend the Minister is considering that issue.

[Mr. Jim Cunningham]

I welcome the CHI report's recommendations. CHI initially became involved as part of a routine review of the hospital's facilities between February and July 2001. The findings were published in September 2002. So far, I welcome the action taken by the trust to implement the CHI report, as I am sure my colleagues do, but there are still two areas of concern. Before I come to them, it is worth reminding the House that there were five initially: the practice of putting five beds in a four-bed bay, the high death rates for non-emergency admissions, the organisation of the emergency departments and the emergency assessment unit, the relationship between some consultant medical staff and senior managers, and the need to address current service problems.

Satisfactory progress has been made with the bedding bays, death rates for non-emergency admissions and the service problems, but progress on organising the accident and emergency departments is limited. The relationship between some staff needs improvement, a subject that I touched on earlier.

Outstanding problems are still to be resolved. Although progress has been made by the trust to ensure patient safety across the split site services, the agreement and implementation outlined in September has not occurred. Will my hon. Friend the Minister comment on that in her winding-up speech? The trust has stated that it intends to implement one of the three structural solutions proposed by the external review, but CHI is concerned that the proposals are costly and that no priorities have been identified.

No contingency plans are in place should full funding for the changes not be available and CHI remains worried that only limited progress has been made between consultant medical staff and senior managers. Two clinical service teams have been found to have significantly dysfunctional working practices and some senior staff remain disengaged from management colleagues. The trust has proposed a new management structure to strengthen the role of clinical staff and has employed external teams to change management and build teamwork, but it is too early to evaluate the possible impact of that.

I welcome the changes made in the trust, especially the appointment of the new chairman, with whom I look forward to working, as I am sure my colleagues do. We should learn lessons from the CHI report, and I hope that there will be no need for more debates on Walsgrave hospital. We have never tried to tell anyone how to run a hospital, but we are certainly interested in the well-being of the hospital staff and consultants and, ultimately, the service delivered to the Coventry public. We should draw a line under the past and make a fresh start, so that we can all work together to provide the best medical facilities for the people of Coventry.

9.42 am

Mr. James Plaskitt (Warwick and Leamington): I am pleased to contribute to the debate, as I was regrettably unable to attend when Walsgrave was discussed in this Chamber previously. Although Walsgrave is not my local hospital—Warwick has a different district general hospital—what happens there is of considerable concern to my constituents and to me, as many of them are treated there.

I endorse what my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South (Mr. Cunningham) said. I have not had occasion to deal with complaints from my constituents on the clinical care that they have received in the hospital or the quality of work from its staff, but plenty of casework about what goes on at Walsgrave has been brought to me over the years and all the issues raise questions about management.

I use Warwick hospital in my constituency as a benchmark. It has had several management problems during the past few years, including considerable turbulence in management personnel, and we recently lost the chief executive as a result of questions about the management of figures supplied to the Department of Health. That turbulence has created great difficulties for the hospital but, throughout the period, not one clinician has said that they have lost confidence in its management.

In contrast, I received a petition signed by more than 80 clinicians at the Walsgrave, telling me that they have lost confidence in the management of the hospital. Clearly a serious state of affairs has been reached. I have received evidence not only from constituents, but in the form of the petition signed by clinicians, and I know of the concern of my colleagues who represent Coventry constituencies. I hear whispers and comments in the health community.

That is the background, but as a responsible Member one looks for objective assessment of what is happening. The report by the Commission for Health Improvement provides that, and it puts the problems into sharp focus. As colleagues have said, most alarm bells rung in the report are relevant to the way in which the place is being managed and run, but less relevant to the standards of clinical care. Yet although it is, in essence, a management issue that we are dealing with, there are clinical consequences and my concern is focused on that aspect.

By way of illustration, I want to raise the case of Mr. John Clifford, a resident of Lapworth in my constituency. In July 2000, he attended the surgery of his GP, who detected heart problems. Mr. Clifford was examined and it was discovered that he had a faulty aortic valve. He and his family were told that a replacement operation was required and that such operations have a 95 per cent. success rate. They were told of the importance of the operation being done within, ideally, six months.

Mr. Clifford was placed on a waiting list and he and his family were told that hopefully—that was the expression used—the operation would be done in or before April 2001. During 2001, Mr. Clifford's condition deteriorated. His GP contacted the hospital several times to urge that the operation be brought forward. The April 2001 deadline passed without a date for surgery being offered. In despair, the family contacted the Walsgrave again in October 2001. The consultant told Mr. Clifford that he would be seen within the next three to four weeks.

In November 2001, the family remained very concerned about Mr. Clifford's condition and contacted the hospital again. Because of their concern and the urgency of the case, they said that they would contemplate private treatment, only to be told that there was no point. Nothing would be gained by securing

private treatment, as Mr. Clifford was third on the list and his operation imminent. Yet by January 2002 a date for treatment still had not been given.

Mr. Clifford was very ill over Christmas and new year. Eventually, on 26 January, he was admitted as an emergency case to Warwick hospital. On 4 February, with Mr. Clifford in Warwick, the family received a letter signed by Mr. Loughton of the Walsgrave:

"I am pleased to inform you Mr Clifford will be called to come into hospital for his surgery within the next few weeks. If for any reason this does not happen, Mr Clifford will then be given the opportunity to utilise the private sector".

That came after the family had been told that there was no point in going private because he was third on the list. On 6 February, in a worsening condition, Mr. Clifford was transferred back to the Walsgrave hospital, where a consultant examined him, said that he was too ill to be operated on and told the family that he had missed his "window of opportunity". On 13 February, Mr. Clifford died.

The community health council is investigating the case, at my encouragement, and I understand that Mr. Richardson, head of communications at Walsgrave hospital, has told a local newspaper that an internal review of management procedures has taken place in order to examine what happened in Mr. Clifford's case. However, he has told us that the results will not be published. Will my hon. Friend the Minister tell us whether that is a common procedure, whether, in her view, it is acceptable and whether the Department can obtain the findings of that important inquiry, which the hospital seems unwilling to share?

I cite the tragic case of Mr. Clifford as an example of what can happen when a hospital has dysfunctional management. I therefore read the March update from CHI with considerable concern. It reviews progress following its earlier report, but still finds:

"Limited progress has been made by the trust to build effective working relationships between doctors and managers".

The clinical governance review found that

"relationships had broken down between some consultant medical staff and senior managers. In particular, some doctors did not feel safe to raise concerns about clinical risk."

It continues:

"CHI remains concerned about the limited progress in the area. CHI was particularly concerned that some senior medical staff remain disengaged from management colleagues. CHI found further evidence of two clinical teams with significantly dysfunctional team working."

Those are serious findings, and to have them reiterated in a follow-up visit by CHI is worrying. CHI says that the role of the trust board is vital in correcting the problems, and I am sure that we agree. It also says that the board has been strengthened by new members since the CHI clinical governance review, adding:

"There needs to be an ongoing commitment and recognition by the Board that these issues should be tackled."

That is an understatement—dysfunctional management and the breakdown in the relationship between management and clinicians contributed to the tragic outcome for my constituent, Mr. Clifford.

I cite a press release issued by the hospital on 11 March. It indulges in an element of self-congratulation based on Dr. Foster's independent hospital guide, which is available on the web and which I have checked. Walsgrave hospital receives a five-star rating—apparently not a bad evaluation—but even that guide points to problems in the cardiothoracic service and the high death rates at the hospital. I conclude by mentioning the guide and the Walsgrave's interpretation of it because Mr. Loughton concludes his press release by saying that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health has said that

"no chief executive should be 'looking for the excuse book'".

Indeed they should be looking for the excuse book, given what has happened and what is still happening. There should be no hiding place. Will the Minister comment on what she thinks should happen to chief executives who have such a record on leaving their post? Should they pop up in due course, elsewhere in the national health service?

9.55 am

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson (Coventry, North-West): I am grateful for an opportunity to take part. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South (Mr. Cunningham) on securing the debate and on introducing a ten-minute Bill. I also welcome the Minister, who is attending for the first time, I believe, one of our three Adjournment debates on matters relating to Walsgrave hospital. We are sure that she will give a lucid and serious reply to the deeply worrying concerns that remain in our minds despite the enormous step forward that has taken place since our previous meeting in this Chamber, when the Minister of State promised to take on board what we said. Since then, Mr. Loughton has handed in his resignation. Without any personal animosity, and respecting the proper limits on our privileges in this House, we regard that as an important step forward. However, ahead of that suspension, a further suspension took place, which is a cause of grave concern to us all. Let me say why.

In none of our criticisms in any of our Adjournment debates have we sought to speak other than wholly positively about the nurses and support staff at the hospital. This is purely a management issue. We believe that the performance of some consultants at Walsgrave has not been up to the standards that the national health service or the Department of Health would allow to continue if they knew the full facts.

In its second report, CHI emphasises that one key area in which great improvement is still necessary is working relationships between consultant staff and management. Now there has been a further suspension, that of Dr. Mattu, which is bound to be, at the very least, a setback to any improvement. We already know that there has been an initial meeting of the consultants at which a wide range of concerns were raised. The necessary signatures for an emergency debate were forthcoming and we shall be plunged back into exactly the same destabilising process that applied in the case of Mr. Barros D'Sa, which lasted over 20 months. Later, I shall say something about the time that suspensions take, because I am sure that the Minister finds that as unacceptable as I do, and I know that the Government are taking steps to accelerate the process.

[Mr. Geoffrey Robinson]

The problem with the suspension of Dr. Mattu is that it is following exactly the same lines as that of Mr. Barros D'Sa. There is no hint of criticism of his professional competence. On the contrary, he is the top man in his field and he has an international and national reputation. I believe that he has given papers in north America, which, by any standard, leads in virtually all aspects of coronary care, diagnostic and surgical. In fact, Dr. Mattu is giving a paper there this very week.

We have a major national shortage of surgeons and doctors and the distinguished surgeon Sir Magdi Yacoub is scouring Europe and north America to recruit top surgeons and consultant cardiologists, but we, in our wisdom, have managed to suspend probably our top man in the field. That is worrying.

The same applied with Mr. Barros D'Sa. There was not the slightest hint of professional incompetence in his case. In addition, the charges are exactly the same—harassment and intimidation. I cannot take a view on those charges, and I do not expect the Minister to give us her view this morning, but I hope that she gives the matter her attention, because that would mean a lot to us in the circumstances.

The charges come from a junior doctor, who worked for Dr. Mattu and made a series of recriminations that, frankly, if boiled down to their essence, do not amount to much more than self-interested tittle-tattle motivated by the fact that he did not get everything that he wanted. There is a childish quality to the charges, which hardly merit a suspension when we so desperately need people such as Dr. Mattu.

One cardinal sin may have been committed: the complainant attacking Dr. Mattu alleges that he said that the incident might bring about the suspension or dismissal of Mr. Loughton. If that were a hanging charge, all the MPs here today would be suspended. Having some experience in such matters, I could advise my hon. Friends on how to handle it.

Dr. Mattu was one of 80 people involved. He did not simply say, alone in conversation with one of the junior staff, that there was a move to secure Mr. Loughton's resignation. Eighty people went public in a debate or ballot, and many of them went public outside the secret ballot to make it clear that they had no confidence in the chief executive. There was an open movement, backed by most of the surgeons, to achieve that very end. Therefore, the charge has no significance or seriousness.

There is another similarity with the whistleblowing incident in the case of Mr. Barros D'Sa. There was a terrible record of colorectal perinatal death rates at the Walsgrave, but that was not accepted. We raised it with the hospital management—I did so myself at a very early stage—but no action was taken until we received the Commission for Health Improvement report. Two steps have been taken since: a new colorectal specialist has been recruited and the surgeon whose performance was unacceptable no longer does that job, but it took us two years to get to that point.

Finally, thanks to CHI, we have eliminated the problem of having five beds in a four-bed room. Dr. Mattu made that point to me nearly two years ago, but nothing was done. I wrote to the management and I wrote to David Loughton personally at least twice, telling him that the practice must change. Dr. Mattu was so forceful and confrontational on the subject that I felt that the very least I could do was write a letter, or he would perceive the fault as mine.

Dr. Mattu is that sort of person—he cares deeply, and I can see how that might upset people, but that is no reason for suspension. He may be a little to blame for the fact that personal relationships between him and his staff in the department are not perfect, but knocking heads together—including Dr. Mattu's, if required—is the right strategy. We should not have to go through a lengthy and costly suspension procedure that also seems to me, although I pass no final judgment on it, to be of questionable necessity.

In passing, I address the question of Mr. Loughton's resignation. I ask respectfully what the redundancy arrangements will be. Will there be severance pay or will he move to another position in the NHS? The Minister may not be able to give an answer this morning, but the people of Coventry have a considerable interest in knowing what is going to happen.

I address two other aspects of the suspension procedure in respect of Dr. Mattu. I am not sure what guidelines are set down by the Minister or the NHS executive, but the process followed in this case is unacceptable and smacks of the arrest procedures characteristic of a communist or fascist dictatorship. The Minister is bound to refer to the fact that the relevant letter was signed by the medical director, but it would be naive of any of us to imagine that the hand of Mr. Loughton was not behind it.

I can assure the Minister that Mr. Loughton has been boasting to other senior consultants and consultant representatives, some of whom he probably thought would be favourable to Dr. Mattu. Mr. Loughton has assured them that the matter has gone to the highest level in the national health service—my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on the one hand and the chief medical officer on the other—and that everyone is wasting their time opposing it, almost as if the outcome is prejudged and the suspension not a neutral act as it was meant to be.

David Loughton is leaving now and we can speak with a frankness that may not have been possible before. At public meetings, he let it be known to consultants and others in the hospital that he had a hit list of five people whom he was going to get rid of before he left, by suspension or some other method. We have all heard that and we believe what we hear when it comes from reliable sources who have heard it from the horse's mouth. Perhaps that was his parting shot. Nothing that can be said about the action in question will do other than convince me and, I think, my hon. Friends that it was inspired by David Loughton.

The manner of Dr. Mattu's suspension is unacceptable. Two people—the medical director and deputy personnel director—banged on his door and demanded entry. He let them in and they made it clear what they were about. He said that he had the right to be represented, but they questioned the need for representation. Dr. Mattu had no forewarning. There was no prior discussion, airing of grievances or attempt at conciliation with the parties involved. It is almost as if people wanted to provoke the incident. Dr. Mattu was

shown to the door and marched off the premises. He was not allowed to take his computer, which was his own. The locks on his door were changed and the details on his floppy disk, or whatever was in the computer, impounded by NHS staff, who I understand had nothing better to do than start transcribing the whole lot to see what they might find out about him.

That gives my hon. Friend the Minister an idea of the way in which the process can be conducted and the military behaviour of the management, and I hope that she is reassured that the steps that we have taken—bringing those matters to this place three times—have not been taken lightly. We are pleased that the chief executive has gone, but, following his last throw of the dice, we must pick up the pieces.

Another important point is the sheer length of these suspensions. I know that the Department has published a new notice, probably at the Minister's initiative, insisting that dealing with such cases should be speeded up and suggesting the manner in which that could be achieved. I raise the issue because another surgeon at the hospital, Miss Briony Ackroyd, has been suspended for, I think, more than two years. It is not acceptable that suspensions are allowed to last so long at enormous cost. That is the bizarre aspect. I believe that it costs the best part of £400,000 or perhaps £500,000 to deny the people of Coventry the services of such a good surgeon.

Similarly, Raj Mattu is a top-flight surgeon—the best in his category. There is great need and we are trying to recruit people from abroad, but he may be out for up to two years for harassing or having a set-to with some of his junior staff. We all have those problems, but we sort them out. I can remember similar incidents in the Department where I worked. We had rows and yelled at one another, but we knocked heads together and solved the problems ourselves. That is what this is about.

When the Minister reads the charges levelled at Raj Mattu, she will see that this is nothing but a case of people falling out and saying things in the heat of the moment that they should not have said. The top man has been suspended, however, which is nothing short of crazy.

I hope that my remarks are sufficiently clear, and I would be grateful if the Minister considered the overall issue and where the case of Briony Ackroyd stands. I know that Miss Ackroyd would like the matter to be resolved. There are too many questions for the Minister to deal with today, but I have utter confidence that she will answer them. We are pleased to see her in her place.

10.9 am

Mr. Mike O'Brien (North Warwickshire): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South (Mr. Cunningham) on securing the debate about the situation at Walsgrave hospital and on gaining Mr. Speaker's consent to another discussion of a subject that so concerns us.

This is the third debate on Walsgrave. The last one involved seven hon. Members in an unprecedented display of concern following publication of the initial Commission for Health Improvement report. The situation is not new. It did not suddenly develop last year after publication of the report, but has been developing in the management and the culture of the hospital for probably more than a decade. In recent months, especially following publication of the report, the public and hon. Members who represent them realised that they could not allow the culture that had developed in the hospital to continue to cause these problems. Public confidence in the delivery of NHS services in our area was being increasingly damaged, and the CHI report was the last straw. All the MPs who represent constituencies in the area had to take a stand.

The problem at Walsgrave is clearly dysfunctional management. The clinical staff, senior consultants, nurses and those who support them have all worked enormously hard to deliver good quality medical care to patients, but they have been handicapped by the quality of organisation that is supposed to run the hospital. We must restore public confidence and make it clear that the staff have been doing a tremendous job, despite the handicaps that they face.

It is time for a new start and a new culture. We no longer need the Thatcherite approach to management, if I may describe it like that—management by diktat from the top, whereby an individual decides to run things as he thinks appropriate without consulting others who work with him. For a time, a weak management board allowed the chief executive, David Loughton, to carry on in such a manner, but we have the opportunity to make progress with the public-private partnership that the Government have approved and prospects at the hospital are brighten.

The new culture, the new hospital building that the public-private partnership will produce and the development of the new teaching hospital plans will all enable us to paint a bright picture for the future of Walsgrave. That should start to restore confidence that not only are there good workers at the hospital, but there is the prospect of good management and delivery of a first-class service.

The most recent CHI report still fills us with concern. On the five key issues, the action plan shows some improvement in some areas. On reducing the number of beds in bays from five to four, the first CHI report expressed concern that five-bed bays put patients in danger, despite the hard work that the staff put into caring for the[illegible]some problems have been addressed and the response in the new report is satisfactory. Satisfactory progress has been made on analysis of death rates, but more work needs to be done.

Some progress has been made on organising care in the two accident and emergency departments and the emergency assessment unit, although it is unsatisfactory and more work must be done there. Inevitably, progress on rebuilding working relationships was limited while the chief executive, David Loughton, was in post. I hope that his decision to go enables those working relationships to be improved. Like my hon. Friends, I am concerned about references to the two clinical teams with significant dysfunctional teamworking, which the management must tackle.

There has been some satisfactory progress in dealing with the serious service problems, but, as my hon. Friends said, until there is a new building and better facilities can be provided to deliver services, the long-term problems will remain and will need constant vigilance by the new management. However, a new chief executive and the current chairman, Mr. Stoten, should be able to create a new culture and start to deliver further improvements.

[Mr. Mike O'Brien]

I share my hon. Friends' anxieties about the disciplining of consultants at Walsgrave hospital, which must change. There must be a more sensible, and faster, approach to the matter, but it is not the consultants' job to run hospitals. NHS management is given the responsibility of running hospitals on behalf of the public. However, it is the responsibility of those who provide patient care to inform their Members of Parliament and other public representatives if problems arise, and they must be able to do so.

I want the Minister's assurance that if consultants have serious anxieties about care in a hospital such as Walsgrave, they will be able to take that concern to their Member of Parliament. There should be no restriction on them doing so, such as a disciplinary obligation on consultants to go through a certain procedure before talking to their MP. The NHS is a public service and Members of Parliament are responsible for ensuring that it is delivered. If there is a concern, I should be able to bring it to the Minister's attention and consultants should be able to talk to their MP.

Mr. Robinson: May I reassure my hon. Friend that in my experience of dealing with consultants, none of them wanted to run the hospital? They wanted the hospital to be run properly and in respect of clinical care, for example, they did not want five beds in rooms designed for four. They felt that surgeons whose perioperative fatality rate was far too high should not be retained and they were worried that in a four-year period Coventry had almost the worst record in artery and valve heart surgery. Those are the concerns that consultants brought to my attention.

Mr. O'Brien: I accept what my hon. Friend says. Consultants do not appear to be seeking to run the hospital, but it is right to make it clear that a public service must be delivered, and managers are employed in the NHS to do that. Consultants should also look to themselves and develop a culture in which they can work with the new management at Walsgrave hospital.

I do not want to have to go to the electorate in three or four years and face public expressions of concern about how the hospital is run. The problems must be sorted out now. I hope that everyone at the hospital pulls together and I am sure that they will. I am pleased that the new chairman is prepared to come to grips and I hope that he continues to address the issues seriously.

The Government's decision to franchise the chief executive's post struck me as odd. I can see why a Minister might decide to franchise the whole team, but I cannot understand the decision to franchise, from within the NHS, only that one post. Why was it taken? I am not sure what difference it will make, as it only delays the appointment of a chief executive by obliging a franchising procedure to be carried out, although there may be a good and logical reason for doing so.

Why was the team not franchised? I am not advocating franchising, however, as I do not think it necessary. The best approach would have been to carry on and appoint a new chief executive from within the NHS. A limited number of people can apply, as probably only a handful have the necessary experience of running a very large hospital. Considering the numbers, I do not think that franchising will make a difference.

No doubt the Minister has a reason for taking that course of action; I am merely curious about it. Perhaps it is a way to express concern that things have reached a pretty bad pass in the management of the hospital and to show that she wants fundamental change. If that is the case, I accept it. The board, by and large, is new. Many senior management posts in the hospital are acting or are held by new people. We are getting a new management team in anyway, which is good. The objective must be to restore confidence, and I am sure that we can do that.

10.20 am

Andy King (Rugby and Kenilworth): I shall keep my remarks brief because, as my hon. Friends have pointed out, we have been here three times already.

The people of Rugby feel that Mr. Loughton should not have been allowed to resign, but should have been removed much earlier. They, and the people of Coventry, would have suffered far less if that had happened. The report points out some improvements. There certainly have been some improvements since the arrival of the new chairman, and I feel much more positive about the future, especially since we heard the good news of Mr. Loughton's departure. What concerns the people of Rugby, however, is that he seems to be hanging around for a considerable period. We want him to go as soon as possible. As my hon. Friend said, the people want to know that he will not walk away with some handsome package into another top job somewhere else. We must not be seen to reward someone who has not done the job that he was paid to do—delivering the best quality services.

CHI is doing an excellent job. The whole purpose is to ensure, through clinical governance, that people receive the highest possible quality of service. I am sure that my hon. Friends have shared my experience. Constituents come to me regularly, with details that defy belief and reason, about the way in which they have been treated when they have gone to Coventry and Warwickshire hospitals.

The following examples date from after the first CHI report. In November a constituent took his wife, who was 23 weeks pregnant, had stomach cramps and was bleeding, to Walsgrave hospital. He said that the labour ward could only be described as prehistoric. It was cold and dirty, the wallpaper was peeling and the floor coverings were taped together.

Another constituent with varicose veins was seen by four different consultants. Some were in the same department; others were in different departments. On every occasion her notes were missing. Staff had no idea why she had been referred. Internal communications between departments were non-existent.

When another constituent took her son to Walsgrave, he was moved to 10 different beds in 15 days. To add insult to injury, when he returned to St. Cross in Rugby by ambulance, the staff did not know that he was arriving. That tells a terrible tale of incompetent management in life-threatening situations, which must not be allowed to continue.

The second CHI report called for significant improvements in those five areas. I am delighted that it found it impossible to paper over the cracks and give the impression that those significant improvements had taken place, because, as was rightly pointed out, the core of the problem was poor management and the dreadful culture that persisted in the hospital. As the report said, that problem must be tackled and those cultural changes must take place. We know that it takes time to change a culture, but unless that happens, we will be in the same cycle in the years ahead. As representatives of the people of Coventry and Warwickshire, we cannot stand by and watch. The future is positive, and I look forward to seeing the new chief executive in post. I wish him well—*[Interruption.]* I apologise; I wish whoever is in post well, be it him or her. Whoever it is, they will need all the support that can be given to them.

I have already arranged a meeting in May with staff representatives and the chairman, and I intend to ensure that such meetings take place regularly. I have met several consultants and found them to be committed people who are determined to deliver the best quality services that they can. I appreciate the hard work that the Minister has done to help, especially those in Rugby, as we were taken over by the Walsgrave hospital. I thank her for her assistance in ensuring and safeguarding the local hospital services for my constituents in Rugby.

10.28 am

Mrs. Caroline Spelman (Meriden): Thank you for allowing me to make a brief contribution, Mr. O'Brien. I am not, I believe, the only speaker not to have been present from the start of the debate, and I have been present at every stage of the battle to get justice done for our constituents. My constituent, Simon Standley, alerted me to the problem after he suffered a failed renal transplant at the Walsgrave hospital, and I speak with him very much in mind. He was there for four and a half months, and was able to observe at close quarters the profound problems that were later identified in the CHI report.

At Mr. Standley's request, I shall return to the issue that was raised by the hon. Member for Coventry, North-West (Mr. Robinson). Something is awry in the unfair way in which the whistleblowers were dealt with at the hospital. I speak with the consultant Mr. Barros D'Sa in mind, and also on behalf of the cardiologist Mr. Raj Mattu. When the whistle was blown, the management wanted to suspend Raj Mattu, who had been brought in to solve the problems in the department. Ultimately, the suspension was dealt with by the medical director, which is the correct procedure. However, his suspension will be overseen by the chairman and chief executive who originally called for that suspension, which represents a conflict of interest. The cardiologist holds strong views, as one would expect of a person brought in to troubleshoot a department and get things done. I wished to raise that issue with the Minister, and I shall confine my remarks to that remaining injustice. I look forward to her comments in response to the wider issues raised by colleagues.

10.30 am

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): This has been a serious debate and has raised serious issues. Although some hon. Members are veterans on this subject, this is my first venture into it, so I will be cautious. My experience is of management and consultant conflict in the cardiac unit at the John Radcliffe hospital in Oxford, which has experienced similar problems, although not as deep as those at Walsgrave hospital.

The problem has been going on for a long time, and hon. Members with local constituencies have deeper knowledge of the situation, so it would be inappropriate for a Front-Bench spokesman such as myself to go into such detail. Hon. Members have demonstrated that when seven or eight of them act in concert—they have been able to have three debates on this subject so far—they can bring a great deal of experience, wisdom and insight to an issue, as well as bringing pressure to bear on their local trust in order to effect change. Both the hon. Member for Coventry, South (Mr. Cunningham), who secured the debate, and the hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) deserve praise and applause for their assiduousness in bringing forward such matters.

I wish to draw out some of the questions regarding the wider issue of performance indicators, and how useful they are compared with Commission for Health Improvement reports. I shall also comment on the franchising process mentioned by the hon. Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien), and discuss whistleblowing.

The hon. Member for Coventry, South rightly struck a positive note when introducing the debate by welcoming the role of the Commission for Health Improvement, as well as its involvement and follow-up report, and the management change. He was at pains to point out that he and many other commentators on this subject are not generally criticising the staff at any level, which is important to mention. Although some appraisals of hospital performance are valid, I contend that some are not, and they may have a negative impact on morale at a time when retention and recruitment are critical in terms of capacity and quality of care.

Among his concerns, the hon. Member for Coventry, South identified management style—a point that has resonated throughout the debate—and the relationship between consultants and managers. It is important to make clear, as did the hon. Member for North Warwickshire, that consultants do not, and should not, want to run hospitals. The hon. Member for Coventry, North-West (Mr. Robinson) said that, in his experience, the consultants in his area did not wish to run hospitals. However, in my experience, people with a lifetime involvement in a hospital do not necessarily embrace changes that may weaken their power. That is not always a bad thing, although some may describe it as a wrecking attitude. Nevertheless, we must recognise that the balance of power should shift away from senior consultants in hospitals. Most of them understand that, although of course we should note that some do not, as the hon. Member for North Warwickshire pointed out.

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: I would not like the idea to get around that any of the three consultants mentioned in my contribution had that sort of problem. They are certainly not resistant to change. They have problems

[Mr. Geoffrey Robinson]

because their changes are resisted by management—changes that would be wholly to the good in terms of improving health care.

Dr. Harris: I accept what the hon. Gentleman says, and stress that my remarks are general.

The costs incurred through the loss of consultant input from those suspended, the number of consultants suspended and the time for which they are suspended have been raised many times. This is a further reminder that procedures must be speeded up. It is difficult to say that no people who are under investigation should ever be suspended, because if a complaint is made, it is difficult for someone to come out as a whistleblower if they must work with the person against whom serious allegations have been made. Speed of process will be important.

The hon. Member for Warwick and Leamington (Mr. Plaskitt) said that he had heard no complaints about clinical care per se, and that complaints were mainly about management. It is important to stress that—although the two things are connected.

The hon. Gentleman also drew attention to a petition from 80 clinicians. We must be careful about sacking by petition, because many politicians—and, indeed, Governments—would be in deep trouble on that basis. He was right to say that the Commission for Health Improvement report—an independent report following an in-depth study—was helpful. The inspection was routine, and it was fortuitous that it happened. Going back was also important.

The hon. Gentleman related well the striking and tragic case of his former constituent, Mr. Clifford. Although it is difficult to draw conclusions without hearing the other side of the argument—there usually is another side—one cannot get away from the fact that that gentleman was first told that he needed a relatively urgent operation in July 2000, yet more than 18 months later he still had not had it. The point is that he needed his operation within six months. If patients who have waited longer but whose cases are less urgent are prioritised, which is the risk with maximum waiting times, there is a danger there will be less political focus on others. Mr. Clifford had been waiting almost 18 months when he underwent his tragic emergency admission. A lesson must be learned about the need for admission to be governed by clinical priority—and, of course, about the need for sufficient capacity.

The hon. Member for Coventry, North-West made a refreshing speech; characteristically, no holds were barred, and he spoke with his usual candour. He gave his view on the allegations against the suspended consultant, although he was careful to say that he was not making a final judgment. There is an issue about temptation, because we know that people might give a view that did not take account of the junior doctor's difficulties in the case in question. I do not want to be drawn on details because I accept that the hon. Gentleman's knowledge of them is greater than mine. However, speaking generally from my experience as a spokesperson for junior doctors, I know the number of times that I was approached by junior doctors who said that they were terrified of making any complaint because they feared that it would be seen as a spat between two equals. The power structure between a consultant and a junior is very different, because a junior doctor relies on a consultant for his or her reference. The sooner we move to a system of open references, the better.

As the hon. Member for Meriden said, there is a balance between whether there should be maximum freedom for whistleblowing from the outset or whether trusts are right to have procedures whereby people approach problems internally first. In the Labour Government's first term, they said that they would get rid of gagging clauses. However, my experience—and, I think, that of other hon. Members—shows that staff are still scared to speak to their Members of Parliament. That point was made by the hon. Member for North Warwickshire.

The hon. Member for North Warwickshire asked a good question about why franchising, rather than advertising, is being used for the post, given that the Government are restricting applications to those from within the NHS. I suspect that that is because franchising is a new policy for which the Government can take credit, by definition, because they invented the term. Hospitals that are doing badly can only do better. When they do better with a new manager, the Government will say that that is a direct result of franchising, rather than of the new manager.

Finally, I must mention performance indicators. The *Sunday Express* set out the position by pointing out that there are three sets of performance indicators in use at once. The star rating system was slammed by health service journals and others as irrational and subject to fiddling. It causes the distortion of resource allocations and clinical priorities, and measures such things as capacity, over which hospitals have little control. Further indicators are the Dr. Foster ratings and the CHI report. All the indicators drew very different conclusions about the hospital. John Richardson, a spokesman for the University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire NHS trust, said that the naming of the hospital as a poorly performing trust was catastrophically damaging to its staff and unduly worrying to its patients.

That was not said about the CHI report, which allows the press to go into the detail of the specific allegations and to see that the concerns are not mainly clinical but are about some of the broad-ranging performance indicator systems that are being used, such as the Government's performance indicator. There is an element of blame shifting in the system; we must be aware of that.

Someone referred to the Secretary of State's comment that no chief executive should be looking for the excuse book. That message could come back to haunt the political chief executive of the NHS, because in the end, the proper performance of hospitals is a matter for the politicians.

10.40 am

Mr. Simon Burns (West Chelmsford): Like other hon. Members, I begin by congratulating the hon. Member for Coventry, South (Mr. Cunningham) on bringing this important debate before the House of Commons yet again. Its importance is highlighted by the presence of so

many Labour Members who represent constituencies that are directly affected, and of my hon. Friends the Members for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) and for Solihull (Mr. Taylor). The debate is important because—not unnaturally or unreasonably—hon. Members want to secure the best health care for the communities in their constituencies.

In Walsgrave hospital, we have seen the high standards of health care that we and our fellow citizens expect unravel for far too long, and now they have completely collapsed. It is important to repeat what many hon. Members have said: we are not criticising the dedicated staff who work in that trust and that hospital. What has happened in that hospital has been described by many hon. Members both in this debate and in the past: the trust has a dysfunctional management team, and that has caused many critical problems with the provision of health care in what should be a first-class hospital offering first class patient care to the people of Coventry and the surrounding area. For far too long, it has been blighted by a series of ongoing disputes. They have torn the hospital apart. Consultants have, in effect, been at war with the senior management, and especially with the chief executive. That has resulted in a dismal level of health care and patient care, which led the hospital to receive a zero star rating in the league tables issued in late 2001.

The hospital has been riven by suspensions of consultants, resignations, bullying, low morale and a desperate atmosphere of suspicion, tension and recrimination. In short, the atmosphere and conditions in which people have had to work, and which patients have had to put up with, are poisonous. That has led to low morale among the patients and the staff, who have had to do a very difficult job in very difficult circumstances.

Nowhere is that more apparent than in the damaging CHI report, which makes for shocking reading. Its criticisms of the hospital—which should be a centre of excellence for local health care—are convincing and damning. It states that the trust scores significantly higher than the national average for the percentage of patients readmitted within 28 days of being discharged, and for the percentage of non-emergency admissions who die within 30 days. Overall, the hospital's comparative death-rate score is 14 per cent. higher than the national average for emergency admissions, and a staggering 60 per cent. higher for non-emergency admissions.

Many critical areas of the hospital have suffered from overcrowding. We have heard from hon. Members the example of the five beds in the four-bay wards. The CHI report also condemned the level of cleanliness; it said that some areas were dirty, unhygienic and unkempt. That is in a hospital, where one would expect cleanliness to be so good that one could—metaphorically—eat off the floor. That was not the case at Walsgrave.

The CHI report contains 68 individual criticisms or areas in which action is called for. Perhaps the most important, in the context of the breakdown of confidence between the consultants and the chief executive, is about the relationship between senior management and staff—that senior staff felt isolated, disempowered and undervalued.

CHI's action plan says:

"Clinical Risk Management is seriously undermined by some senior clinical staff feeling intimidated and threatened by senior managers when reporting concerns about clinical practice".

I find that a staggering complaint to be levelled at the management of a national health service hospital in this day and age. The report continues:

"Confidence, communications and relationships between some senior medical staff and senior managers need to be restored in order to develop effective working relationships."

That is an equally damning indictment, but what I find worrying is that CHI's follow-up comments about areas in which there is a need to restore trust and heal the breach between consultants and management make it clear that not enough is being done fast enough to allow the hospital to move forward rather than be constantly tainted and affected by what has happened in the past.

With that breakdown in communications, it is hardly surprising that 66 per cent. of the senior medical staff have, in effect, passed a motion of no confidence in their chief executive. Looking at that fairly superficially, I would think that it is unheard of in the NHS, and must be a key indicator that something is very wrong. The situation has been going on far too long; it is a total mess.

The chief executive, David Loughton, seems to have been the cause and catalyst of many of the problems that have emerged in the hospital, through his management style, his high-handedness and his actions. His suspension of surgeons such as Mr. Barros D'Sa and Mr. Raj Mattu seems incomprehensible, and gives credence to the accusations that his management style was based on bullying and intimidation. That is a deeply flawed management style that is not needed, and should not be welcome, in the national health service.

Mr. Loughton has now announced that he is leaving the post, although I understand that he may not do so for up to six months from 6 March, when he made that announcement. In the light of that, I have several questions for the Minister, and I would appreciate it if she could give specific answers—if not in this debate, by writing to me.

Did Mr. Loughton genuinely resign, or was he pushed? Why has he been allowed to remain in post for such a long time, given what we have seen, given the zero rating of the hospital under the Government's system of tables, given the damning indictment in the CHI report and the criticisms that hon. Members have made to Ministers over a long period? It was quite clear that something was wrong with the hospital and the trust. When Mr. Loughton had lost the confidence of a significant number of the medical staff with whom he had to work, and the trust's performance was so poor, why was he able to survive for so long, when such positions as his are critical in assuring the highest performance of this country's trusts and hospitals?

Can the Minister provide a financial figure for what the suspension of consultants, which carried on for so long because the system to resolve the problems that caused them was long-drawn-out and complicated, has cost the health service, and thus the provision of health care?

I should also be grateful to know why Mr. Loughton remained in post once the CHI report, which damningly highlighted many problems and showed the need for

[Mr. Simon Burns]

action, was published. In other parts of the world, such as business—although I accept that a hospital is not a business—if the chief executive were presiding over such calamity and failure they would have gone long ago. I should also be interested to know what the Government and the Department of Health have been doing about that sad saga, and why they did not do more to bring those problems to an end.

Finally, with the departure of Mr. Loughton, I too should like to know whether he is to be moved on to another job within the health service. To be fair, that has been common practice in the health service by Governments of all political parties, regardless of how poor performance has been. Will he leave the health service—which would be a blessing for it—and be paid off with a financial package of cash and pension rights? If someone is responsible, or seemingly responsible, for completely ruining a trust and the provision of health care in an area, it adds insult to injury for the patients and staff who have had to put up with and work in those conditions if the person who seems to have caused them is handsomely rewarded financially.

10.51 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Yvette Cooper): I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South (Mr. Cunningham) on securing a debate on the progress in implementing the clinical governance action plan at the University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire NHS trust, and in particular on the issues at the Walsgrave hospital.

My colleagues and I are fully aware of the concerns that have been raised locally and the issues highlighted in the CHI report. Those issues are of great concern to people in the area who need to use health care services in Coventry. Obviously, I appreciate how strongly hon. Members in that area feel, and over time they have raised those issues in Parliament and with Ministers. All the hon. Members who have spoken have made clear their support for both the excellent work being done by many of the clinical staff at the trust, and the care that is very often provided for patients. As we discuss the concerns that have been raised, it is important to acknowledge that.

The Commission for Health Improvement's rolling programme of clinical governance reviews began in 2000, and it examined the University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire NHS trust in February 2001. During the review, CHI examined the clinical governance structure within the trust, taking the views of patients, staff and local partner organisations. As hon. Members have mentioned, the report, which highlighted five areas requiring immediate attention, was published last September. The areas requiring attention were the practice of placing additional beds in bays not designed for that purpose; the need for a review and analysis of mortality rates for non-emergency admissions; the organisation of care between the two accident and emergency departments and the emergency assessment unit; the relationships between some consultant medical staff and senior managers when concerns about clinical risk were raised; and the need to address current service problems.

Hon. Members will be aware that as a result of the CHI report the trust was awarded a zero star rating in the NHS performance ratings in September 2001. Accordingly, the trust's chief executive was given three months' notice to achieve satisfactory performance improvements in those five areas. It is worth pointing out that that is the first time we have had a proper procedure that flags up such problems and provides both an independent external assessment and a proper process for developing action plans. Where such problems are not likely to be dealt with, they can be turned round by new procedures for bringing in alternative management and arrangements. Those sorts of procedures are now available in the NHS for the first time. They are extremely important, and have been critical in handling the issues at Walsgrave hospital.

The trust's work in developing its action plan was extensive. Its staff have worked hard, not only in the areas identified by CHI, and on 22 and 23 January this year CHI assessed progress against the five major areas of concern. My hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South asked whether there was a delay in the implementation of the report. I understand that the report was always intended to be issued about eight weeks after the visit, so it was always expected in March.

CHI observed that some progress had been made, especially on problems such as a fifth bed in four-bedded bays. Satisfactory progress has been made in analysing mortality rates and identifying a programme of developments, although, as my hon. Friend the Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien) said, more work needs to be done. Some progress has been made to accident and emergency services, limited progress has been made in addressing poor relationships between medical staff and managers, and satisfactory progress has been made on current service developments.

In summary, the trust has made satisfactory progress in three of the five areas, but limited progress in two areas. The commission noted some improvements but, as hon. Members have made clear, it continued to raise concern about the working relationships between some doctors and managers of the trust, and in some teams. As a result, it was decided to franchise the management of the University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire NHS trust. An advertisement will be placed next week to seek a high calibre chief executive to take the agenda forward, with the continued support and direction of the chairman.

My hon. Friend the Member for North Warwickshire asked why we are using franchising instead of reappointment. The process of franchising is only for trusts that are zero rated, to signal the need for broad and substantial change to solve their problems. It builds change into the process of appointment, with the development of action plans to turn the trust round, and franchise plans on how the key issues will be addressed by an incoming chief executive. Trusts can appoint experienced NHS leaders who have already been appointed elsewhere in the service. There are various differences, and I shall be happy to write to my hon. Friend about the significance of franchising.

Several hon. members have spoken about the suspended consultants. They will be aware that it is difficult for me to comment in detail on individual cases. My hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, North-West (Mr. Robinson) referred to Miss Ackroyd, whose case is

awaiting the outcome of an inquiry by the General Medical Council. Other hon. Members referred to the recent case of Mr. Mattu, which is being examined internally by the trust. It is important to say that the suspension of an employee is a neutral act and does not prejudge the outcome of a case. All the cases are subject to detailed procedures under health service guidance issued in 1990, and employment law. I share the concern that the procedures take too long. It is not acceptable for cases to drag on, often at great cost to employer, employee and the health service.

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson *rose—*

Yvette Cooper: I am tight for time, so I shall not take interventions.

We are introducing improvements to speed up cases, including the establishment of the National Clinical Assessment Authority, and an extensive review, involving medical and professional organisations, to try to speed up the processes and improve the care of patients.

Hon. Members have also expressed concern about whistleblowing. All trusts are required to introduce procedures so that staff at all levels can raise matters of concern without fear of retribution. It is critical that they should be able to do so through existing line management. If necessary, however, they should be able to bypass management arrangements. It is also important that people should be able to talk to their Members of Parliament. As so many hon. Members have raised that matter, I shall examine it further in the local area.

I shall also examine the tragic case of Mr. Clifford, which my hon. Friend the Member for Warwick and Leamington (Mr. Plaskitt) raised. Obviously, it will be little consolation to the family to have the matter investigated now, but I am keen to look into it further and get back to my hon. Friend.

Hon. Members have also raised a series of further questions to which, unfortunately, I have not had time to respond. I hope that I shall be able to reply to them later, and I undertake to write to all hon. Members about the additional points that they have made. I understand the concerns that have been expressed, and, like other hon. Members, I strongly want improvements to be made in their local trust. We now have in place a system to deliver those improvements, and to flag up problems when they arise. That is right. As hon. Members have said, we can now move forward, improve care and look to a new future for the local community.

Age Discrimination

11 am

Hywel Williams (Caernarfon): I am grateful for this opportunity to debate age discrimination. This is a timely debate, particularly given that the Government are consulting on the equal treatment directive. That consultation will conclude at the end of this month.

Last Saturday, at Plaid Cymru's spring conference, I chaired a meeting with Age Concern Cymru at which the latest version of the pensioners' manifesto for Wales was launched. Hon. Members will not be surprised to know that the fourth of 12 points in the manifesto is a call for legislation to make discrimination on the grounds of age illegal. That is a live and important issue for older people, as it should be for us all as we face the prospect of growing older—some more than others. I was proud to associate my party and myself with that call for an end to age discrimination, particularly given the salience of the issue in Wales, where a large proportion of the population is over retirement age, and in some areas the figure is extremely high.

I am gratified that hon. Members from other parties who have a long-standing interest in this matter hope to speak in the debate. I supported the Age Equality Commission Bill, which was introduced by the hon. Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Ms Atherton). I am glad to pay tribute to her hard work on the issue, and, like others, I was disappointed when the Bill was withdrawn.

Yesterday, I was glad to associate my party and myself with a ten-minute Bill on age discrimination, which the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) introduced. Both he and the hon. Member for Falmouth and Camborne are present, and I trust that they will elaborate further on their arguments with their usual eloquence, should they be fortunate enough to catch your eye, Mr. O'Brien.

As someone in the middle years of life, I am beginning to understand the Welsh adage: yr hen a wyr, yr ifainc a dybia—the young suppose, the old know. What is it that the old know? They know that age discrimination is an all-too-real aspect of their everyday lives. An ICM poll for Age Concern found that nearly one person in three knows someone who has been the victim of age discrimination at work. Seventy per cent. of the population believe that ageism still occurs, and the public overwhelmingly believe that it should be illegal to discriminate against someone on the grounds of their age.

I know that other hon. Members will discuss other aspects of age discrimination, but I shall make some general comments before moving on to employment issues.

In preparing for the debate, I asked a few constituents for examples of age discrimination. They readily responded, and just a few examples will suffice. As regards health, a patient was told that she was too old to have cervical screening, even though she had specifically requested it. Someone who was recovering from a heart attack said that she was not given access to the rehabilitation services, including dietary advice, that a younger person would have received. She was told off the record that resources were rationed by age, and that was her perception.

[Hywel Williams]

As regards the provision of care, it is too easily assumed that residential care is the appropriate response to the needs of the older person. From my experience in social work and in social work education and training, I know full well that there is a strong move towards care in the community for older people. I am also aware that young people might be maintained in the community as a common-sense strategy, while older people might be admitted to residential care as a matter of common sense. I also have family experience of the value of the independent living fund's support in maintaining younger people with a disability in the home—with the valuable help of the social services and of the voluntary organisations. Would that that support were available to the same degree for older people for whom, too often, the assumption is that residential care is the proper option. We need to shift from this common sense of what is appropriate care to assessing individuals and their needs.

In many areas of Wales, health and care services are not available through the medium of Welsh. That is significant, given the greater proportion of older people making use of such services. For example, the Stroke Association points to the effect of a stroke on language ability; people might lose their ability in their second language. Services in the medium of Welsh might not be available in southern and eastern urban areas, even though the person has no choice but to use his or her first language. That counts as indirect discrimination.

I have a further short example. Last week, I met someone who had applied for motor insurance. She faced a 400 per cent. increase in the cost of her premium. The reason that she was given for the jump was her age—she is over 75. She is a very active person and a student in higher education—so much for assumptions about the capacity of older people—and I understand that she is also a very good driver.

Turning to employment issues, older employees are valued by far-sighted and clear-thinking employers for their commitment, their experience and their skills with people.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): When I was a youngster, I was an articled clerk to a person of retirement age. He taught me everything that I know about being a lawyer.

Hywel Williams: I thank my hon. Friend for that point. I have met his former colleague, who is as spry as he ever was, and now in his 90s, I understand. Older employees are valued by their employers for their commitment, skills and experience. It is well known that B&Q employs older people—the effect of that policy has been to reduce its staff turnover by 60 per cent. and absenteeism by 39 per cent., so continuing the employment of older workers can be good for employers. However, employers often assume that age implies the existence of other characteristics—it is a proxy for poor health and the lack of flexibility in the workplace, or a lower capacity for work. Those assumptions are not based on the individual's health or work record, nor even on the record of older workers as a group, but they are influential assumptions.

I hope that the House will forgive me for introducing this thought about assumptions. It has stuck with me since a friend inflicted it upon me and I cannot shake it off. To assume something is to be in danger of making an "ass" out of "u" and "me". The message is that we should assume nothing. People should not be treated as asses; certainly the law should not be one.

The age discrimination that is faced by many workers often leads them to feel that their right to work is less certain than that of other employees. Their commitment might be sapped, their experience disregarded and their skills with people undervalued—those are real problems for older workers. However, the Employers Forum on Age reports that 55 per cent. of managers admit to using age as a criterion for recruitment, and a third have not heard of the voluntary 1999 code of practice on age diversity in employment.

During a debate on the Employment Bill, I raised a point about the unfair dismissal of people aged over 65. Many people find retirement to be a time of freedom and opportunity. Their right to choose to retire should be protected. Others, however, want to work into later life. That is an entirely laudable desire; they want to maintain their networks of colleagues and friends and they want, and need, to maintain their incomes by earning money for work done. That, too, is laudable. An increase in the percentage—8 per cent., according to the labour force survey in spring 2001—of people over 65 continuing to work, perhaps part-time, makes a lot of plain common sense. It can be good for employers and employees. Is it therefore reasonable to maintain a mandatory retirement age, and is it not unacceptable to remark on the financial burden that older people allegedly present while insisting on a mandatory retirement age? Older people should have a proper choice to continue working if they want to.

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): Is it not ironic that this House, which legislates on matters such as a mandatory retirement age, benefits most from the contribution of people who have passed that age?

Hywel Williams: I thank my hon. Friend for that interesting point. I have been impressed, as I mentioned earlier, by the clarity and incisiveness of the contributions of people who might in other situations be regarded as beyond working age—or perhaps even as being on the scrap heap.

A significant aspect of age discrimination is the age limit of 65 on protection from unfair dismissal. I tabled a new clause to the Employment Bill on Report with the aim of removing the age limit. That would have ensured that an older person would be able to claim for unfair dismissal, just like any other employee. It would have brought that right into line with a great many other employment rights, which are not subject to an upper age limit, such as the right to paid leave and the right to a minimum wage. The right would be consistent with the right to claim unfair dismissal for specified reasons that are automatically regarded as unfair, such as trade union membership.

It was a disappointment, therefore, that there was only the briefest opportunity to discuss the new clause. The hon. Member for Runnymede and

Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) said on Report that he had much sympathy with the aim of the new clause, and that he looked forward to

"a constructive discussion on how to protect the rights of older workers . . . when the consultation in which the Government are engaged is discussed".—[*Official Report*, 12 February 2002; Vol. 389, c. 159.]

I look forward to the hon. Gentleman's remarks this morning.

As we know, the Government confront an equal treatment directive. The short guide to their proposals puts matters succinctly, stating that

"it is wrong for people to be singled out for different treatment, merely because of personal characteristics."

As far as I can see, the age limit on protection from unfair dismissal singles people out on the basis of their personal characteristics—their age. However, I understand that the Government are not asking a direct question in the consultation about employment rights for people over 65. I accept that another broad question—question 15.20—might elicit views on that issue; but only indirectly.

I note that the equal treatment directive allows the Government to justify some differences in treatment on the ground of age, such as when there is a genuine occupational requirement. Different treatment can be justified on the basis of employment policy, and relevant differences in treatment may include dismissal conditions. However, I cannot see why the attainment of the age of 65 should be the point at which people automatically lose the employment right of protection from unfair dismissal.

Ms Candy Atherton (Falmouth and Camborne): The hon. Gentleman will be aware that one of the problems that employers and employees face is that of obtaining insurance at the age of 65. That applies in volunteering as well. Will he comment on that?

Hywel Williams: That is a salient problem. I referred earlier to difficulties in that respect in obtaining motor insurance. Clearly, the availability of insurance would facilitate the employment of people over 65.

The bad effects of age discrimination may deprive employers of some of their most valuable employees, at a time when they are most needed. I referred earlier to B&Q's experience of the value of older workers. Losing older employees because of age discrimination can therefore be bad for employers and, in turn, the economy in general, because of lost production, extra benefits paid and lost taxes. The performance and innovation unit report "Winning the Generation Game" estimated that the cost of lower economic activity among the over-50s was £16 billion in lost GDP and between £3 billion and £5 billion in lost taxes.

Discrimination may also undermine older employees' ability to choose to continue working, because their position seems less certain and valued than that of younger employees.

Mr. Philip Hammond (Runnymede and Weybridge): I accept entirely that the main thrust of the hon. Gentleman's argument relates to older workers, but would he acknowledge that age discrimination operates at the other end of the age spectrum?

Hywel Williams: Certainly, and Plaid Cymru has taken a petition on such matters as the minimum wage for younger workers.

Age discrimination also affects people over 50. The Government have said that they intend to introduce new legislation to prohibit discrimination in work on the grounds of age, but they want to take the fullest period available for consultation on the age strand of the equal treatment directive, up to December 2006. It has been pointed out in earlier debates on an age equality commission that the Government have had commitments to end age discrimination for at least six years, since 1996, which is the year before they were elected. Many older people have the potential of years of work before them. They should not have to wait until 2006 for protection from age discrimination and unfair dismissal.

We are given to understand that the Government's preference is for a single equality commission. Other hon. Members will no doubt speak on that matter, but I shall pose a few questions before finishing. Will such a commission address a broad range of discrimination issues, or will it concentrate on employment questions? Clearly, it should consider discrimination broadly. The establishment of such a commission may be some way off, so what will happen in the interim for the rights of older people? Will the commission be established through primary or secondary legislation? Will we have to wait for a body of case law to be developed?

Will the Minister note my general concern about the danger that issues of age discrimination, so long unregarded, will not have a sufficiently high profile when struggling for attention with other important aspects of discrimination? There should not be a competition between the different "isms"—between issues of discrimination on the grounds of ageism, racism, sexism or disability. Alas, that competition sometimes seems to exist.

In conclusion, by 2006 I shall be in my early 50s and we shall have had another general election. I have every faith in the support of the good people of Caernarfon, but I admit to having a personal interest in the matter.

A debate on age discrimination should cover aspects of discrimination addressed by other equality legislation on employment, access to goods and services, buying and renting property, and so on. No doubt, other hon. Members will address some of those issues. I look forward to the Minister's response.

11.17 am

Ms Candy Atherton (Falmouth and Camborne): I congratulate the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Hywel Williams) on securing the debate. Age discrimination is fast becoming a major issue of political activity and debate. Yesterday we had a ten-minute Bill on age discrimination and I attended a conference on older people in the media, at which my hon. Friend the Minister was the keynote speaker. Recently, we debated my private Member's Bill and Help the Aged launched its On the Scrapheap campaign, which helped to raise the profile of the issue still further. All that is good news for tackling age discrimination across society. In addition, the Government have adopted article 13 of the equal treatment directive and are consulting on how to implement it.

[Ms Candy Atherton]

The hon. Member for Caernarfon referred to the problems faced in the world of work. I could wish that the wholescale discrimination that people faced was to be found only in the workplace. Sadly, the workplace is just the tip of the iceberg, and the iceberg is rather large.

I am a member of Equal Rights on Age, which comprises national organisations such as Age Concern, Help the Aged, the Association of Retired and Persons over 50, the National Pensioners Convention and a handful of hon. Members, such as myself. We have come to some conclusions on how we believe the Government might tackle age discrimination and, as we reach the end of the first round of consultation on age, it seems appropriate to explain our point of view.

We all know the statistics that show that age is becoming the social issue of our time. We are being urged daily to consider working longer, even into our seventies, in order to provide financial security for the future; yet, at 47, I am deemed to be an older worker, as are most hon. Members. The House is one of the few places where a 40-something, as I am, can still find herself referred to as a young thing—one of the great ironies of life. Older people are more likely to watch television, an argument voiced at the Independent Television Commission and Help the Aged conference yesterday, yet older people rarely appear on television and then only in caricatures such as Victor Meldrew, or in parts such as Prunella Scales' role as a somewhat daffy older shopper in Tesco's advertisements. Older people do not appear in the main stream, and they know it.

It is clear that the Government need to set the agenda, and that it must be secured by primary legislation. Regulation provides no legal statutory power, and it has been shown that voluntary codes of conduct are ineffective. Indeed, age equality should be treated in the same manner as sex, race and disability. It will not be enough for legislation to cover only employment. It must cover access to goods, facilities and services, and the management, buying or renting of land or property. The ERA group, not unnaturally, believes that people should not be treated less well than others purely because of their age. The Government and public bodies should, of course, take the lead with positive images.

If age is to be treated equally, there should be an enforcement body, which should work to eliminate age discrimination, promote equality of opportunity, encourage good practice and advise the Government on age discrimination. The Government could even adopt a template from those commissions that deal with race, gender and disability. The commission could help people who have been discriminated against, such as the vet in Cornwall whom I have mentioned before, to secure their rights. The House might be amused to learn that my vet, Noel Stewart, has now leapt to fame. From being excluded as a vet working on foot and mouth, he has been nominated as the sexiest man of the year by Radio Cornwall, which shows how life can move on.

A commission could provide information and advice to individuals, employers and service providers, prepare new statutory codes of practice and offer practical guidance. It could provide a conciliation service, investigate the many cases of discrimination, monitor the law and initiate judicial action where necessary. All the organisations campaigning for older people's rights believe that those issues could be secured through an age equality commission—and, to coin a phrase, we want it now. Age equality requires that a commission should be created as soon as possible. In the minds of employers and among society generally, a recognition of ageism lags behind that of other forms of discrimination. In order to catch up, it is vital that the Government create a commission to focus on age. Later, the commissions could be melded together, with the different strands of discrimination all being represented in one body.

At the moment, legislation to tackle age discrimination is the great omission. That makes remedial work all the more urgent. Age discrimination must be treated in the same way as the other areas of discrimination. It would be wrong for the message to go out that the Government somehow feel that it is okay for ageism to be treated differently from other forms of discrimination. Older people need to be a visible part of the commission, and it should be sufficiently resourced to serve the millions of older people in this country. It would be wrong on all counts for age to be linked to disability, as has been suggested for the structure of discrimination commissions in future.

The Government should legislate to give employees flexibility on when they retire. By adopting that position, they might show enlightened self-interest. One in four older people say that they have been affected by age discrimination in the workplace, so if we presume that we all have two sets of grandparents, every family in the land has been affected. I urge the Minister to think how warmly those people might take to a Government who effectively and efficiently introduced comprehensive legislation on age discrimination, and who recognised that age discrimination in the workplace cannot be tackled if people cannot get insurance to enable them to work. The Government have tackled pensioner poverty, for which I applaud them, and they could tackle all aspects of age discrimination. Older people are more likely to vote, hence the enlightened self-interest.

The Government could recognise that older people are sometimes the only people who can deliver what is required. For example, 87-year-old Dr. James Van Allen is apparently the only person in the world who can analyse data sent from Pioneer 10 in deepest space to the National Aeronautics and Space Administration in the United States. Let us celebrate the contribution that older people make and want to make. Let us enable them to participate by removing the barriers in services. Let us end discrimination that means that the older people are, the more they are seen and treated as second-class citizens.

11.26 am

John Barrett (Edinburgh, West): I congratulate the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Hywel Williams) on his interesting remarks, and my hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Ms Atherton) on hers. Like me, she is 40-something and feels relatively youthful in this place. I am not sure who first replied, when asked what they felt about getting older, "Not bad considering the alternatives."

Like many other people, I have noticed that newspapers tend to give numbers after people's names. At the conference organised by Help the Aged, Kate Adie, 56, talked about the marginalisation of older viewers of television. Reference has been made to the fact that, when considering equality, we should take care to think about age separately from gender, race and disability. The work of the equality commission must not be a battle between those who consider such issues. When legislation is being drafted, we must ensure that those who feel that race, gender or disability has caused a problem for groups in society understand that various problems in relation to age must also be tackled.

Mr. Hammond: The hon. Gentleman referred to the apparent obsession of newspapers with people's ages. Does he suggest that they should not publish the age of the people to whom they refer? When they do not, I confess that I ask myself how old the person is. Whether someone is 18 or 68 makes a difference to how I read an article.

John Barrett: I have no objection to newspapers including an individual's age, but it tends to slant the news coverage if a newspaper names someone and then mentions his religion immediately afterwards. It may be of general interest to know the age of the person speaking, but what if newspapers then mentioned that he was disabled? I would not urge newspapers to stop the practice, or try to legislate against it. I was pointing out why they used it in the first place.

As the hon. Gentleman said, age discrimination is an issue for younger members of society as well as its older members. I want to raise two issues; voting rights and the national minimum wage. On 5 March, voting age was debated in Westminster Hall, so I shall not dwell on that subject for too long, but I should remind hon. Members that we are happy to collect tax from people at 16. I am the parent of a teenage daughter, and when she was 16 she reminded me that she was old enough to get married in Edinburgh. Although she was prepared to help in the campaign, she was not old enough to vote. At a time when our forces are being deployed abroad, we should remember that young people can join the armed forces and the Government can make important decisions about where those forces are deployed, but some members of the armed forces are too young to vote for the Government who will make decisions about where they should go and what they should do.

As the hon. Member for Falmouth and Camborne has already said, older people are more likely to vote. It is interesting to note that as many as 47 per cent. of 16 to 17-year-olds felt that voting was important and could have considerable influence, but that the figure for 17 to 20-year-olds dropped by 12 per cent. So as young people go into their 20s, they seem to think, for whatever reason, that it is less important to vote. They may change their minds later through self-interest, but the Liberal Democrats believe that if we are to encourage people to take an active interest in politics, the voting age should be 16.

The hon. Member for Caernarfon mentioned employment legislation, and there are real problems in relation to unfair dismissal, but I want to talk about the national minimum wage. The British Youth Council has been campaigning to end discrimination against young workers. It has said:

> "Workers should be paid equally for work of equal value. Any lower rate to the National Minimum Wage should be assessed by training, not age. The most vulnerable 16 and 17 year olds in society have no safeguards against poverty if they have no wage protection rights or have no entitlement to benefits."

It goes on to say:

> "The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry ends the current age discrimination in the National Minimum Wage . . . all workers from 16 years of age should be entitled to the same minimum wage rights as adult workers."

Other campaigners on that issue include the GMB.

If, when legislation is framed, the House can appreciate that age discrimination takes place at the younger as well as the older end of the spectrum, that will be a step forward.

11.32 am

Mr. Paul Burstow (Sutton and Cheam): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Hywel Williams) for his initiative in securing an Adjournment debate on this subject. It is timely, not least because of the ten-minute Bill that I introduced yesterday. As I said then, about 15 pieces of private Member's legislation have been before the House during the past 5 years, attempting to nudge the issue forward, roll this large rock up the hill and persuade the Government that age discrimination requires more than just a voluntary approach; it requires a statutory approach. Perhaps as a result of the European Union directive on equal treatment in employment, there will now be some progress and legislation will be introduced by 2006. However, in common with others who have spoken today, I take the view that we need more comprehensive legislation that also addresses issues relating to the provision of goods and services.

The hon. Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Ms Atherton) was absolutely right when she said that we should celebrate the fact that people are living for longer. However, it is not always the case that extra life is added to those extra years, in terms of the quality of their experience, and that is a problem, but all too often, the language that we use to debate old age is ageist in its assumptions. We use phrases such as "the demographic time bomb" and "bed blockers", which suggest that age is some sort of problem, rather than an opportunity not just for the individuals, but for the wider community. That is why we need to look not just at the employment questions that the hon. Member for Caernarfon rightly tackled, but at the broader picture that he also touched upon. We need to address ageist assumptions, attitudes and practices. A comprehensive age equality Bill has a part to play in dealing with that.

There is a lot of research evidence, both domestic and international, about the extent of discrimination in the labour market. Far less research is available into the causes and extent of ageist assumptions and practices and the wider agenda of public policy and private practice. At the beginning of the month, Help the Aged published a useful and timely report on age discrimination across public policy. I make no apologies for the fact that I shall probably refer to much of its evidence. Help the Aged drew together the existing

[Mr. Paul Burstow]

evidence. It looked at the problem and identified a series of age barriers. We often talk about age barriers in terms of access to health and social care, but they are much more widespread than that. In many cases they are being used as explicit devices to ration access to services and public resources. In other cases, they are implicit, but just the same they are used to ration resources.

There is a much bigger challenge than the direct discrimination issues. There is the challenge of how we address indirect discrimination, such as institutional ageism. Many organisations unconsciously discriminate on the basis of age. We need to think carefully about how we address that. Many organisations fail to include older people in the development of policy and the implementation of services. In terms of health, for example, old age is equated with illness and disability. That is wrong. The majority of us will probably not need any form of long-term care. We will pass on never having had to come into contact with social care or the health care services in our later lives. There is also direct discrimination. There are age limits on screening programmes such as for breast cancer. Older people are excluded from clinical trials and have to wait longer in accident and emergency departments.

There is age discrimination in social care too. As the hon. Member for Caernarfon rightly said, assumptions are made about where it is appropriate for an older person to be cared for. We cannot generalise about the care needs of older people. People take a journey through their lives, and part of that journey may entail them being cared for in their own homes. At some point they may need to be cared for in residential care. There are discriminatory elements there too. The maximum fee levels for care homes for older people are lower than the fees that are paid for younger people in care homes. Why? That needs to be looked at critically. Why does it take someone like Rose Cottle to come to Downing street to raise those concerns about underfunding of the care home sector? The practice of limiting expenditure for home care to equate to the cost of residential care is also widespread. Placing that cap denies that person the opportunity to live as independently as they can in their own home.

The same applies in the benefits system. Older people have longer waits for the disability fund. Only 10 per cent. of older people get money from the social fund, despite being poorer, often for longer, than younger people. The mobility component of disability benefits is another serious concern. In the 1970s, for example, people under 65 who qualified for the disability component for mobility, continued to receive it once they reached that age. Someone who becomes disabled after the age of 65 is no longer eligible for the mobility component, as if it is entirely appropriate for them to be stuck indoors, unable to get out. Such forms of discrimination in public policy show that we have a widespread problem of ageist assumptions and practice that need to be addressed.

I have four questions for the Minister with regard to how we can move the agenda forward, and they are not all about legislation. First, what is being done to tackle ageism in public policy? What steps have been taken across Government to audit public policy to get to the roots of where ageism exists? Through its national service framework, the Department of Health is at least beginning to do that and may provide a template that other Departments need to follow. Is the national service framework being followed up, and if so what lessons are being learned to ensure that staff are equipped with the tools to enable them to identify and tackle ageist assumptions and practices?

Secondly, we need a change in the law because, as the hon. Member for Caernarfon identified, the voluntary terms of practice for employment have not worked. Most employers do not know that they exist and those who do are confused about what they are for. As the hon. Member for Falmouth and Camborne and my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, West (John Barrett) rightly said, however, we must go further than employment and have a comprehensive Act that deals with employment and goods and services, and places a general duty on all public bodies comprehensively to tackle age inequality and actively to promote age equality.

Thirdly, we need a mechanism to educate, inform, learn and enforce. An age equality commission is vital and I hope that the Minister will say something about that. We must avoid a situation in which age discrimination always ends up as the poor relation of all the other forms of discrimination. Can further thought be given to the time scales so that such a commission can be running, even if only in shadow form, before other changes take place? A body of skill, knowledge and experience could therefore be built up so that if and when we had a single commission, it would not be overshadowed by others that had been in place for much longer.

Fourthly, we must strengthen the evidence base. We need a series of data, the better to understand what is happening. We do not know the number of people in the work force who are past retirement age, nor do we know the differences in the experience of men and women past retirement age in respect of transport and health care. We do not have information about the interrelationship between age and ethnicity. It would be helpful if the Minister could say what research is in hand across Government to strengthen the evidence base so that there is more evidence to inform policy development.

Yesterday, I introduced a ten-minute Bill on age discrimination. The Press Association produced some copy about how it went and felt the need to describe me as "Paul Burstow (39)". My hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, West referred to that. It felt that it had to give my age, which is unnecessary and constitutes stereotyping. What on earth does a reader gain by knowing my age because I have an interest in ageism issues? It adds nothing to the piece and merely stereotypes still further.

We should be moving these issues from the margin to the main stream. I hope that the Minister will respond to my questions, because ageism is clearly a serious issue and a serious challenge for us all. It costs our economy £31 billion and it is time that we all said not only that we will no longer tolerate ageism, but that we will tackle it through legislation and concerted action across Government.

11.43 am

Mr. Philip Hammond (Runnymede and Weybridge): I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Hywel Williams) on obtaining the debate. I am

genuinely delighted that he was successful, because he drew the short straw twice in the Standing Committee that considered the Employment Bill and on Report, when he tried to raise this important issue, but fell foul of the timetabling procedures. I am glad that he has had an opportunity to elaborate on the points that he was forced to make in 90 seconds on Report. I hope to have the chance to respond more fully than I was able to then, when I had the last 15 seconds before the guillotine fell.

I am glad that the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) has clarified his status in the great age debate as someone rapidly approaching the 40 watershed. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Ms Atherton) referred to being one of the 40-somethings taking part in the debate, and the hon. Gentleman is shortly to join us.

Ms Atherton: I never referred to 40 as a watershed; I merely said what age I was. The problem with stereotypes—saying that a person is 40-something, or 30, and that it is a watershed—is that they perpetuate ageism.

Mr. Hammond: If we are to have a serious debate on the subject we must avoid political correctness for its own sake. People are interested in a person's age; it is a relevant piece of information. As I said earlier, when I read a newspaper report of a trial or criminal proceedings, knowing the age of the person involved helps me to form a mental picture of them. I want to know lots of things about them.

It is perfectly possible to address the issue of unjustified discrimination without going to the extreme of suggesting that it is always wrong, or always unjustified discrimination, to want, out of curiosity, to know a person's age. It tells me something about the person and I am not ashamed to admit that.

Mr. Burstow: Is there any other information that the hon. Gentleman would expect to have—for example, whether a person has a disability, and, if so, what it is? What does it tell him to know a person's age? What are the lessons to be learned from knowing a number?

Mr. Hammond: It depends on the circumstances. We have all sorts of information about a person if we are watching them on television because we can see them. When we read something in a newspaper we have to imagine what the person looks like and knowing how old they are helps us to build up an image of them. It is human nature to want to have that information. I shall say something about education versus legislation later.

If we set out fundamentally to change human nature it is likely to be a long haul. I hope that we do not attempt to do so as I have sensed a large degree of consensus in the debate about what needs to be done, which is relatively unusual in this place. We should exploit the benefits of that consensus and see what we can do with it, rather than trying to drive wedges between us by citing extreme examples.

It is a great pleasure to see the Minister in the Chamber; I am glad that the national minimum wage was mentioned because whenever I see the hon. Lady that subject inevitably comes into my mind. However many times I debate with her, I doubt that we shall have the pleasure of spending as many hours together as we and the hon. Member for Falmouth and Camborne did on the Standing Committee on the National Minimum Wage Bill. The debate, introduced by the hon. Member for Caernarfon, has focused on employment issues, which the hon. Gentleman raised in debates on the Employment Bill.

I was particularly pleased that the need for a flexible approach to health and social care for older people was raised. The hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam and I have discussed those important issues on many occasions. The hon. Gentleman was right to say that ageist assumptions lurk throughout the structure of society. In the late 1940s and 1950s, the age of 65 was a sort of magical marker which became institutionalised and it will take a great effort to shift it. Since then, especially in the last 20 years, the transformation in people's life expectancy and in their expectancy of a fit and active older age has made the watershed of 65 increasingly irrelevant and absurd. That is the underlying premise of the hon. Gentleman's remarks.

This debate takes place in the context of the European Union equal treatment directive and the obligation on the United Kingdom to legislate by 2006. The hon. Member for Falmouth and Camborne mentioned the distinction between primary and secondary legislation. Although 2006 is still a long time away, will the Minister confirm that there will be primary legislation to implement the directive?

The Government's preference so far has been for voluntary codes to try to achieve progress, despite the clear position set out by the right hon. Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney). As Opposition spokesman in 1996, he said categorically that an incoming Labour Government would introduce comprehensive legislation to outlaw age discrimination. The Labour party in opposition said many things that have not translated clearly and unambiguously into Government programmes, and that is certainly one example.

The Conservative party's position is clearly in favour of flexibility. I can tell the hon. Member for Caernarfon now, as I would have told him on Report had I had enough time, that the official Opposition will be supportive—

John Barrett: On the question of flexibility, should not the hon. Gentleman point out that the Conservative party's policy in Scotland, which is for long-term care for the elderly, is the exact opposite of that in England?

Mr. Hammond: I am certain that we do not have a policy in England against long-term care for the elderly. The approach of the Westminster Government is different from that of the devolved Government in Scotland with regard to the provision of so-called free long-term care for the elderly. Indeed, we have questioned the definition of free nursing care—as the Government desire to call it—on many occasions, but I suspect that we stray from the main theme of today's debate.

I should like to place on the record that we will support carefully thought out proposals to abolish blanket mandatory retirement limits in employment, so that people's individual circumstances can be properly taken into account. We believe in flexibility. It fits

[Mr. Hammond]

clearly with our core principles of flexibility in labour markets, the supremacy of the individual and a rejection of blanket, one-size-fits-all solutions.

The Government have also talked about flexibility in relation to retirement. They mention a flexible decade of retirement, but it is not clear what that entails. Perhaps the Minister will clarify the situation. Is the flexible decade from 65 to 75 or 60 to 70? Will she elaborate how the mechanics will operate in practice?

I am glad that the hon. Member for Falmouth and Camborne had an opportunity to speak this morning. The Opposition were anxious to see her Bill taken in Committee, because we could have had a genuine exploration of some of the issues needing further debate. Unfortunately, it was not to be.

There has been a good deal of consensus in the debate so far. However, legislation is always a blunt instrument. I realise that the EU directive requires legislation, so we will have it, but it does not automatically change people's attitudes. I urge the Minister to consider the educative process alongside the legislative process. The Government must be proactive in educating employers about the advantages of employing older workers and the disadvantages of an arbitrary, mandatory retirement age.

Mr. Burstow: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, although legislation might not change attitudes, it provides a mechanism for challenging them? Does he also agree that we must ensure that the legislation that is on the statute book is sufficiently comprehensive to address not only employment, but the goods and services issues?

Mr. Hammond: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. Legislation changes people's superficial attitudes. With regard to that, I offer the example of race discrimination legislation. It is relatively easy to put in place legislation that carts people off to court for overt racist behaviour, but it is much more difficult to change people's fundamental attitudes. That requires an education process—not merely the heavy hand of legislation.

I do not disagree that both approaches are needed, but I hope that the focus on legislation—and the European Union requirement for legislation—does not lead us to lose sight of the need for a parallel process of education because, particularly with regard to employers and employees in the workplace, there is a genuine win-win possibility here. To some extent, people are not exploiting that because they are not aware of it—they have not had the opportunity to understand the full possibilities that are available to them.

Ms Atherton: I am listening with great care to what the hon. Gentleman is saying. Does he agree that a commission would be able to spearhead the educative part of the process of tackling age discrimination?

Mr. Hammond: That is a responsibility of Government, and a commission is one way of achieving it. When the Minister replies, I would be interested to hear about what the Government are doing, not with regard merely to relying on future legislation, but to setting in train a process of preparing public opinion—of changing attitudes and educating people.

I return to the point that I was making. There is a job to be done in educating employers about the advantages of employing older workers. It is also important to overcome some of the stereotyping, to which several hon. Members have referred. There is also a job to be done in educating employees, by persuading them of the need continually to upskill, so that they do not inadvertently reinforce the prejudice that older workers are likely to have less relevant skills. It is clear that, as people become older, they must upskill and retrain themselves, to ensure that they have the relevant skills that are needed in the workplace throughout their working lives.

Fiscal incentives are always a good way for Government to persuade people. I notice that the Minister is smiling, and I remember that she was a Treasury Minister in the previous Administration. Nothing is as effective as a fiscal incentive in changing people's behaviour, as I am sure that she is aware. Fiscal incentives will be an important tool in ensuring extended participation in the work force, with a staged departure from it at a time that is appropriate to the individual's needs—rather than at a time that is imposed by an arbitrary limit.

I also urge the Government to lead by example. The Government are a large and, I suggest, a relatively rigid employer throughout the nation. When the Minister replies, will she describe how the Government are leading by example in addressing the question of fixed retirement limits in the public sector and other matters that have been mentioned in previous debates? As the Government are a large employer, they can lead by example on the issue, as is the case with regard to all employment-related matters. The probing of Ministers during the Standing Committee that dealt with the Employment Bill made it clear that although the Government were willing, in several areas, to lecture employers about the benefits to themselves of adopting more flexible and family-friendly employment practices, they did not always take the lesson of that lecture to heart by practising what they preached in their role as an employer.

The core of the point that the hon. Member for Caernarfon wanted to raise during consideration of the Employment Bill and today is compulsory retirement. I should be grateful if the Minister would clarify whether her interpretation of the European Union directive is that the Government would be required to outlaw blanket arbitrary and compulsory retirement at a certain age. May we address the practical concerns that would follow from that?

I hope and assume that all hon. Members agree that if people need to retire because they are no longer able to perform their role in the work force effectively, there must be a mechanism to achieve that. I argue—I am sure that all hon. Members in the Chamber agree—that a blanket age limit is a crude and ineffective way in which to achieve that. If we say that a person should not be required to retire at a certain age and we should instead examine their capability to do a job, is the Minister confident that we would not fall foul of another anti-discrimination provision? For example, if fitness and

capability to do a job were the criteria rather than age, could we fall foul of anti-disability discrimination legislation? It is important that we look across the piece at the different anti-discriminatory provisions that are in place and ensure that there will be an effective way for employers to address people who no longer have the ability to perform the function that they have performed in the work force.

Mr. Burstow: I am listening closely to the hon. Gentleman's argument. He suggests that discrimination legislation on disability is framed to give an advantage to disabled people rather than requiring reasonable adjustments to allow them to use properly the abilities that they have.

Mr. Hammond: I was raising a genuine issue of concern. Presently, we have a crude and arbitrary test of fitness to continue work that is based on an age limit. All hon. Members will agree that that is pretty irrelevant. People do not become unfit to work in a certain role when they are aged 65 and a day if they were fit to perform the role two days before. There will have to be other tests, and I foresee that problems will arise from them. Although employer organisations are becoming more receptive to the increasing unsustainability, inefficiency and ineffectiveness of a blanket age limit on retirement, they are worried about how we will deal with future issues.

The Government's consultation document raises all those issues, but it does not suggest any answers. Responses to the consultation are due by the end of March, and I hope that the Minister will accept what hon. Members have said in the debate as a response to the consultation process and take that into account.

Perhaps unwisely, I confessed to my own weakness earlier in the debate by telling the Chamber bluntly that sometimes when I read about somebody in the newspaper, I wonder why it does not give his or her age. I make a confession of the latent ageism that I suspect we all have. As I have grown older, I look at people—especially professionals such as lawyers and accountants—and think, "Good God! He can't possibly be old enough to give me legal or financial advice."

Ms Atherton: I am listening with some interest to the hon. Gentleman. If he reads about a Sam Brown or a Leslie Brown representing a person, does he know whether that person is a man or a woman? Does that flavour his judgment about the person who makes a statement?

Mr. Hammond: That depends on the context, but there are certainly times when I am interested in someone's gender, when the name does not betray it. I do not feel in any way ashamed to admit that. I think that it is natural human curiosity. I am merely telling the Committee, in all honesty, what has happened as I have grown older and become 40-something—I am actually not far from becoming 50-something now.

Ms Atherton: Another watershed.

Mr. Hammond: As I have grown older, I have started to find, inevitably, that more and more people in positions of authority with whom I deal are younger than I when once they were older than I. That is a perfectly natural experience, and I find it interesting, in the context of this debate, to examine my own reactions and instinctive prejudices. We all have those, and to pretend that we do not is not a sensible starting point for the debate. I hope that we are all mature enough to recognise that they are largely irrational and absurd, part of the conditioning that all of us 40-somethings have because we grew up in a world where people were assumed to retire at 65 and cease to be economically effective or participate in the work force from then. That is the era in which we grew up, and it will colour us.

I have probably gone on for far too long already, but I have one or two more points. Whatever people think about the moral arguments against ageism, there is clearly an unanswerable economic argument against the current mandatory retirement age. As we all live longer, it is simply not an option for us to expect to work for 30 years and then live comfortably for another 30. The country cannot afford that and we as individuals shall not be able to afford it unless we are prepared to consume a very much lower percentage of our product during our working years, and I suspect that most of us are not willing or able to do that. We all face a private challenge as we examine the huge benefits of longer life expectancy. There is also a public challenge for the state, in examining how to encourage us to remain economically active and contributing for longer periods of our lives.

I urge the Government to lead by example and to recognise that, although legislation is needed to satisfy the requirements of the EU directive, that cannot be a substitute for education. The key challenge for the Government is to educate employers and employees in the concept of a flexible approach to retirement. If we are to have a mature debate, the Government should acknowledge that all forms of discrimination are not necessarily wrong. We are here talking about unjustified and irrational discrimination.

The hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam mentioned health care, and he and I have discussed that before. There will be cases when the clinically appropriate treatment for a person differs, depending on whether they are 18 or 80. It would be a great shame if, in trying to tackle inappropriate, unjustified, irrational age discrimination, we allowed the debate to be hijacked and lost sight of the fact that there are areas and issues where discrimination on age grounds is appropriate.

The hon. Member for Caernarfon cited the car driver who could not get insurance, or was charged a large sum for it, because she was over 75. There are many other car drivers who are grateful that their car insurance premiums are very low because they are over 50 or over 55. Those differences are actuarially justified.

My party and I have an instinctive sympathy with the position set out by the hon. Member for Caernarfon, which underlines the importance of individuals and of dealing with each person's position on the basis of their individual characteristics, capabilities and needs. The arbitrary blanket retirement age is the opposite of that.

We have here a rare, genuine win-win opportunity by which employers, employees and the public purse can all benefit from a change in attitudes, which can be underpinned, but not solely brought about, by

[Mr. Hammond]

legislation. I hope that when the Minister replies she will specifically address education and the Government's role as a major employer in leading by example.

12.10 pm

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Mrs. Barbara Roche): The debate has been extremely good. I agree that the time for this issue has come. There is a great deal of public interest in it, and there is certainly a great deal of interest in the House.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Ms Atherton) said, the conference held yesterday by Help the Aged and the Independent Television Commission enabled us to consider in more detail the representation of older people in the media.

The hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) talked about general education, which is very important. I am pleased to see him opposite me again because our paths have not crossed since those heady days on the National Minimum Wage Bill. Indeed, there were heady nights as well; we spent not only days but nights on that Bill. We set the record, which was about 36 hours, for the longest sitting in Standing Committee. You will be relieved to know, Mr. Taylor, that given the limits of Westminster Hall I do not intend to repeat that today.

It is clear that unfair discrimination on the grounds of age is not tolerable. We need to counter the unthinking prejudice that blights not only people's lives, but our economy. Older people are a major and growing section of the population, and we need their skills, talents and contributions if we are to create a successful society and economy. Although it is right to say that the over-50s suffer most from age discrimination, it is not the exclusive province of older people. Younger people also experience ageist practices, as the hon. Member for Edinburgh, West (John Barrett) pointed out. We have all heard, for example, about whiz kids doing well in the City, but we have also heard about people who cannot get jobs in IT because they are over the hill at 30. The hon. Gentleman referred to training and to the need to keep skills up to date. Much of the research actually shows that older workers are the most assiduous in following modern technology and practices, and in making sure that their skills are competitive.

There has been a great deal of discussion today on the question of whether ageist employers miss out on the skills and experience of a diverse work force. Reference has already been made to the fact that the estimated cost of that is £31 billion according to the Employers Forum on Age publication "Ageism: too costly to ignore". The Cabinet Office report "Winning the Generation Game" discusses similarly large sums of money.

The Government are determined to tackle discrimination against older people. We are taking action for older people right across Government through legislation outlawing age discrimination for the first time, and in the Age Positive campaign initiated by the Department for Work and Pensions, the new deal 50-plus and the Department of Health's national framework for older people. Through our Age Positive campaign we are challenging ageist employment practices, and I shall speak about that legislation in a moment.

Many employers are already committed to employing a diverse work force. As champion employers, they have shared their experience of good practice along the lines suggested by the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge. There is good practice out there, and those employers who have good policies implement them not only because they are nice people, but because to do so makes economic sense and gives them a competitive advantage. Those employers are astute.

Through the new deals we are helping older people to find work. For the past four years the employment rate for the over-50s has increased faster than the overall employment rate. During the first 21 months of the new deal 50-plus, more than 61,000 people have been helped through the programme. That is a tremendous number of people.

Ms Atherton: Is my hon. Friend aware that even people who have found employment through the new deal are turfed out on certain dates because the employer or voluntary organisation to which they are offering their services cannot obtain insurance cover for employment or work undertaken in a voluntary capacity? If that barrier in the goods and services insurance industry is not tackled, there will never be a resolution to the problem.

Mrs. Roche: I know that my hon. Friend feels strongly about the matter. I understand why and will deal with it in a moment.

On education, learning can play a major contribution in helping older people to fight discrimination by giving them the confidence and skills they need to compete for interesting and rewarding employment.

I turn to the important matter raised by the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Hywel Williams), whom I congratulate on securing the debate, and by the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow)—health and social care. The national service framework directly addresses age discrimination against older people in accessing NHS or social care services. It sets out, for the first time, national standards for the care of older people and will ensure that older people are not unfairly discriminated against when accessing NHS or social care services because of their age. Action plans are being drawn up to deal with any unfair policies that have been identified as age based. Ageism is intolerable and NHS treatment should be based on clinical need, not age. We cannot say that too often because it is important to get that message across.

Age discrimination in the workplace has been the focus of much of our discussion. Too often in the past, older workers have been written off although they have much to offer. Nearly 70 per cent. of people between 50 and state pension age are in employment, but for the remaining 30 per cent. finding and retaining suitable employment can be a serious problem. We welcomed the employment directive because it is important in ensuring equal opportunities for all workers in this country and elsewhere in the European Union. However, legislating against age discrimination is not simple. The House knows that article 13 of the directive introduces some new strands.

Mr. Hammond: Can the Minister tell me what has changed since 1996 when her right hon. Friend the

Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney), now the Minister for Pensions, said that an incoming Labour Government would introduce comprehensive legislation outlawing age discrimination? She is now saying that it is not so simple.

Mrs. Roche: There has been no change. We are absolutely committed to implementing the directive, which is what we shall do. Our consultation document highlighted some complexities and I shall deal with them now.

Legislating against age discrimination is not simple. Complex and sensitive problems must be resolved so that the eventual legislation is practical and helpful to employers and employees. For example, the directive recognises that differences of treatment are sometimes justified on the ground of age. The challenge for implementation is thus to identify which differences of treatment are acceptable, and which are not. That means that we must carefully consider the response to the consultation.

The consultation will be in two stages. The current consultation on equality and diversity seeks views on several broad issues. We want to discover what people think about mandatory retirement ages. That issue was raised by the hon. Member for Caernarfon who initiated the debate. With regard to justifications, we aim to find out what practices employers have, why they need them and why they need to retain them. The consultation finishes at the end of the month. We will then develop specific proposals in the light of the responses to it, and consult on them later in the year.

Mr. Hammond: While the Minister waits for responses to the consultation, what has she done to examine the way in which the Government treat their employees, and their view on mandatory retirement ages, especially in the civil service?

Mrs. Roche: The hon. Gentleman is more impatient than I remembered. He will have an answer if he can just contain himself a little.

Mr. Hammond: That is what Ministers always say when they are about to run out of time.

Mrs. Roche: I will return to that issue, if the hon. Gentleman can just contain himself.

The hon. Member for Caernarfon was concerned about the rights of older workers and the upper age limit for unfair dismissal in the Employment Rights Act 1996, as his amendment to the Employment Bill showed. We will consider that as part of our overall approach to the implementation of the directive.

There have been several questions about goods and services. On Second Reading of her private Member's Bill, my hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne eloquently drew attention to the difficulties that some older workers experience. There should, of course, be no identifiable differentiation in the provision of financial services or credit. The banking code is voluntary, but it is followed by almost everyone in the banking industry; it includes undertakings on non-discrimination. However, the directive applies only to employment and training, which is a major step in itself.

We must resolve several issues before we can introduce the legislation, and it would not be sensible to be distracted at this stage by the further complexities that legislation on goods and services would pose. For example, should we outlaw 18 to 30 holidays because they are ageist? Should concessionary travel continue to be available to pensioners? What about other concessions, such as the television licence?

Demographic and economic factors will provide powerful incentives for shops and service providers to change their practices towards older customers. I use the phrase "demographic factors" positively, not as the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam used it.

Mr. Burstow: Will the Minister at least reflect on the fact that there is rarely an opportunity for primary legislation, and that it would be a loss to pass up the opportunity to legislate on goods and services when the Government are legislating on employment?

Mrs. Roche: I will, of course, listen to what hon. Members have to say, as the House expects me to. However, I do not want people to underestimate the number of difficult and complex issues that we will have to resolve if we are to implement the legislation to which we are committed. That is our priority.

Hon. Members referred to an age commission. We are determined to put in place effective arrangements for advice, support and guidance for individuals and employers. Those will cover all the new discrimination strands in the directive—age, sexual orientation and religion. It is not clear that an age commission is the best way to proceed, and such a course could raise questions about cost-effectiveness and overall coherence. It is essential that the Government study the issue in the round, and it does not make sense to establish new single-issue arrangements before we have thoroughly considered the strategic and practical issues for all the new strands. It is important that we take the issue forward in that way.

The hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam asked about research, and officials at the Department of Trade and Industry are working with officials at the Department for Work and Pensions. DWP officials also work on the Age Positive campaign, which is led by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Pensions, and on commissioning research. I agree that it is important that we do that.

The hon. Gentleman also asked about tackling ageism in public policy. I take his point that we must look at the issue throughout the Government. The Cabinet sub-Committee on older people, which is chaired by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, is taking a close and active look at age issues across Government policies. It is also examining the Government's role as an employer, and the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge is right that the Government should act as an exemplar on the issue.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the flexible decade of retirement. The current consultation seeks general views on the retirement age, and we shall consult on specific proposals later in the year.

The hon. Gentleman asked how we would incorporate the policy strands. The document said that we aimed to prepare separate items of legislation for

[Mrs. Roche]

each strand and to use regulations under section 2(2) of the European Communities Act 1972 to implement the directives where possible.

As regards the Government acting as an exemplar, the Cabinet Secretary has written to permanent secretaries about the need for the civil service to ensure that it takes that role seriously.

The hon. Gentleman asked about mandatory retirement ages. There is, of course, no legal retirement age, and employers are responsible for setting the retirement age for their employees. Through the document, we are consulting on whether there should be mandatory retirement ages. It is probably one of the most complex issues in the document and in the consultation process.

The process of developing legislation to outlaw age discrimination at work is nearing the end of its first stage as the consultation exercise draws to a close, and I look forward to considering the responses. That is why this debate, which was initiated by the hon. Member for Caernarfon, is timely. I undertake to ensure that I take account of the comments that have been made. I also look forward to consulting on the specific proposals later this year.

These are important issues, and this has been an extremely good debate. I look forward to working with hon. Members to take the agenda forward.

Car-jacking

12.30 pm

Mr. Tom Watson (West Bromwich, East): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise the issue of car-jacking for what I believe is the first time in this House. May I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to pass on my congratulations and regards to the Prime Minister, who has pre-empted this debate and has set up a street crime and car-jacking taskforce to deal with the problems that I shall outline?

I hope that the taskforce will consider not only car-jacking but new measures to tackle the junior criminals who move from bullying in the classroom to taking part in antisocial behaviour on street corners. In West Bromwich, East, my neighbours are driven to misery by teenagers who create mayhem late at night. Although they conduct relatively minor acts of antisocial behaviour, they belong to the generation that can graduate to street crime and violent car-jacking. I hope that addressing persistent and defiant behaviour in very young people will be a core goal of the taskforce.

The Government have worked closely with the car industry in the past couple of years and have successfully introduced new security measures in vehicles. However, we now see the flip side of that. At the end of January, the violent stabbing to death of 25-year-old Timothy Robinson outside his home by a gang of suspected car-jackers brought this new crime to the attention of the public. Thieves often target motorists who have items on their passenger seats, such as a handbag or laptop computer, and in nearly all cases they strike when the vehicle is stationary at traffic lights. A common tactic is to force minor collisions and then to ambush motorists when they approach them to exchange insurance information. The most public case happened when Gloria Hamilton, a 41-year-old mother of three, was knocked unconscious by a gang of thieves who stole her vehicle in south London. While all motorists who are involved in accidents should report and pass on their details to the police, this kind of crime has prompted the RAC Foundation, on whose policy committee I sit, to encourage motorists to go directly to a police station if they are uncomfortable about a minor collision.

Because the crime is classed as robbery under UK law, few statistics exist on the extent of the phenomenon. Metropolitan police figures suggest that 1,200 car-jacking style crimes took place in London last year.

Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside): Is my hon. Friend aware of an incident in Cardiff earlier this week in which a young man who stopped to answer his mobile phone was set upon by a gang of youths, who kidnapped him and took him for a hair-raising drive before stealing all the money that he had on him and taking his CD player? Car-jacking is often seen as a London crime—it is not; it is spreading to all parts of the country and we must address it in that light.

Mr. Watson: I thank my hon. Friend for bringing that point to my attention. Car-jacking is not countrywide but, like street crime, it has hot spots. There are certainly some in my region, the west midlands, and there are others in Salford, Bradford and West Yorkshire. Last

week, a particularly savage attack on a young driver that took place just outside my constituency made the front page of the *Great Barr Observer*. In that case, the man was violently pulled over to the kerbside and attacked by two men who punched him to the ground and then stole his vehicle.

Many examples of such attacks in the west midlands illustrate the growing problem. In one case, a female motorist—female motorists are often targeted—was parking her BMW in her front drive. A man approached the car to ask her the time and she was assaulted with an iron bar and viciously dragged from her car. Luckily, the car was fitted with a tracker device and, although she was injured, the police were able to retrieve the car about eight miles from the incident and arrest the man. Will my hon. Friend consider how new technology might combat that crime? Will he tell the House how the Home Office pilot scheme in Northampton—the automatic number plate identification scheme—is progressing? It might deter further developments in that crime.

Although car-jacking is a relatively new phenomenon in the United Kingdom, it is far from new in other parts of the world. South Africa has suffered the crime since the mid-1970s. Until 1986, car-jackings were recorded as robberies, but the South African Government changed the law in 1986 to allow the specific offence of car-jacking. I am not saying that the problem is as bad in the UK as it is in South Africa, but a number of lessons could be learned from the way in which other countries deal with the crime. The number of violent car-jackings in South Africa has escalated to a horrific extent. Two years ago, more than 12,000 incidents took place; through the greater use of hit squads to target crime hot spots, that number has been reduced by 1,000 during the past 12 months.

I hope that my hon. Friend will consider introducing a new specific offence of car-jacking. It is my strong view that harsh and stern penalties should be imposed that truly reflect the terrifying and violent nature of the crime. We need to send to those dangerous and violent criminals the clear message that, when caught, they will go to jail for a long time. Introducing a specific crime of car-jacking with harsh minimum tariffs would also ensure that criminals who took part in that activity would not be let off as a result of legal ambiguities.

I refer my hon. Friend to some rather contradictory statements made by Lord Woolf during the past few months. In early January, he said that mobile phone muggers should be sent to prison for up to five years—I strongly agree with that sentiment, as do many of my constituents. Only two months later, on 6 March, *The Guardian* reported him as saying that the courts should think twice about sending criminals to jail. I want to make sure that when car-jackers are found guilty, the judges have no choice but to send them to jail. If the Government decide that that is not appropriate now, will they at least put pressure on police forces throughout the United Kingdom to record car-jackings and smash-and-grab attacks separately from robberies? With accurate statistics, we can properly assess the true extent of the crime.

The RAC Foundation is concerned that insurance companies have refused, or tried to refuse, to pay out money to motorists involved in car-jackings when the vehicle is stolen. Clearly, we cannot let that continue. The majority of car insurance policies say in the small print that claims are invalid if the key was left in the ignition or if the car was not locked. The Association of British Insurers said that insurance companies should always pay out on claims made as a result of car-jacking attacks, and I sincerely hope that all insurance companies will follow that sensitive approach. It will add insult to injury if those companies use the small print to shirk their responsibilities. In his deliberations with the insurance industry, could the Minister ask insurers to make a public statement to reassure car drivers that they will be able to achieve at least some recompense if they are victims of attacks?

In the Minister's discussions with police authorities, will he consider the possibility of issuing guidelines to drivers on how to avoid becoming victims of car-jacking attacks? The RAC Foundation has responded to this public information issue in its PR and marketing. It has issued helpful guidelines to its members and motorists in general, saying that thieves will be more tempted to target a vehicle if goods are visible, so drivers should ensure that valuables are not left on the passenger seat or dashboard when travelling. The RAC Foundation also says that car-jacking gangs are more likely to target motorists who seem unsure where they are going—when they look at maps at traffic lights, for example.

Such guidelines as planning a route before travelling should be handed down by a police authority. They should be a police force responsibility, not simply left to the motoring organisations, because they are an important part of crime prevention. I hope that the Chancellor's Budget will include greater funding for police forces, and I know that the Minister will be negotiating behind the scenes on that matter. When the Budget is known, some money should be spared for public campaigns, as they do so much to reduce crime. As everyone knows, crime prevention is better than law enforcement.

I welcome the opportunity to raise this matter in the House for the first time. It is of great concern to my constituents and of increasing national concern. I look forward to the Minister's comments.

12.42 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Bob Ainsworth): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Watson) on securing the debate on an issue that relates to not only his constituents but people throughout the country. The Government share his concerns about this despicable crime. We need to be as tough and effective on car-jacking as we have been on tackling other vehicle crime offences.

Some terrible incidents have been reported in recent weeks, and we extend our sympathies to the victims of those crimes. The incident in Cardiff has been mentioned, but others have occurred throughout the country. The victims are not only the people involved in the incidents, but those who are instilled with the fear that the same thing might happen to them. My hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mark Tami) is right in saying that the issue is not simply London based, as it is a problem in areas such as the west midlands and most other conurbations. We are determined to reduce violent crime by pursuing a concerted strategy of targeted policing, effective

[Mr. Bob Ainsworth]

punishment and tackling the underlying conditions that breed violence. I welcome the opportunity to describe our strategies. The increase in violent theft of cars and burglaries in which car keys are stolen is possibly a result of the increased security for new vehicles that follows Government pressure on manufacturers to make cars more difficult to steal. The publication of the Home Office car theft index has helped to raise awareness of car security issues among motorists and encouraged manufacturers to raise standards continually. It is massively unfortunate that so-called "car-jacking" stems in part from our success, in that criminals have been forced to resort to more violent means of stealing vehicles. I do not underestimate the task ahead. We must deal with the issue, as my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, East made clear, and we shall certainly do so.

My hon. Friend raised the subject of personal safety and some action that motorists could take. The Home Office has published a leaflet, "Your Practical Guide to Crime Prevention", which we intend to make available on our website. I shall ask officials to check that some of the advice that my hon. Friend mentioned is covered adequately in that guidance, as he was right to say that we could not class the issue simply with motoring offences. There is a role for the Government and the Home Office in ensuring that guidance is as comprehensive and effective as possible.

We support the use of tracking devices in high-performance and expensive vehicles, but recognise that in some cases those are beyond the means of the majority of motorists, especially those who drive older models of cars. An average price for the installation of a tracking device is about £400, and then an annual subscription must be paid. However, they are playing a part in discouraging vehicle crime.

My hon. Friend was right to point out that the police do not record car-jacking as a separate offence, nor is there a legal offence category of car-jacking. When there is a threat or use of actual violence, the offence is robbery, which carries a maximum penalty of life. He said that, in terms of the criminal justice system and sentencing, a separate offence of car-jacking was necessary. I am not convinced of that, as the problem has so many manifestations and different levels, as in other cases of robbery. I am broadly satisfied that the framework is adequate for the purposes of sentencing.

The other issue to which my hon. Friend alluded was that of reporting and whether, without a specific sentence, we have an adequate and accurate method of measuring the size and geographical spread of the problem. That point is well worth considering, so I give him a commitment that I shall consider it. Although we have statistics, we are not confident that they properly cover the size of the problem or measure the severity of individual instances. Sentencing capability is covered, but the issue of reporting is worth further examination.

It is important that the courts then treat the offences with the seriousness that they deserve. The Lord Chief Justice recently emphasised their seriousness when he gave a judgment on several cases that involved robbery of mobile phones from young people. One such offender received a six-year custodial sentence, and three young men convicted of car-jacking recently received custodial sentences of up to four and a half years.

The Lord Chief Justice's view accords with that of the Government, which is that those who prey on the vulnerable using violence or the threat of violence should expect a commensurate sentence. He is perfectly capable of defending himself. My hon. Friend said that there were contradictions in what he said, but I do not think that the Lord Chief Justice tried to suggest that custodial sentences were inappropriate in cases of robbery, especially the aggravated robberies and more serious car-jacking offences that have been highlighted in the press of late, to which my hon. Friend referred. We believe that the sentencing framework needs to be adequate and the courts need to take the matter seriously and respond appropriately to the severity of the crime. I hope that the comments of the Lord Chief Justice encourage that; we agree with them.

My hon. Friend alluded to the announcement by the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary this morning. We have made it clear that the whole of Government as well as other agencies should give the highest priority to tackling robbery and dealing quickly and effectively with offenders. Additional funds of £20 million have already been committed to tackling the robbery problem in the five forces with the greatest problem, including the West Midlands police force, which received an additional £3.3 million and has set a target of reducing robbery by 34.1 per cent. by March 2004.

The subject discussed this morning was stepping up action to deal with robbery. The robbery reduction initiative announced by the Home Secretary over the weekend involves a clampdown on all street crime, which of course includes the specific issue of car-jacking that my hon. Friend has raised. My hon. Friend will probably agree that knowing that one will be caught must be the biggest deterrent, particularly if that prospect is supported by an appropriate punishment regime. We must reclaim our streets for decent, law-abiding citizens, who want no more than to be able to walk or drive safely, to live peacefully and to go about their business freely and untroubled by the fear of attack.

The Prime Minister chaired the first meeting of the new cross-departmental street crime action group this morning. It is drawing together all the resources, expertise and initiative of Government Departments and all the relevant agencies, in a concerted effort to attack the problem. This morning's announcement contained five main strands relating to the police and criminal justice system. The police should step up operations against robbery by targeting hot spots—an issue on which I am encouraged by what my hon. Friend has said—making more arrests and ensuring that evidence is brought to bear swiftly and systematically to enable early charges to be laid; the Crown Prosecution Service should step up the priority that it gives to robbery case preparation, fast-tracking cases, deploying top-quality lawyers and working closely with the police.

The courts need to give priority to robbery cases, if necessary introducing extra sittings to deal with the increased work load that will arise from the initiative. Youth offending teams need to give priority to the work on robbery cases, including the preparation of pre-sentencing reports. The Prison Service and probation

service will need plans to deal with what we hope, sadly, will be an increase in the number of robbery offenders to be brought to justice, who could be given prison sentences.

My hon. Friend rightly said that the matter needs to be tackled more widely than by the police and criminal justice systems, so I think that he will be happy to learn that a leading contribution to this morning's announcement was made by the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, who has been considering what schools can do to help to identify problems and to take early action. An example might be supporting the police in truancy sweeps. My hon. Friend mentioned the way in which young people become involved in minor criminality, which, if left unchecked, leads inevitably to the more serious consequences that he has identified.

We intend that the initiative announced this morning will at first apply to the 10 police areas with the greatest robbery problem. That includes the West Midlands police because, as I have said, the increase in robbery and the problem of car-jacking is sadly not just a London issue, but exists far outside the capital. Then we intend to try to spread the good practice that is learned in the initiatives to other forces beyond the 10 that are initially targeted. Furthermore, we shall bring together the other agencies across government who can work together to support the police in tackling the problem and its causes. We must not forget that the whole community has a responsibility to work with the police and help them in their task.

West Midlands police are well aware of the public's concerns about car-jacking. In common with other forces, they are dealing with it as part of their wider anti-robbery strategy, to which the robbery reduction initiative provides added stimulus. The problem is being given the high priority that it deserves. I am told that West Midlands police intend to enhance their strategy by adopting intelligence-led policing, which targets the offenders in all robberies. I hope that that means that the national intelligence model will be introduced throughout the West Midlands police service. West midlands Members will want to make sure that it is introduced, because there is much to be gained from encouraging all our police services to adopt the national intelligence model, although I know that many police forces have not been able to do so to date.

My hon. Friend talked about how technology can assist us in that regard. I know that, as a result of his association with motoring organisations, he is aware of the pilot scheme in Northampton on automatic number plate recognition. We need to look into the benefits of such a scheme. Criminals of all kinds need to use the roads and their vehicles to go about their criminal activities, so there are great benefits to be gained from automatic number plate recognition in dealing with car-jacking as well as other crime. That information needs to be fed into the robbery initiative, and I shall ensure that that happens.

We must do better at learning from international lessons. Some of the ideas that we try to put to good effect in this country have been learnt from other jurisdictions. We must do better in learning from the problems of other countries.

Crucially, we must not forget, especially if we want the community to support the police, that there is a victim in every car-jacking. We are fully committed to providing a better deal for victims of crime and ensuring that they receive the support that they deserve. A major plank of our programme to support victims is provided by the voluntary organisation Victim Support. Since May 1997, we have doubled our grant to Victim Support, and I am pleased to say that, as part of the robbery reduction initiative, we will see whether we can do even more to support victims and witnesses in those terrible crimes. It is not only important to support victims because their circumstances mean that they need support; victims are often the best people to help us to bring criminals to justice by acting as witnesses. The British public will help the police to do their job and help the criminal justice system to bring people to book only if their confidence in the police enables them to come forward to act as witnesses without fear of further victimisation. Therefore, there is a double benefit to any assistance that we can give victims, because not only do we help vulnerable people who have been victimised by crime—an end in itself—but we build the confidence of the community so that people will work with the police to reduce crime levels.

I welcome the opportunity that this debate has given us to talk about car-jacking. It is a problem that is closely associated with the recent increase in robbery and street crime. I hope that hon. Members will accept that the Government are taking the issue seriously. We are doing everything that we can to support the police and the courts in bringing the situation under control and to ensure that people are again confident to walk the streets in safety.

Solihull Hospital

1 pm

Mr. John Taylor (Solihull): I am grateful to the Under-Secretary of State for Health for taking this debate. I respect her and her office. I come with an all-party mandate from Solihull and, whereas there may be the odd political remark in what I am going to say, I have no party political axe to grind either now or in any subsequent developments. If she can help my constituents we will all be grateful to her. That is the spirit in which I approach this debate. At a recent meeting in Solihull involving all political parties we agreed that we are all in this together. In the same spirit, I acknowledge the presence of my hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) and the hon. Member for Birmingham, Hall Green (Mr. McCabe), who has wished me well in this debate.

The great, and so far unhappy, saga of Solihull hospital began for me in my earliest years in the House when, with many others, I pressed the case for what we then hoped would be a new district general hospital for Solihull. The regional health authority, as it then was, proved receptive and a splendid new hospital building costing £38 million was ultimately erected and opened in June 1994. We rejoiced—but later in 1994 the hospital applied unsuccessfully for trust status. That was not in itself a decisive alarm, but by the end of 1994 I was privately alerted to the fact that all was not well.

The origin of whatever miscalculations had been made may well lie in the NHS planning of the 1980s, which had anticipated that one of the five principal hospitals in Birmingham would close and a district general hospital in Solihull, to the east of the city, could well be justified, not least in the light of Solihull's expanding population and expanding economy. In the event, there was no such hospital closure in Birmingham.

I have documented the litany of events between 1995 and March 1997, but I will not recite it here in the limited time available to me in an Adjournment debate. March 1997 is, however, a significant date in that it was marked by a statement by the then Minister for Health pledging the future security of services at Solihull hospital, in particular accident and emergency services. I have given the current Minister a copy of that pledge.

Two months later I was to become, involuntarily, a member of the Opposition, following an election in which the Minister's party promised that it would do much better in health matters than my party had managed to do. It may surprise the House to know that I was prepared to believe that it might indeed do so. The economy was strong and it was in a position to make a fresh start with an overwhelming majority and an unchallengeable mandate. There was also a feeling, or mood, that health services might become more consumer led and less consultant or administrator led, and—a welcome thought—that decision making would be more local.

However, the uncertainties at Solihull hospital would not go away, although for a time they were counter-balanced by optimism, and there was a period of abeyance that seemed to me to persist, though uneasily, until last year. There were recurrent assertions in accident and emergency that throughput figures in Solihull did not justify a comprehensive 24-hour service. However, many of us found those contentions bogus and unconvincing, as ambulance crews were instructed to exercise a preference to take accident and emergency patients to Birmingham Heartlands hospital. In that case, the statistics would be inevitable and self-fulfilling.

I could waste the whole half hour if I repeated all the questions that I raised during the period—1995 to the present—that I am reviewing. However, neither the Library nor I can find the date of one question that I raised. It may not have passed muster with the Table Office. The question was about accident and emergency provision and is still pertinent. Should difficulties in staff recruitment be a valid determinant in establishing levels of service?

Whether or not that question was included on the Order Paper, it addressed another seemingly bogus argument with which we had to deal—that one could not provide the service because one could not get the staff. That too was self-fulfilling in its own way. We argued that it was surely the job of those in charge to address that argument the other way round. It should be their responsibility to ensure that the staff provide the service.

The next vexingly unconvincing argument was similar. Some greatly respected consultant would take a critical view of facilities or the level of staffing and pronounce that the situation was clinically unsafe. No one would quarrel with that, for understandable reasons. That judgment is potentially final. Our frustrated response to that would be, "Make it safe."

That is the background. I have endeavoured in this small compass to try at least to depict, if not re-create, the mood of uncertainty that attended the discussion of the security, or insecurity, of services at Solihull hospital, and the sort of arguments with which we had to contend, with mixed feelings of hope and exasperation.

Some things are clear. The population of Solihull is 205,000, but the daytime population is much greater. Solihull ceased to be a commuter town long ago. Approximately 9,000 people work at Land Rover. Solihull is a huge retail attraction, not least following its new Touchwood shopping centre with its many employees and its many shoppers from outside Solihull. It is estimated that on average, 60,000 shoppers visit it each day, and that 8 million have visited it since last September. Such is the prestige of Touchwood that Her Majesty the Queen will formally open it later this year.

Solihull's population growth is generated by new housing development mainly in the south of the borough, the area that is most naturally served by the hospital. There is an enormous amount of traffic on the M42 within a mile of the hospital. The M42 in Solihull is, in effect, a confluence of the M6, M40, M5, M45 and M69 motorways and the Birmingham northern relief road. Although I do not want to depict it as a hazard, I must add that Solihull also has a rapidly expanding airport—Birmingham International airport. It employs 6,500 people on site and had a throughput of 7.6 million passengers last calendar year, despite the events of 11 September. The National Exhibition Centre is also in Solihull and attracts further large numbers to the borough—to visit Cruft's dog show, for example, or the motor show. All that is visible, patent and obvious.

Furthermore, Solihull expects 30,000 new jobs to be created in the south of the borough in the next eight years.

I hinted that I did not wish to tempt providence by anticipating a disaster in Solihull, but it could happen. Could Solihull cope? It is obvious to me, as their parliamentary representative, that my constituents should demand an appropriate hospital that includes a comprehensive accident and emergency service. They feel that they have earned and paid for one.

A new strategic health authority will be in place from 1 April, although it may not be fully fledged until October. That much we know, but real and poignant uncertainties surround the future. We are told that there will be a consultation on the range of services to be provided at Solihull hospital, with an emphasis on examining A and E provision. We are told that there would have been little point in the outgoing health authority setting that consultation in train, and that the new strategic health authority will start the consultation process when it is in place—but will it also assess the results?

Who makes decisions about the consultation process—the Minister, or someone, some body or some institution that has the Minister's authority? What is the role of the primary care trust in that context? We need clarity. What will be the terms of the consultation? By what criteria will its findings be measured and judged? Who will decide? Is it ultimately a matter for the Secretary of State? Above all, what is the future of accident and emergency provision in Solihull?

At the moment, we have patients waiting in ambulances and plenty of first-hand accounts of utterly unacceptable waiting times. The overwhelming majority of people in Solihull are law-abiding taxpayers who have normal fears and apprehensions about illness and injury. They want certainty that a good efficient hospital will be there for them in Solihull should they need it. I hope that the Minister will reassure us about that, and I will give her the credit if she does.

My hon. Friend the Member for Meriden will now share the debate with me.

1.13 pm

Mrs. Caroline Spelman (Meriden): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Solihull (Mr. Taylor) for giving me a small share of his time, and I will confine myself to asking specific questions. Does the Minister accept that any downgrading of accident and emergency provision at Solihull hospital will be seen by the people of Solihull as a broken promise? If the previous hospital management secured an agreement with the royal colleges that doctors could safely be rotated between Birmingham Heartlands and Solihull hospitals, what has changed?

I endorse my hon. Friend's view that an inability to staff the A and E department is a poor reason to close it. That is a supply-driven argument that does not reflect the true demand or wishes of the people. The Minister may say that the matter is local and should be decided locally, but does she accept that a perfectly reasonable local solution is under threat? It takes 38 minutes to get from the border of my constituency to Heartlands A and E at off-peak times. Does the Minister regard that as an acceptable journey time in the event of an emergency? What is the Government's overall strategy for national accident and emergency services? Solihull hospital, together with five other hospitals throughout the country, faces the closure of its accident and emergency department.

Is the Minister aware of the editorial in the *British Medical Journal* of 4 August last year? It said that the Royal College of Physicians and the NHS Confederation had together announced a working group to rethink accident and emergency provisions. The editor wrote that the preferred model would place accident and emergency departments within 10 minutes reach of those who need them.

1.15 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Hazel Blears): I congratulate the hon. Member for Solihull (Mr. Taylor) on securing this important debate. Primarily, it raises issues about Solihull, but it also touches on broader issues about accident and emergency departments. I thank him personally for giving me notice of the issues that he intended to raise. If Ministers can respond to specific points rather than talking generally, it makes for a more focused debate.

The hon. Gentleman has a keen interest in the services that Solihull hospital provides. He has tabled parliamentary questions about it on several occasions, and he is keen to ensure that the highest possible standard of health service is available to his constituents. I assure him that the Government, too, are committed to ensuring that local people get services of the highest possible quality, and we want to provide services that are as close to people's homes as possible. Obviously, that is consequent on safety and viability, but striking the right balance between local access and high-quality services has always been a tension in the national health service, and we all continue to grapple with it.

At the outset, I acknowledge that local people want accident and emergency services to be as close to their homes as possible. The hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) quoted a journey time of 38 minutes, and the working group is examining a period of 10 minutes. People want access, but we must acknowledge that they also want extremely high quality. It is not easy to achieve consensus; that requires much local consultation and discussion on the detail of local services.

Mr. Stephen McCabe (Birmingham, Hall Green): I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend for permitting me to intervene. She knows that my constituents use some of the facilities at Solihull hospital, and they want two assurances from her. First, will she give a categorical assurance that there is no threat to Solihull hospital? Secondly, will she assure me that any changes that the trust contemplates will be subject to a full, transparent and above-board consultation process?

Ms Blears: I am delighted to give my hon. Friend those assurances. The Government, the health authority and the community see a vibrant future for Solihull hospital. Any changes to the services will be subject to the same rigour that has always been required. If there is a requirement for public consultation, it will be open, transparent and inclusive.

[Ms Blears]

We want to make the consultation process more real to local people. Instead of presenting local people with a fait accompli, we want to get them involved in drawing up options at the outset. That will allow them to be part of the decision-making process. In the past, local people felt that they entered the process right at the end, and if they had not had the chance to influence policy making at the outset, they were often forced into a position of opposition and defending a situation. We want that change to be introduced.

The hon. Member for Solihull set out the background of the hospital and trust. He was right that the merger with Birmingham Heartlands hospital in April 1996 brought financial and managerial stability to Solihull hospital. Savings were made at that time, such as efficiency savings that managed to turn the financial situation around, and the merger was beneficial. Since then, there have been several dramatic new service developments in areas such as renal dialysis, ophthalmology, oncology and dermatology. Activity levels at the hospital have increased year on year. The trust is performing very well with regard to waiting times. It has been successful with the fourth wave booked admissions bid, which means that patients will be able to book their admissions at a time that is convenient to them. I hope that that will lead to a significant reduction in appointments that are not kept, which means that we will save money, which can be invested in services.

There have been several improvements to the physical environment, including better facilities for obstetrics, gynaecology, day surgery and endoscopy, as well as MRI and CT scanning, dermatology, the out-patients department, pre-operative assessment, and the mortuary facility. That goes to show that there has been significant investment in the hospital, so that it can provide a wide range of services for local people.

Some of the investments resulted from Government expenditure, some from efficiencies as a consequence of the merger, and some from publicly raised funds. It is also the case that much of the progress has been made because of the hard work of the trust's staff, and we should acknowledge their contribution.

Since the merger, there has been no major change to the A and E service but the trust has long expressed concerns about the clinical safety of maintaining a 24-hour A&E department at the hospital. The removal of training accreditation from certain posts has contributed to recruitment difficulties, and concern has also been expressed about the case mix of patients who are presenting at the hospital, which is of relevance to the training of doctors. The relevant factors include the supply of doctors, their training needs and their working practices. I am sure that hon. Members will agree that all of those are essential to the delivery of high-quality health care.

Clinical quality requires a minimum work load, so that doctors can build up experience. In an acute hospital without a minimum work load, doctors cannot be properly trained and senior doctors cannot maintain the expertise that they need to ensure the best treatment and care for patients. That situation has been developing for a long time, and it involves two issues: accessibility, which local people greatly value, and the pressure towards greater specialisation, which is advocated in particular by some of the royal colleges.

Therefore, there is tension in that situation, and I am delighted that extra attention is now being paid to looking at the future of A and E services, by examining, for instance, whether we can use new technology such as tele-medicine. It is important to take a fresh look at how we provide A and E services, to see whether we can provide as much as possible in local communities, while maintaining a balance by continuing to provide excellence. Most people accept that it is not possible to have top-quality specialist care on everybody's doorstep; that is common sense. Therefore, getting that balance right is a key issue. We must look afresh at emergency care.

As hon. Members may be aware, in November 2001, we published a document called "Reforming Emergency Care: First Steps to a New Approach". It was worked on by all of the royal colleges, nurses, consultants, paramedics, the ambulance service—by everyone who is employed in emergency care. The document sets out a new strategy for joining up all of the elements of emergency care, because the issue is not only about A and E departments; it is about primary care. It is about whether people who currently come to A and E departments could be dealt with more appropriately, and faster and better, by primary care, community mental health units and a range of other partners. It is also about whether we can use the ambulance service more effectively. One ambulance service is sending consultants out in their vehicles, which enables them to make rapid decisions about diagnosis and admissions in patients' homes. As a result, emergency admissions to A and E departments are falling dramatically.

The issue is also about joining up walk-in centres, and joining up NHS Direct so that it can take some of the telephone calls that are currently made to A and E departments. We are planning for every health community to appoint an emergency care leader, who can try to join together all of the parts of the network. A great deal of innovation is going on in terms of looking at the future of A and E departments, and I urge hon. Members to get involved in that endeavour.

The issue is also about reform and changing the way that we do things. The Government intend to put in extra investment to change the way that services are delivered so that patients receive a better standard of care.

Mrs. Spelman: The Minister encourages us to look at innovation. Does she accept that it was an innovative solution to rotate doctors through the two hospital sites, to satisfy the criteria of the colleges for their training? Is she also aware that, although A and E services might not have significantly altered since the merger, the loss of an emergency surgeon at Solihull was crucial with regard to what could be done in the A and E department?

Ms Blears: I am delighted that people have come up with different ways of providing services and training doctors. There is no single solution to all such matters, which is why I have advised the hon. Lady to get involved in all that is contained in "Reforming Emergency Care". I urge her to read the document and

take an active, participative role in ensuring that its proposals happen in her local community. I am sure that she will.

The hon. Member for Solihull asked important questions about whose responsibility it is to make decisions and what the process is for that. I shall not say simply that that is a matter for local consideration, but, primarily, it is. We should aim to achieve consensus in a local community if we can. The primary care trusts, which will have a major role in examining reconfigurations in their communities, will be key to the process. They are the bodies with which local people will be involved and they will be able to look at the local community's needs. The primary care trusts will be able to decide what services are appropriate for the people that they represent. That is what I mean by getting people involved right at the start of the process. The primary care trust, which will have the majority of the budget and be commissioning services for local people, will be the driving force behind changing services locally.

Of course, if a major change is not agreed, it can be referred to Ministers, as at present. That power currently lies with community health councils. If the NHS Reform and Health Care Professions Bill, currently in the other place, is enacted, that power will be transferred to the local authority overview and scrutiny committee. I have given an undertaking that the power to refer configurations to Ministers will be no less rigorous under the new system than it is under the existing one. There will be that right to refer. It is very important that local government, with democratically elected members, can take a view on such issues right across the community and that there can be the links between local government and the health service that have, perhaps, been lacking in the past.

The Government are in the process of setting up the independent reconfigurations panel, an independent body to offer advice to Ministers on contested and controversial reconfigurations. The panel is likely to be operating by the autumn, but if the matters under discussion were referred to it in advance of that, it might be in a position to offer some advice to Ministers. It is a very good development, which will be able to work up some consistency around configurations. It will examine not hard and fast rules or a rigid framework, but the way in which reconfigurations should go through. At the end of the day, decisions will remain the legal responsibility of Ministers. That situation will not change. I urge all hon. Members to get involved in that process, and I know that they will. The hon. Member for Solihull has been very active on that, representing the views of his constituents and ensuring that Ministers are fully aware of the concerns surrounding a matter.

Staffing and training issues are important, but they are not the only issues. Access is incredibly important to local people, and such matters will be weighed in the balance when decisions are being made.

Mr. John Taylor: Will the Minister kindly take into account and acknowledge now the point, which I have made, that the daytime population of Solihull is much more than its residential population, for the reasons that I have given?

Ms Blears: I am delighted to deal with that point. The hon. Gentleman mentioned new homes, the new Touchwood site retail development, the airport and 30,000 new jobs to come. Those are important developments, which are happening as a result of the strong and thriving economy under this Government. I am delighted that his area is doing extremely well and that local people are thriving to such an extent. Clearly, his point is important, as it is in seaside areas that have a great influx of tourists. We must be conscious of such variations in communities.

It would be wrong to speculate on the future because, by the process that I have just explained, decisions might end up being made by Ministers. I am aware of the previous pledge given, as a result of the merger, on maintaining a 24-hour service. I am not in a position to say that the position will never change, because Ministers have a legal duty to take into account any changes in the population, the area and the services provided. However, we are determined to ensure that people have access to high-quality health services in their local communities.

Whatever is decided, the overriding aim should be the delivery of high-quality treatment in a modern, up-to-date setting, in an NHS fit for the 21st century. The hon. Gentleman's constituents are entitled to that, as are people throughout the country. The primary care trusts have a new role, a new responsibility and new powers to drive that system, and I urge them to make sure that they consult local people as widely as they possibly can in drawing up options for the future. It is crucial that local people are able to participate in formulating options as well as deciding on them at the end of the day; if we can get some kind of consensus on that, so much the better.

Mr. Gordon Downie

1.30 pm

David Cairns (Greenock and Inverclyde): Before moving into the substance of my contribution, I hope that you will indulge me, Mr. Taylor, if I make two preliminary and vital comments.

Today, British soldiers once again stand on the brink of active military service. The task that we have asked them to perform is crucial, and we know that it is highly dangerous. From the Balkans to Sierra Leone, from the remote mountains of Afghanistan to Northern Ireland, the men and women of our armed forces have shown without doubt that they are the finest in the world. Nothing that I say today can or will diminish the absolute respect that my constituent, Mr. Gordon Downie, and I feel for our armed forces.

My second preliminary remark is of equal weight. I am fully aware that today's debate comes with a price tag attached, and I am well aware of the pressure on the Ministry of Defence in its tough budgetary negotiations. It is time for the Government—I am happy to make this point in any forum—to increase the defence budget and defence spending if we are to rise to the challenge that the Prime Minister has set for us of fulfilling Britain's historic role as a leading world power.

Justice sometimes has a price tag attached to it, which is the case with my constituent Mr. Gordon Downie. The case is one of justice long denied that must be corrected, and a fair degree of recognition and compensation must be awarded. The case is complex; it went on for a number of years and involved several locations throughout the world. I hope that it will make it easier for you, Mr. Taylor, and the Chamber if I strip the case down to its bare essentials and give a brief chronology.

Mr. Gordon Downie is one of my Greenock constituents. His ambition as a boy was to join the Army, and he fulfilled it at the age of 16 when he joined up. He was given a medical, as is customary, and was passed fit to join the Army. In 1979, three years after he joined the Army, a medical examination revealed that he had a rare congenital deformation of his spine, which was diagnosed by the Army as a very gross congenital deformity of the upper-thoracic and cervical spine. At that time, the Army doctors who had discovered Mr. Downie's condition did not inform him about it. He received further postings and undertook a tour of duty in Northern Ireland.

In 1981, two years after the discovery of his condition had been withheld from him, Mr. Downie was on a tour of duty in Belize, and was injured during physical training exercises. A local doctor examined him and diagnosed a pulled muscle. At no stage were his medical records from the UK sought. Those records would have informed the local doctor that Mr. Downie had a congenital back condition that may have been damaged by the accident. Mr. Downie was told to return to his duty until his tour ended four months later.

Upon returning to Scotland, Mr. Downie collapsed due to the severe pain in his back. A doctor, who knew that Mr. Downie had that congenital condition, examined him and, realising that it had been exacerbated by the accident in Belize, recommended that he be discharged from the Army because he was unfit to continue in service. The Army did not comply with that recommendation and for a second time Mr. Downie's congenital deformity was not disclosed to him. The following year, 1982, Mr. Downie was promoted to the rank of corporal and posted to Cyprus where the pain in his spine caused him to collapse again. The local medical officer yet again recommended that Mr. Downie be discharged, but yet again that did not happen and, for the third time, a medical officer did not tell Mr. Downie that he was suffering from a severe congenital ailment that was being exacerbated while he remained in active service. Mr. Downie returned to Scotland and served as a section commander, but his condition deteriorated further and he was eventually discharged in 1983 at the third time of asking. Mr. Downie now has constant pain in his back, neck, left arm, the left side of his chest and his left leg and several doctors have told him that his condition is inoperable.

In summary, the condition was discovered in 1979 but not disclosed to my constituent. In 1982, it was recommended that he be discharged, but that did not happen and the condition was again not disclosed to him. The same thing happened in the following year. Three recommendations for discharge from the Army were required before it happened and during that time, Mr. Downie's condition deteriorated. Mr. Taylor, consultant neurosurgeon at the Southern general hospital, Glasgow, issued a report stating that

"50% of his symptoms could be attributable to his spinal congenital abnormality and 50% could be attributable to the injury"

suffered in Belize.

"It is unlikely that he would have developed symptoms to the current level of severity if he had not sustained such an injury."

As the House knows—and I am sure the Minister will remind us when he replies—because the events occurred before the Armed Forces Act 1986, Mr. Downie, as a serving member of the Army was not legally able to sue the armed forces. He acknowledges and accepts that and there has been helpful correspondence from the Minister. However in recent months, the Human Rights Act 1998 was introduced in United Kingdom law and has opened a window of opportunity for people such as Mr. Downie who suffered accidents before they were able to pursue claims against the Crown and the Army as their employer.

Mr. Justice Keith ruled in the High Court that the law barring legal claims by veterans injured through negligence—I contend that that applies in Mr. Downie's case—before service men won the right to sue clashed with the Human Rights Act 1998, which guarantees the right to a fair hearing. It is worth noting that civilian employees of the Ministry of Defence have always had that right and I have personal knowledge of civilian employees being given compensation for asbestosis when such compensation was denied to the men and women of our armed forces.

A declaration of incompatibility has been issued and we await further cases. We must wait for a test case to pursue the matter to its conclusion because my constituent is not a wealthy man. He is not part of a large group such as a veterans association, which might support his case. He simply does not have the financial

means to pursue a test case through the courts and must rely entirely on those who may be able to pursue such a case and on the outcome of that case.

This is a matter of fundamental justice. This gentleman is suffering because of negligent diagnosis, failure to inform him of his condition, and failure to act on the clear recommendations and medical advice from the Army's own medical officers, which resulted in his condition deteriorating and being exacerbated. In a letter to me about a month ago, Mr. Downie wrote:

"I only wish disabilities could change the way that this Act does, as my disability is as real now as it was in 1983."

That is the point. It does not matter whether someone suffered an injury before or after 1987. The pain and suffering are as real now as they would be if the person had suffered the injury after the Act was amended and they had been allowed to sue for compensation.

Mr. Downie's ability to work and move is limited, and his future earnings are certainly limited. He is entitled, as I believe my hon. Friend the Minister will point out, to an Army pension, but because 50 per cent. of his condition was diagnosed as existing before he joined the Army, the amount of pension to which he is entitled is also limited. That is unfair, as Mr. Downie clearly would not have joined the Army if his condition had been diagnosed or disclosed to him at the time.

We are talking about a man who has served his country well in difficult circumstances, not about one of the usual suspects, a troublemaker or someone who wishes the Army ill. We should listen to the words of Mr. Downie's commanding officer on his certificate of service:

"Cpl Downie has unfortunately had to end a very promising career with the Army as a result of being medically downgraded. During his service he has proved himself to be a loyal, conscientious, trustworthy, cheerful and reliable NCO. He has shown great enthusiasm for his work and has adapted well to the variety of jobs he has been faced with. A likeable young man who has got on well with his contemporaries and who has been an asset to the Regiment."

This man gave the best years of his life to the Army and is suffering as a result. He was a loyal, decent, conscientious and brave soldier and is not asking for the earth or for untold riches; he simply wants a degree of compensation to make up for the gross negligence of which he has been, and continues to be, a victim, and because of the suffering that he endures today.

The Minister may say that he has to discharge the law and that his hands are tied. I understand that, as does Mr. Downie. However, we need a resolution of the matter, not just for Mr. Downie but for those who are in a similar situation. I would be surprised if there were many other cases in which the negligence was so culpable and clear and had resulted so directly in continued suffering for an individual. I hope that this good and loyal soldier will receive the justice that he has long been denied and that, in due course, he will receive the pension to which I believe he is entitled as well as some degree of ex gratia compensation as recognition of his current pain and suffering.

1.42 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (David Cairns) for securing this debate on the case of his constituent, Mr. Gordon Downie, and the important issues surrounding his claim for compensation against my Department. My hon. Friend will recall that we corresponded on this matter last year. However, other than repeating the advice that I provided in that letter, there is little that I can add at present.

I understand that, in 1981, while serving in Belize with the 1st Battalion, Gordon Highlanders, Mr. Downie injured his back during physical training. He was subsequently, after the events outlined by my hon. Friend, medically discharged from the Army in January 1983. Our records show that he submitted a claim in May 1997, alleging that his medical discharge from the Army was a direct result of his accident in Belize and not a consequence of a congenital abnormality to his spine.

Notwithstanding the Limitation Act 1980, which provides that personal injury claims be made within three years of the date on which the cause of action accrued—the date of the accident—or three years from when the claimant knew, or might reasonably be expected to have known, certain specified facts, Mr. Downie is barred by law from suing the Ministry of Defence by section 10 of the Crown Proceedings Act 1947.

Before 1948, no individual could sue the Crown, because of the long-held principle that the Crown could do no wrong. We might discuss that at some stage in another forum, but that was the principle at the time. In 1947, legislation in the guise of the Crown Proceedings Act 1947 was passed enabling the Crown to be sued for acts of negligence. Section 10 of that legislation prevented service personnel from suing for compensation. Section 10 in turn was subsequently repealed by the Crown Proceedings (Armed Forces) Act 1987. Since then, service personnel have been entitled to sue the Ministry of Defence for compensation as a result of the Department's negligence and have had the same legal rights as any other employee against their employer or organisation.

When the Ministry of Defence receives compensation claims, they are considered on the basis of whether the Department has a legal liability to pay compensation. Where there is a proven legal liability to pay compensation, we do so. The amount varies according to individual circumstances, determined by common law principles. However, in the case of my hon. Friend's constituent, as the injury he sustained while serving in the Army preceded the repeal of section 10 of the Crown Proceedings Act, I am prevented by law from paying him compensation.

During the passage of the 1987 Act, the question of retrospection was debated and motions to allow present and past members of the armed forces to pursue claims against my Department for injury or death suffered in incidents since 1947 were moved, but they were defeated or withdrawn. The view that prevailed at the time was that there would have been no logical time to draw a line, short of trying to cover all incidents and all types of injury going back to 1947. To make the Act retrospective would create many new examples of unfairness and injustice.

[Dr. Lewis Moonie]

My hon. Friend said that he is aware that a former member of the armed forces suffering from an asbestos-related disease recently mounted a legal challenge—the case of Matthews *v.* the Ministry of Defence. However, section 10 of the 1947 Act is incompatible with the European convention on human rights. The claimant alleged a breach of article 2, the right to life, and article 6, the due process right, of the convention. The case under article 2 was that, by exposing him to asbestos dust, the Crown was in breach of its obligation to take positive steps to safeguard his health. The case under article 6 was that, as section 10 of the Crown Proceedings Act is a blanket immunity, it deprives the claimant of his right of access to the court. The matter was heard in the High Court on 10 and 11 December 2001. Mr Justice Keith handed down judgment on 22 January 2002 in favour of the claimant.

The Department has secured leave to take this matter expeditiously to the Court of Appeal, where it will be argued strongly that there is a general presumption that legislation does not and should not have a retrospective effect, in the interests of legal certainty and the rule of law. It is also highly arguable that article 6 of the convention does not give new civil rights to claimants. In the case of service personnel who suffered injury or illness prior to the repeal of section 10, they had no rights until 1987, and therefore in relation to the Crown Proceedings (Armed Forces) Act 1987, claimants would have to argue that the 1987 Act, in giving them a right, was nevertheless deficient. Therefore, until such time as the higher authority has ruled on the case, my Department's position concerning the payment of claims preceding the repeal of section 10 of the Crown Proceedings Act 1947 remains unchanged.

My hon. Friend may recall that the question of retrospective legislation was referred to in the *Official Report*. The Solicitor General said:

"The Government's policy before introducing a legislative provision having retrospective effect is to balance the conflicting public interests and to consider whether the general public interest in the law not being changed retrospectively may be outweighed by any competing public interest. In making this assessment the Government will have regard to relevant international standards including those of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms which was incorporated into United Kingdom law by the Human Rights Act 1998."—[*Official Report*, 6 March 2002; Vol. 381, c. 410W.]

My Department has no way of accurately predicting the number of claims, previously barred by law, that would likely be made if the Court of Appeal and ultimately the House of Lords were to uphold the judgment in Matthews *v.* the Ministry of Defence. As my hon. Friend will be aware from my correspondence of last year on Mr. Downie's case, the War Pensions Agency, which is now part of my rapidly increasing area of responsibility, makes provision for ex-service personnel suffering from injury or illness attributable to their service in the form of a war pension and associated benefits. War pensions are non-discretionary. They are not means-tested and are made on a no-fault, tax-free and retrospective basis. They are also uprated annually. In addition, most pension and related benefit rates vary depending on the degree of physical disability. They do not, however, reflect actual financial losses or hardships.

According to the War Pensions Agency, Mr. Downie has been in receipt of such a pension since the early 1990s and, following a recent successful disability assessment appeal hearing, his level of pension has increased. However, although not relevant in this particular case, my hon. Friend should note that in cases where a recipient of a war pension is subsequently awarded common law compensation, the level of war pension is abated by the War Pensions Agency in line with the principle of a claimant not being compensated twice for the same loss.

My hon. Friend will recall that in our correspondence last year he inquired about the possibility of Mr. Downie being awarded an ex gratia payment by my Department in recognition of his injury. As I explained in my reply then, except for two special categories of claim relating to injuries sustained by criminal activities overseas and accidental injuries sustained by service personnel voluntarily involved in research trials, it is my Department's policy to consider claims for compensation on the basis of legal liability. With the exception of those two categories, I have no discretionary powers to award ex gratia payments. As Mr. Downie's case falls into neither of the above categories, he is prevented also from receiving an ex gratia payment. I have looked at this very carefully and I can see no room for manoeuvre on my part.

I can assure my hon. Friend that his constituent, Mr. Downie, is not being denied any form of compensation to which he is legally entitled. As I have advised today, as well as in correspondence, my Department considers claims for compensation on the basis of legal liability. Mr. Downie is legally prevented from pursuing a common law claim for compensation. I am really sorry that I cannot be more helpful, but compensation legislation is unambiguous and its constraints cannot be set aside, no matter how deserving the case. I am afraid that there is nothing more that I can do at present.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at seven minutes to Two o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 21 March 2002

[SIR ALAN HASELHURST *in the Chair*]

Ministerial Accountability and Parliamentary Questions

[Relevant documents: Second Report from the Select Committee on Public Administration, Session 2000-01, HC 61, and the Government's response thereto, Session 2001-02, HC 464.]

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Mr. Pearson.]*

2.30 pm

Tony Wright (Cannock Chase): I am delighted to introduce this debate on ministerial accountability and parliamentary questions, a subject that should be of wide interest to Members across the House. The debate is based on the Select Committee's second report of 2000-01, which we published in January 2001, and its fourth report of 2001-02, which was published in December 2001 and contains the Government's response.

I shall outline the background to the report, and therefore to today's debate. In the mid-1990s, our predecessor, the Public Service Committee, of which I was privileged to be a member, produced a major report on ministerial accountability and responsibility that was connected with the Scott inquiry. It resulted in the House's 1996 resolution on ministerial accountability, which is now in the ministerial code—an important statement on the responsibilities of Ministers to the House.

That report proposed also that the Table Office should provide a memorandum each year listing the questions that had been blocked by Ministers—that is, not answered—and that when questions were blocked, Ministers should cite the appropriate provisions of the code of access to Government information in their refusal to answer. We said then that the Committee would monitor that system.

The report that we are discussing today is the latest annual report on parliamentary questions and answers, based on a memorandum supplied to us by the Table Office. When we receive such a memorandum, we ask all Departments about their blocked questions. Unfortunately, the replies are extraordinarily slow in coming forward—so slow that the report on the 1998-99 Session could not be produced until January 2001. That delay continues. For example, in May 2001, Departments were asked for information on blocked questions relating to the 1999-2000 Session, but the final reply to our inquiries, which happened to be from the Department of Health, was not received until this week—some 10 months on. It will therefore be a couple of months before we can report to the House on that year.

On the report that we are discussing today, we decided to go beyond our precise remit on blocked questions to explore part answers—Ministers choosing to answer those bits of a question that they want to answer and not answering bits that they do not like. That practice has caused Members some difficulty, so we thought it appropriate to extend our questioning to cover that area. We wrote to all Members to ask for their experience of the partial answering of questions, and we are grateful for the replies that we received, some of which are reproduced in our report.

I shall briefly identify the central points raised in the report and say what has resulted from it. We note the continuing failure of Departments to refer to the code of practice in not answering questions, the starting point for our interest. When we brought the matter to the Government's attention through the report, they agreed to re-issue the guidance to officials on drafting answers to parliamentary questions, which clearly states that part answers are unacceptable. We argued further in relation to disproportionate-cost refusals, with which we are all familiar, that any available information should be provided, even if disproportionate cost is given as the reason for preventing a full answer from being given. On that point, the Government again agreed to revise the guidance.

We also proposed that when material is put in the Library in response to a parliamentary question, the Member who asked it should receive the information at the same time. The Government agreed and reminded Departments that it is courteous to provide such information. We deplore part answering questions and recommend that stringent checks be carried out to ensure that it does not happen. In response, the Government restated their commitment to giving full and accurate answers and said that if Members remain dissatisfied, they should raise the issue with the appropriate Ministers.

All that is background, and I shall now talk about general aspects of parliamentary questions. We know that parliamentary questions are a vital instrument in the hands of Members of Parliament. In fact, written questions are probably the most vital instrument of sustained accountability that Members of Parliament have. They are also very much a part of the continuing struggle between Parliament and the Executive and between the Government and the Opposition.

There is a nice story about Lloyd George motoring in the mountains of north Wales. He lost his way and asked a passer-by where he was. The passer-by replied, "You are in a motor car." Lloyd George subsequently commented that that was the perfect answer to a parliamentary question, as it was true, brief and told him absolutely nothing that he did not already know.

I referred to the Scott inquiry as part of the background to the Committee's work. Sir Michael Quinlan, permanent secretary at the Ministry of Defence from 1988 to 1992, gave an interesting paper to that inquiry, where much argument centred on whether Ministers had given proper, full and accurate answers to Members of Parliament about the supply of arms. Sir Michael's paper related to the practice of civil servants in drafting answers to parliamentary questions, and he said that seeking and giving information in Parliament was

> "in a certain sense analogous to a game . . . in the sense that it is a competitive activity conducted, within rules, largely for a purpose different from that of its apparent form."

[Tony Wright]

That means that the form is to bring information to the public domain, but that the prime purpose is, for the questioner, to give the Government a hard time and, for the Government, to avoid being given a hard time. He continued:

"The Opposition will seek to extract information which they can use to portray the Government in a bad light; and they will . . . feel free thereafter to exploit the information, if necessary selectively and tendentiously, to that end. The Government for its part will be reluctant to disclose information of a kind, or in a form, that will help the Opposition to do so."

That is a useful reminder of the context—the game within which everything goes on.

In the last Session, 16,716 written parliamentary questions were tabled; I am told that they cost £121 each. Members use that device in a variety of ways, and in different quantities. I note from the Order Paper that the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) is much in evidence as a particularly assiduous asker of parliamentary questions—he tabled 144 on Monday 18 March, no less than 42 per cent. of those submitted. At £121 each, his questions on that day alone cost £17,424. I have told him that I would refer to his record this afternoon.

My curiosity was so stimulated by those statistics that I looked further and pulled up the record for the current Session. The hon. Gentleman has asked 2,619 questions, 6 per cent. of the total, at a cost of £316,899. I am sure that they are worth every penny and that the electors of Buckingham would not swap them for policemen on the streets or nurses in their hospitals.

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham would not have to ask so many questions if his original questions received straight answers?

Tony Wright: That is a fine point, but my only quibble is that on Monday alone the hon. Gentleman asked every Department what crèche facilities they provide and what is the cost of criminal damage to their buildings. Perhaps I do not understand the implications, but those do not seem to be pressing issues. I am not making a value judgment; I am reporting the facts to bring context to a discussion on parliamentary questions. However, those are formidable sums and it is incumbent on us all to use that money wisely. If taxes have to rise in the Budget to pay the bill, I am sure that the hon. Member for Buckingham will be the first to applaud.

Mr. Greg Knight (East Yorkshire): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham is the shadow Chief Secretary? When the Budget is announced, he and the shadow Chancellor will have to make an instant critique of the Chancellor's announcements. Many of those questions go to the heart of Government spending.

Tony Wright: I have no doubt that knowing about crèche facilities and the cost of criminal damage will be integral to the Budget critique advanced by the hon. Member for Buckingham. I look forward to that, as it will be a most interesting speech.

Parliamentary questions are a key instrument of accountability, which is why they provided a focus for the Committee. We are not concerned with the general arrangement for questions and answers, as that is not our territory but that of the Procedure Committee, whose current inquiry is studying

"the extent to which the current system of parliamentary questions contributes to effective scrutiny".

We are interested not in the general issues but in accountability—that is very much part of the Committee's concerns.

Many hon. Members have come to regard us as an avenue for complaint about unsatisfactory answers. Indeed, we seem to be a general repository for all complaints about questions. In a way, that is flattering, but we have gone beyond questions and become associated with correspondence. Some hon. Members think that the Committee is the place to bring their complaints when they receive delayed or unsatisfactory correspondence.

We are not a standing complaints channel—I should emphasise that that is not our role—but we keep an eye on developments relevant to the work in which we are engaged. For example, in November 2001, the parliamentary ombudsman, who comes under our purview, upheld a complaint from the hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) about a Home Office refusal to release information to him through a parliamentary question. The Home Office had cited exemptions under the code, but when the ombudsman found that those did not apply, it refused to comply with the ruling. That is an unprecedented action for a Minister to take.

Another example is an early-day motion tabled in February by the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow), expressing concern about the time taken to answer parliamentary questions. In addition, the hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) took a survey, which he kindly sent me, identifying what he believes to be the increasing use of commercial confidentiality as a reason to block answers.

Finally, earlier this month, the Secretary of State for Health replied to concerns about delays in answering parliamentary questions with the statement that there has been

"systematic falsification in recording the handling of parliamentary questions in the Department's parliamentary section."—[*Official Report*, 5 March 2002; Vol. 381, c. 192W.]

That is clearly a serious matter, which has caused an official to be suspended and an inquiry to be set up. Those examples show the need for continuing vigilance and continuous pressure on Ministers and Departments to ensure that a vital instrument of parliamentary accountability is protected as it should be.

Mr. Speaker made a statement to the House on 28 November 2001, reminding Ministers of their obligations in relation to parliamentary questions. He also directed complainants to the inquiry being undertaken by the Procedure Committee and directed hon. Members to us—that is, the Public Administration Committee. He said that

"Members aggrieved at a ministerial refusal to answer might get in touch with the Committee Chairman".—[*Official Report*, 28 November 2001; Vol. 375, c. 971.]

We have received several complaints since that statement, but many raise questions that go beyond our narrow territory, on which we based the survey and report that we compiled.

In case anyone thinks that I am not afflicted by the problem, I should mention my attempt to ask a question of the Prime Minister a few weeks ago. I wanted to know whether the 1975 agreement made under Harold Wilson that those in the Government could differ in the context of a referendum campaign might apply now. That is a straightforward question. On 25 January, I asked whether the Prime Minister planned

"to follow the precedent of the 1975 referendum on membership of the Common Market in respect of the Government's agreement to differ in a referendum on membership of the single European currency".

The answer was:

"I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary to the hon. Member for Buckingham".—[*Official Report*, 28 January 2002; Vol. 379, c. 25W.]

Inevitably, the hon. Member for Buckingham reappears in our proceedings.

I looked the answer up, but it has nothing to do with my question. The hon. Member for Buckingham asked the Chancellor to

"make a statement on the proposed date for a referendum on euro entry."—[*Official Report*, 2 November 2001; Vol. 373, c. 883W.]

The Economic Secretary's answer is about the five tests—I shall not bore hon. Members with it—but there is no mention of what I asked about.

I took the liberty of asking the Prime Minister again, on 14 February, if he would

"explain the connection between the question to him of 25 January and his answer of 28 January."

The reply states:

"I referred my hon. Friend to an answer which sets out the Government policy on the euro."—[*Official Report*, 25 February 2002; Vol. 380, c. 701W.]

That put us back where we started. Mr. Speaker's statement suggested that aggrieved Members could get in touch with the Chairman of the Public Administration Committee. Armed with that fact, I immediately contacted myself about the matter, but I did not know what further action to take.

I hope that the House feels that our annual reports perform a valuable function on its behalf, in relation to ministerial accountability. There may now be a case for Parliament to find a mechanism, perhaps one involving the Committee, to take up Members' dissatisfaction with answers that they receive. I invite the Procedure Committee to think on that during its current inquiry.

2.52 pm

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch): I congratulate the hon. Member for Cannock Chase (Tony Wright), the Chairman of the Committee, on his comments and on the vigilance that he exercises daily on behalf of so many right hon. and hon. Members. I was interested to hear him refer specifically to the blocking of a reasonable question that he put to the Prime Minister, as I want to draw attention to my experience of trying to ask the Prime Minister a straightforward question in the past month.

The issue goes straight to the heart of our parliamentary democracy, and also relates to the fourth and fifth principles of public life set out by Lord Nolan, which have been adopted in the ministerial code. Those principles deal with accountability and openness. The principle of accountability is:

"Holders of public office are accountable for their decisions and actions to the public and must submit themselves to whatever scrutiny is appropriate to their office."

The principle of openness is:

"Holders of public office should be as open as possible about all the decisions and actions that they take. They should give reasons for their decisions and restrict information only when the wider public interest clearly demands".

For the purposes of the debate, the seventh principle of public life is also relevant. On leadership, it states:

"Holders of public office should promote and support these principles by leadership and"—

I emphasise—

"example."

That brings me straight to the role of the Prime Minister. He issues the ministerial code and commends it to his ministerial colleagues. In his foreword, he says that he

"will expect all Ministers to work within the letter and spirit of the Code. Ministers will find it a useful source of guidance and reference as they undertake their official duties in a way that upholds the highest standards of propriety."

As the Prime Minister recognises, the first part of the ministerial code follows the terms of the March 1997 House of Commons resolution on ministerial accountability. As the hon. Member for Cannock Chase said, that resolution is crucial. In his important statement to the House on 28 November 2001, Mr. Speaker said:

"The House's legitimate expectations are contained in the 1997 resolution on ministerial responsibility. It is the duty of a Speaker to do what can properly be done from the Chair in support of the resolution. It is the duty of Ministers to act in the spirit of the resolution."

He quoted the resolution:

"Ministers should be as open as possible with Parliament, refusing to provide information only when disclosure would not be in the public interest, which should be decided in accordance with the Government's code of practice on access to Government information."

He also emphasised that hon. Members should persist when faced with unsatisfactory replies:

"One pointed question can, in my experience, achieve more than 20 vague ones."—[*Official Report*, 28 November 2001; Vol. 375, c. 971.]

I do not disagree, but I should tell hon. Members of my experience during the past month in seeking to extract from the Prime Minister a straightforward answer on a particular matter.

Hon. Members will recall that the Prime Minister told the House that he regularly corresponds with the Heads of State and Prime Ministers of other countries about the award of contracts to companies with British interests. That is all part of the Mittal affair, as it has come to be known. Hon. Members on both sides of the House followed up that statement by asking the Prime Minister more questions. I asked him

"on how many occasions in the past two years he has written to the *(a)* Head of State and *(b)* Prime Minister of a foreign Government about the award of contracts to companies with British interests."

He responded:

"I refer . . . to the answer I gave the hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Adam Price) and the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) on 14 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 610–11W."—[*Official Report*, 25 February 2002; Vol. 380, c. 701W.]

[Mr. Christopher Chope]

In an echo of what the hon. Member for Cannock Chase told us, I looked up the Prime Minister's 14 February answer and it turned out to be the original answer on which I was seeking further information.

The Prime Minister said on that occasion:

"There was nothing extraordinary about my letter to the Romanian Government. I have written regularly to other leaders concerning contracts in which there is a British commercial interest. I have also lobbied fellow leaders in person and over the telephone on behalf of British business."—[*Official Report*, 14 February 2002; Vol. 380, c. 611W.]

That was no answer to the question that I asked, so I asked another. Each answer apparently costs £121, but the cost cannot be blamed on me—it arises directly from the Prime Minister's refusal to answer the original question.

I asked the Prime Minister

"under what provision of the Code of Practice on Access to Government information he has declined to say on how many occasions in the past two years he has written to foreign Governments about the award of contracts to companies with British interests."

That relates to the report's point about the desirability of Ministers, and the Prime Minister in particular, citing the relevant part of the code when they decline to give information that is requested in a question.

I also put a more straightforward subsidiary question, in the belief that there would be no question of the information not being available. I asked the Prime Minister

"on how many occasions in the past two years he has written to the Prime Minister of Romania".

Even those with the most elementary filing system know the answer to such a question, and one would not think it embarrassing for the Prime Minister to reply. However, he said:

"I have nothing further to add to my previous answer for the reasons I explained. It is not normal practice to release letters from the Prime Minister to another Head of Government under exemption 1(b) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. Exemption 13 of the Code also applies with regard to commercial confidentiality."—[*Official Report*, 28 February 2002; Vol. 380, c. 1450W.]

For those who do not have it in front of them, exemption 1(b) relates to behaviour that would harm the conduct of international relations or affairs.

Brian White (Milton Keynes, North-East): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that in evidence to the Committee, the Ministry of Defence and the Prime Minister quoted the code correctly? The Committee praised their use of the code, although certain other Ministers were not using it.

Mr. Chope: I have no reason to doubt the accuracy of what the hon. Gentleman says. I hope that he, likewise, will not doubt the accuracy of my recent experience of trying to ask the Prime Minister a straightforward question.

I had not asked the Prime Minister to release the letters; I was merely asking about the number of occasions on which he had written, in order to test his earlier statement that he had written regularly. Following Mr. Speaker's advice, I asked four more pursuant questions, which I shall repeat in summary to emphasise my dissatisfaction.

The first question was whether information is available on the number of occasions the Prime Minister has written to the Prime Minister of Romania in the past two years about the award of contracts to companies. Obviously, if the information is not available, it is reasonable not to give an answer about it. The second question asked how disclosure of the number of occasions on which he has written to the Prime Minister of Romania will harm the conduct of international relations or affairs. The third and fourth questions asked for the same information concerning the wider issue of the number of occasions in the past two years that the Prime Minister had written to foreign governments in general about the award of contracts to companies with British interests.

Those were obviously a testing set of questions for the Prime Minister, because on 5 March I received a holding reply. However, on 6 March I received a substantive reply, which I shall quote in full:

"I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on Thursday 28 February".—[*Official Report*, 6 March 2002; Vol. 381, c. 344W.]

One does not need a first-class brain to realise that the Prime Minister is not complying with his own ministerial code. Most seriously, he is failing in the duty of leadership and example, as set out in the seventh principle of public life; he is ignoring Mr. Speaker's clear ruling on 28 November, and insulting him to boot.

Following Mr. Speaker's advice, I went to the Table Office to find out how I could get the information that I sought. I was advised that I had pushed things as far as I could and there was no further avenue open to me, other than raising the matter in open debate in the hope that I would be able to shame the Prime Minister into giving me the information. I am increasingly angry at the arrogance and insolence of the Prime Minister.

I tabled four more questions, the first of which asked:

"what consideration he gives to the application of the Ministerial Code of July 2001 paragraph 1(iv), when answering written parliamentary questions."

The Prime Minister responded as follows:

"Paragraph 1 of the Ministerial Code sets out Ministers' responsibilities in relation to Parliament and the public."

I asked:

"how many breaches of the ministerial code there have been since July 2001?"

It seems to me that the Prime Minister himself is in serial breach of the code and is a recidivist. His answer was:

"Section 1 of the Ministerial Code makes it clear that Ministers are personally responsible for deciding how to act and conduct themselves in the light of the Code and for justifying their actions and conduct in Parliament. It also sets out Ministers' responsibilities in relation to alleged breaches of the Ministerial Code."—[*Official Report*, 18 March 2002; Vol. 382, c. 1W.]

That leaves us with a situation in which the Prime Minister refuses to give information about the number of breaches of the ministerial code, refuses to take any responsibility for Ministers who breach the code—and, indeed, himself refuses to answer the simplest of parliamentary questions, in flagrant breach of the code.

On 22 November, the Prime Minister told my hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan):

"The Ministerial Code is my guidance to my Ministers on how they should act and arrange their affairs in order to uphold the highest standards. I decide the content of the Ministerial Code."—[*Official Report*, 22 November 2001; Vol. 375, c. 470W.]

I hope that hon. Members will accept that the buck does indeed stop with the Prime Minister. However, because he shows such contempt for his own code, it is hardly surprising that other Ministers also show such contempt for it. The Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions has admitted giving inaccurate information outside Parliament in connection with the Sixsmith and Jo Moore affair. Incredibly, although the ministerial code requires the giving of accurate and truthful information to Parliament, it does not extend that principle to the giving of information outside Parliament.

In order to clear up that conundrum, I asked a question of the Prime Minister. I asked whether he would extend outside Parliament the principles of ministerial conduct set out in the code on the giving of accurate and truthful information. Even that straightforward question was not answered in a straightforward and factual way. He purported to reply by stating:

"Paragraph 1 of the Ministerial Code sets out Ministers' responsibilities in relation to Parliament and the public."—

We knew that. I was asking whether he would extend the principles of ministerial conduct to include the giving of accurate and truthful information outside Parliament as well as inside.

I asked the Prime Minister another question. I asked why Ministers' responsibilities in relation to the public do not include giving accurate and truthful information outside Parliament—another straightforward question. Again, the Prime Minister refused to answer. Instead, he stated:

"Ministers are personally responsible for deciding how to act and conduct themselves in the light of the Code and for justifying their actions and conduct in Parliament."—[*Official Report*, 18 March 2002; Vol. 382, c. 1-2W.]

Norman Baker (Lewes): My experience echoes that of the hon. Gentleman. Some of my questions—to various Ministers, but particularly to the Prime Minister—have been unanswered. There seem to be no sanctions against those who refuse to answer. Indeed, when it comes to accountability, some Ministers increasingly treat Members of Parliament with contempt. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that one solution could be for Mr. Speaker to have to the power to ask for those questions to be answered at the end of Question Time at 3.30 pm by the Minister who refused to answer properly in writing?

Mr. Chope: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. I was about to ask whether we can do anything about what is happening. The Prime Minister and his wife are both lawyers, and they know very well that when going through law exams, studies of jurisprudence and so on, one learns the principle that there is no point in having a command without a sanction. That is the point that the hon. Gentleman is making.

Self-regulation by the Prime Minister and Ministers is manifestly not working. The Press Council has the power to police the voluntary code that the press adopt in relation its conduct. In my view, Mr. Speaker needs to be invested with much greater power to enforce the code, particularly the provisions fundamental to ensuring that the House can fulfil its constitutional role of holding the Government to account.

The hon. Gentleman suggests that one sanction could be public ridicule at the end of Question Time. That might be one way forward, but the number of questions for written answer will always be far in excess of what can be managed at Question Time. Of course, if the Prime Minister were prepared to comply with his own code, the problem would not exist. It seems to me that the Prime Minister is becoming increasingly arrogant—it is almost an art form. He seems to have decided, out of stubbornness and just to demonstrate how arrogant he is, that he will not give reasonable information to Members of Parliament. He attends only 3 per cent. of votes in the House, and now he is not even prepared to stoop so low as to deign to answer hon. Members' questions.

A previous Question Time practice is relevant to the report that we are discussing. Those who had a burning question to ask would, if they were lucky enough to have the chance to ask an oral question, give the Prime Minister advance notice of it. People now give him advance notice of their oral questions, but he takes no notice of it, ignores the point that they have made and gives a superficial brush-off as a response. That is just not good enough. It is in the interests of Government and Opposition Back Benchers alike to ensure that something is done. At the moment, the ministerial code is not worth the paper it is written on.

The Chairman of the Committee, the hon. Member for Cannock Chase, talks about vigilance and pressure, and I applaud the vigilance and pressure that he is exercising on this issue, but the evidence that I have—I have quoted just one recent example—shows that we are not getting far. That is grinding the House into a situation in which MPs have to table pursuant questions to every answer, because the answers do not respond to the questions.

I presume that the Government hope that our proceedings today will receive little publicity because the business has been relegated to this forum on the same day as major statements on Zimbabwe and foxhunting in the House. I hope that all hon. Members who are not members of the Executive will prove the Government wrong and expose the contempt in which we are obviously held by the Prime Minister and his increasingly overbearing Government. I hope that this will be the beginning of something, rather than just another debate.

We need commands, and to reinforce them, a police force that can identify failures to comply. We also need some sanctions. I hope that the Committee will introduce some ideas about sanctions in the near future, so that we do not spend the rest of this Parliament being fobbed off as I was recently by the Prime Minister.

3.11 pm

Brian White (Milton Keynes, North-East): With a debate such as this, we can either take it seriously or indulge in party political knockabout of the sort that we have just heard. It is regrettable that the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope), who was making a

[Brian White]

serious point, allowed his speech to degenerate into a personal attack on the Prime Minister. There are some serious points that the Minister needs to answer at the end of the debate, and I hope that we shall be able to tackle some of them.

The report tries to draw out some of those points. The Chairman of the Committee said that the Committee's work went beyond previous reports and looked into some wider issues, including next steps agencies and the fact that parliamentary questions are passed to the chief executives of agencies to answer. Those answers are often included in *Hansard*, where the full reply of the chief executive is printed, but in relation to the private finance initiative and public-private partnerships, answers are less forthcoming, particularly from chief executives of agencies. That also applies to devolved institutions, as well as to regional development agencies and similar bodies—but I shall not stray into that territory.

The Government must consider how they should provide the information that Members seek. As joined-up government begins to take effect and the Government's modernising agenda moves forward, there are instances of initiatives—sure start is one example—that are overseen by two different Ministers, and that will happen increasingly. One of the problems in tabling a parliamentary question is that one is often referred from one Department to another. The Government must come up with a way of dealing with such cross-departmental questions, rather than hon. Members having to table about 20 different questions, one to each Department, as the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) has had to do. That is one way of doing it, but the Government could find a way of dealing with cross-departmental questions more effectively.

Some bodies, such as the performance and innovation unit and the office of public services reform, technically report to the Prime Minister but also come within the Cabinet Office. How should parliamentary questions about them be answered? I look forward to hearing the Minister's response to that question, because there is a real problem about whether one should ask the Prime Minister or the Cabinet Office about the operational effectiveness of those units.

Then there are regulators, whose role has an independent element. There is a real tension in trying to obtain information when the Government have one policy but the independent regulator takes a totally different view. How should one obtain information in those circumstances?

One of the most frustrating sorts of answer is when the Minister says that he will write to the Member, and a copy of the letter is placed in the Library. That is fine for the hon. Member concerned, but not for the rest of us. There should be a place in *Hansard* to print letters that are sent to the Library, so that the rest of us can see the answers. That issue needs to be taken forward.

The layout of questions and answers in *Hansard* could also be clearer. The Table Office has a role to play in reconciling information about questions, when they are replied to and the time taken to reply. The problems to which the Chairman of the Committee referred would not arise if the Table Office provided the House with those statistics—perhaps quarterly.

The way in which we table questions is rather outdated, and the sooner we move to electronic tabling, the better. I, for one, am frustrated. When Ministers reply to hon. Members' questions and letters, they still send a hard copy by snail mail, rather than using e-mail. The sooner they take on board the need for change, the better. There are honourable exceptions, but they are still in the minority.

The most frustrating practice on which the Committee commented was that of giving partial answers. I was particularly interested in the evidence from my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), who said that he had obtained through his Select Committee information that he had failed to obtain in answer to a parliamentary question. The Government should consider that. If information exists, it should be provided in answer to parliamentary questions. Several Select Committees use such questions to obtain answers for their inquiries, yet hon. Members must often use the Select Committees to obtain answers.

I was also interested in the evidence from the Minister responsible for small businesses, who referred to his experience with the

"very poor civil service drafting of answers. This did not really improve over the course of the year and I found that my private office and I still had a lot to do—mainly incorporating background information into the answer. Frankly the culture of hoarding information seems to be endemic".

That reflects the frustration expressed by the hon. Member for Christchurch. The hoarding of information is endemic, and a loosening of the reins would prevent a lot of frustration.

I was also interested in the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Blyth Valley (Mr. Campbell), who was told by a Minister that information about particular funds was not available. When he approached the European Commission, it told him that the funds were available and asked why the Minister had not applied for them. When he asked the Minister why he was not applying for the funds, the Minister went ballistic, because he had not been given the information. There is an issue about Ministers being given the information to enable them to answer questions, just as there is an issue about Ministers giving partial answers.

Finally, the report contains some real pointers to the way forward. The Government have accepted some of its recommendations, but the real test will be whether they are implemented. We must regularly remind Ministers of the need to do that, and the key is to have the statistics available. If we have the statistics and build on the report, much of the frustration over parliamentary questions will be dissipated.

3.19 pm

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I am delighted to take part in this debate, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Cannock Chase (Tony Wright) and his Committee. I am glad to see that several members of that Committee are present, because the House has set them an ongoing task.

The situation is deteriorating, as I have seen over 10 years, and from my previous experience. The way in which the civil service, and Ministers, have learned the lessons of the anecdote about Lloyd George is a great tribute to their ingenuity, but it has done nothing for open government.

Reference has already been made to Mr. Speaker's statement, so I shall not repeat it all. Clearly, its most important element was when he said:

"It is the duty of Ministers to act in the spirit of the resolution."

The spirit is important, as well as the letter.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff, West): The hon. Gentleman said that he felt that in his experience, the problem had become worse. I accept that he has much more experience in the House than I do, but I have with me the statistics for the percentage of questions blocked and so on. Does he have statistical evidence, as opposed to a feeling in his water, that the problem has worsened?

Mr. Tyler: I do not have statistical evidence with me, but I shall give a few examples of how I feel that the situation has deteriorated since 1992—not only since 1997, if that comforts the hon. Gentleman. The comparison between the situation when I returned to the House in 1992 and that in 1974—old history, I accept—is interesting, and does not do credit to the reputation of an impartial civil service.

I was about to quote Mr. Speaker's statement again. He said:

"when Ministers refuse to answer questions, they are expected to indicate in their reply why they have refused by reference to the Government's code".—[*Official Report*, 28 November 2001; Vol. 375, c. 971.]

That is clearly not the standard practice. Ministers will go all round the houses rather than admit why they have not given a straight answer to a straight question. The Committee's fourth report stated:

"The Committee and its predecessors have for several years monitored the performance of government departments in answering Parliamentary Questions. We regard openness and accuracy in answering Questions as a crucial element in ministerial accountability".

The Chairman of the Committee said something similar earlier. We all accept that written questions provide a key instrument of parliamentary scrutiny, one that it is the responsibility of every Member of the House to try to enforce and strengthen. We have precious few such weapons, and it is extremely important in holding the Executive to account.

Even in the weasel words of the Government's response to the report, there is the statement:

"The Government is committed to providing prompt and accurate answers to Parliamentary Questions. The normal procedure remains to answer Questions as soon as possible after they are tabled, and therefore in date order."

I emphasise that. The response continues:

"Inevitably, some questions cover similar ground. On occasion, it is more helpful to answer a later but more wide-ranging question and to refer an earlier question to that answer."

That rather begs the question, more helpful to whom? I will come to a specific example in which what happened was "more helpful" to the Government's party interest rather than to the institution of Parliament.

I want to deal with four specific categories of ways in which the Government seek to undermine the integrity of the questioning process. I also want to draw attention to two serious and recent examples of clear disregard for the recommendations of the Select Committee and the Government's response to it. The first relates to a question tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) for answer on 26 February. The Table Office changed the wording of the original question without warning his office, but as that is not normally the custom of the Table Office, it may have been an aberration. The question read:

"To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the Government will make a decision on funding to fire authorities in England and Wales for the additional costs of emergency planning following the events of 11 September 2001; and if he will make a statement."—[*Official Report*, 27 February 2002; Vol. 380, c. 1370W.]

On the morning of 27 February—the day after an answer was expected—the Department's press office put out its news release No. 2002/0072, headed, "Fire service to get £53 million in new funding", as an answer to a parliamentary question asked by the hon. Member for South Ribble (Mr. Borrow), a Government Back Bencher, rather than an answer to the Liberal Democrat who had asked the question. The question tabled by the hon. Member for South Ribble had not even appeared in the Order Book or in *Hansard*. It was a put-up job.

On the same day, my hon. Friend the Member for Bath received an answer to his parliamentary question, No. 37886, which was word for word the same as the press release answering the Labour Member's question. After my hon. Friend's office rang the Department's press office, a copy was faxed to it. That listed the Labour Member's parliamentary question as No. 39514—1,628 questions later than that of my hon. Friend. The obvious conclusion is that a convenient Back-Bench Government Member had been found to whom credit could be given for having asked the question.

Mrs. Annette L. Brooke (Mid-Dorset and North Poole): I am sorry to distract my hon. Friend, but my mind is racing. I wonder who was responsible for the press release—it came from a Department that has had a few other problems with press releases.

Mr. Tyler: My hon. Friend is becoming more cynical than me, even after my long period in the House. I would not like to speculate; clearly the people in the press office are an ingenious and inventive lot. The Order Book for Friday 1 March, which contained the written answers for Wednesday 27 February as the first of two parts, did not include that answer. The second part, which was published a week later, on 8 March, did give it—an intriguing coincidence, and in direct contravention of the advice given by the Committee and by the Speaker, and acknowledged by the Government.

Brian White: Is the hon. Gentleman's real concern the fact that others are trying to claim credit for his party's ideas—a trick that the Liberal party uses up and down the country?

Mr. Tyler: That is unworthy of the hon. Gentleman, who is usually very fair. I hope that, as a member of the

[Mr. Tyler]

Committee, he takes a dispassionate view of the problem. If he does not take that issue seriously, he should wait until I come to the others.

A second example concerns an attempt by my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey (Sandra Gidley) to put a question to Ministers. She tabled a question on 8 February, but it was effectively sabotaged, again by a Government Back Bencher, whose question was tabled four days later in much milder terms than the substantial and detailed answer would suggest. My hon. Friend asked the Deputy Prime Minister, first,

"when his Department expects to publish departmental targets for the appointment of women to public bodies for (a) 2001-4 and (b) 2002-5",

secondly,

"what percentage of those appointed to public bodies are women; and when will the next set of figures be released;"

and thirdly,

"what assessment his Department has made of progress by Departments towards their 1998 to 2001 targets for the appointment of women to public bodies."

One would think that those were fairly non-controversial questions. Why not a straight answer? The Parliamentary Secretary to the Cabinet Office replied:

"I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave today to my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Dr. Stoate)."

The hon. Member for Dartford had asked a completely different question, some days after my hon. Friend. He had asked the Deputy Prime Minister:

"when the Government will publish the next edition of "Public Bodies" and the annual publication setting out the targets for increasing diversity in public appointments; and if he will make a statement."—[*Official Report*, 14 February 2002; Vol. 380, c. 564-65W.]

In both cases, there was an attempt to set up a patsy planted question in order to avoid having to answer a substantial one, and a congenial Government Back Bencher asked a question that could be put to good use. Again, the Government made a specific announcement but refused to acknowledge who had asked the question.

The next way in which the Government play fast and loose with the questioning system is blocking. The experience of my colleagues in the Liberal Democrat shadow Treasury team has serious implications for everybody in this place. Having had a series of questions from my hon. Friend the Member for Truro and St. Austell (Matthew Taylor) regarding the euro unhelpfully answered by the Treasury, they pursued another route. On 20 October 2000 a member of staff sent a letter to the Treasury asking, under the code of conduct on access to public information, for:

"a list of any studies that they had commissioned or undertaken on the impact of the Euro on competition or trade in the United Kingdom or the Euro zone since May 1997",

On 6 March, after four months, the request was denied, with the Treasury citing various exemptions to the code. A complaint was sent to the Treasury and a reply was received after three months—we all know that the Department is terribly busy. Again, the request for the information was denied, but at that late stage, the Treasury recommended to the inquirer that any further complaint be directed to the parliamentary ombudsman.

The complaint was taken up, and after a lengthy investigation the parliamentary ombudsman concluded:

"While I criticised the Treasury for aspects of the way in which they handled Mr H's request for information . . . I saw no reason why the Treasury should not reveal that they have not commissioned any external studies on the impact of the Euro on competition and trade since the publication of the Currie report on July 1997. I regard the Treasury's willingness to agree to that recommendation as a satisfactory outcome to a partially justified complaint."

The implication is clear: an ordinary member of the public using the code can get some decent information out of the Treasury, while you and I, Mr. Olner, and other hon. Members, cannot get that information. That is outrageous, because we are the representatives of the public. We are being denied information that ordinary members of the public have a right to expect. I hope that the hon. Member for Milton Keynes, North-East (Brian White) will take that complaint seriously.

Even more illuminating, perhaps, are the revelations that followed a detailed request made by my hon. Friend the Member for Truro and St. Austell to the Treasury under the terms of the Data Protection Act 1998 for all information pertaining to him, such as mail, notes, internal letters, briefings, e-mails and so on. His request elicited some extraordinary facts about the workings of the Whitehall machine. Extracts from the documents supplied to my hon. Friend include examples of e-mails and internal memos between anonymous and supposedly impartial servants of Whitehall that speculate on the reasons for questions being asked, rather than providing the information requested.

One such communication says:

"Matthew Taylor is a tricky customer and he's not asking this just to help the government beat the opposition round the head."

That was written by a civil servant—not, I take it, a special adviser or a Minister. Another sentence runs:

"We do not know why Mr Taylor has asked this question."

Why should they speculate about that, when it is not the business of civil servants to do so?

There is then an exchange on a neat way in which to block a question. The civil servant writes:

"I have gone for a narrow and perdantic interpretation of Taylor's question, which makes the answer pretty short and easy."

I should say, in parenthesis, that that may have been written by a special adviser, because pedantic was spelled with an "r" after the "e", so I do not think that anyone who passed the civil service exams could have written it. Again, that is a deliberate attempt to set the Minister up to block a question. It is not even a political decision; the decision was made within the Department.

By this time, something about the process may have been getting to the individual concerned. I do not think that the following sort of comment, which shows evident annoyance at a line of questioning, should be permitted in a Government Department. The civil servant says:

"Tyler"—

sorry, that was a Freudian slip. He says:

"Taylor is at it again, I'm afraid".

That is inappropriate comment from the civil servant, and it appears on the records of a Department of State in Whitehall.

Interestingly, as soon as *The Sunday Times* drew attention to the revelations about that extraordinary attitude, the Treasury advised other Departments to destroy such personal records and remove all comments forthwith. This is Enron time—"Let's put it all through the shredder," they said. That is not how we expect the British civil service to operate. Such an attempt to undermine the whole purpose of the data protection legislation is despicable. Even worse is the evidence that career civil servants are being subverted into the political mindset; that is damaging and dangerous, and all hon. Members should be worried on that score. They are servants not of Ministers or of the governing party but of the public. They belong to all of us, and we pay for them.

I have other examples of the ways in which the sort of advice that I have described has been taken.

Mr. Greg Knight: The hon. Gentleman has raised a number of issues that should give us all cause for concern. I want to ensure that he does not unintentionally mislead the Committee by seeing shadows on the wall where they do not exist. Often, when a Minister is given a draft reply to peruse, the civil servant will properly give what he thinks is the reason behind the question, particularly if there has been a constituency tragedy, if it follows an earlier line of questioning from before the Minister was in post. That is a legitimate way for the civil service to behave.

Mr. Tyler: I entirely agree. However, I have a whole series of similar examples to those that I have cited, and they do not fall into the category that the hon. Gentleman rightly describes as proper briefing, which is done to ensure that Ministers give appropriate answers.

I shall move on to the next series of complaints—about delays—that some of my hon. Friends have been trying to get sorted out. On 14 February 2002 my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) tabled an early-day motion whose first line was:

"That this House notes that the length of time taken by Ministers in the Department of Health to answer parliamentary questions far exceeds the accepted convention of one week."

The hon. Member for Cannock Chase, the Chairman of the Select Committee, has already referred to what happened next. It was shown that since the 2001 general election as many as 1,000 unanswered parliamentary questions from the Department of Health were still hanging around.

On 20 February, the Department had the following statement printed in *The Daily Telegraph*:

"Department of Health ministers take very seriously their duty of accountability to Parliament in all its forms, including the prompt and helpful provision of replies to Members' questions; it is unfortunate that this commitment to quality can on occasion result in a reply taking longer than one would like."

That is an understatement.

On 5 March it came to light that a civil servant had been suspended after an inquiry had revealed that false information was being sent out by the Department of Health. The Secretary of State for Health said at the time that evidence had been found of what appeared to be the "systematic falsification" of the handling of parliamentary questions. Why did it take so long to discover that?

It is extraordinary that the great Departments of State have no built-in mechanism to check that nothing had happened during those nine months. It reminds me of the rogue traders in the big banks, and the fact that it had not been spotted meant that nobody was in a position to monitor or undertake an internal audit. The Secretary of State for Health was quoted on the BBC as saying that the falsification that had taken place meant that officials and Ministers were wrongly led to believe that Members had received replies to their questions when they had not. There is a big question mark about the efficacy of the system. It needs to be examined carefully.

Others have referred to the fact that commercial confidentiality and disproportionate cost are often used as an excuse for not answering questions. My hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) has been a dogged terrier in trying to establish precisely how and why those excuses are used. What is so extraordinary—he may want to comment on this if he catches your eye, Mr. Olner—is not only that those excuses are used increasingly frequently, but that Ministers do not always know how often they are used.

The proportion of questions blocked in 2000-01 outstripped even the number of secrets in the Tories' last year in power. As the hon. Member for Milton Keynes, North-East implied, that might to some extent be the result of more arm's-length government—agencies, privatisations and all that nonsense. That raises other important questions, and I hope that the House will return to them, but it is an ironic twist that most Departments refuse to reveal how many questions they block on the ground of commercial confidentiality. What nonsense.

Although a manual search through *Hansard* to collect the data to make a graph took slightly over four hours, even with careful double-checking, many Departments claimed that to do the same would still incur "disproportionate cost". One wonders precisely who they are paying to do the job. Perhaps it is the Ministers themselves, because it works out at about £140 an hour. The Home Office was one of the few Departments to answer the question in full. Interestingly, from 1997 onwards there was a steady rise; it was not a dramatic number, but at least the Departments could quantify it.

The Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions provided figures only for the period since the general election, despite the fact that the Department for Education and Skills, whose function also changed in part, seemed able to supply information going back to 1996. Only two Departments, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, responded to the recommendation of the Select Committee. The Committee stated:

"We recommend that when Departments are considering refusing to answer a question on grounds of 'disproportionate cost' there should be a presumption that any of the requested information which is readily available should be given."

That still does not seem to have sunk in.

[Mr. Tyler]

Until we have effective freedom of information legislation, such an excuse is pathetic. I have some experience of this. I asked the then Minister of Agriculture in April 2000:

"what meetings have been held between United States Government officials and his Department in (a) the USA and (b) the UK in the last 12 months, indicating the dates and locations of the meetings and the subjects discussed."

He replied:

"There have been frequent meetings between United States Government officials and MAFF officials over the last 12 months covering a range of bilateral and multilateral issues. Detailed information in the form requested is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost." —[*Official Report*, 13 April 2000; Vol. 348, c. 270W.]

The cost would not have been disproportionate because, with a little help from my American friends, all that information was available from the Department of Agriculture in Washington. Every single meeting, all those who had taken part and precisely what subjects had been discussed was available. Citizens of the United States have a right to information that is denied to us, despite the fact that the Government said that they would introduce effective freedom of information legislation. We await that with interest.

Other speakers have referred to the difficulty of finding an enforcement mechanism to ensure that recommendations from the Select Committee, Mr. Speaker and the code are adhered to. I do not know the answer, but we must seriously address the issue, and I hope that the Committee will take it up. It occurs to me that the role of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration may provide one route, and that his office may act as the examining body, but either the Committee or the Speaker should take a more proactive role.

I believe that hon. Members throughout the House find the present situation unsatisfactory. Although we are grateful to the Select Committee for its regular reports, it will not be sufficient to report on abuses; we must deal with them. That means that we need an undertaking from the Chairman—I hope that he will take this seriously—that his investigations will range further, not only into what has gone wrong, but to see how things can be put right. In the meantime, the Minister must examine the reputation of his Government. I am sure that he is proud to be a member of a Government who set out to be a more open and transparent Administration than their predecessors, but on the basis of the evidence that we have heard this afternoon, he and his Government are failing abysmally.

3.42 pm

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff, West): I was interested in the anecdote with a Welsh theme told earlier by the Chairman of the Public Administration Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock Chase (Tony Wright), about Lloyd George and the motor car. I have had a similar experience when making my nightly phone call to my eight-year-old daughter. I often make the mistake of asking her what she is doing, and she says, "I'm talking to you on the phone." That is another example of a perfect answer, which, according to Lloyd George's dictum, is true, brief and tells one nothing that one does not already know.

Although hon. Members may have attempted to, I do not believe that anyone has made a political case in today's debate that it is the Government's active policy to be difficult about answering parliamentary questions. There are problems, which I shall come to, but a case has been made—not a new case—that there is a culture in public administration and the civil service in the UK, for whose work I have much admiration, especially having started to serve on the Select Committee, of withholding information. I would like that culture to be broken. Although it is important that we debate such matters—the Select Committee's work is important— that culture exists in public administration.

I do not think that there is a political case for saying that the Government are deliberately being more difficult than their predecessors about releasing information. On the contrary, an Act dealing with freedom of information has been passed, although it has not come into force. It may not go as far as some, including myself, would like, but it is nevertheless a major improvement on the situation that prevailed in the 1990s and 1980s. We should recognise that and give the Government credit.

We should, therefore, take a balanced approach and make fair criticisms. We all have to make our political points, but we must recognise that the Government have made efforts to be accountable. I realise that, as a new Member, I come to this issue with a less experienced eye than others, but I also come to it with a fresh eye. I like to think that I am a free-range style of politician, rather than a battery-farmed one. I like to ask my own questions, not planted ones. I am prepared to hold the Executive to account and to ask difficult questions, even though I am a Government Back Bencher.

I am, however, also prepared to be realistic, and I see that Ministers must be allowed to do their jobs. When I read the Order Paper, I am sometimes reminded of the saying "The greatest fool can ask more questions than the wisest man can answer"—unlike my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock Chase, I am not referring to the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow). When I look through the Order Paper, it sometimes occurs to me that Departments must devote huge amounts of time and resources to answering questions. Some Departments are asked hundreds of questions, and Ministers give answers. It is obvious that civil servants draft them and that Ministers go through them. Some Ministers, however, have hundreds of the things in their boxes and must read them before they can be published. We must accept that some of the rates that have been quoted for blocked questions are too high, as the Committee noted. That needs to be studied. In none of the Departments that are listed in the information available to me, however, does more than a couple of percentage points of questions fall into that category. I accept that there are other ways of blocking questions, although there is, of course, impartial information, too. There is, however, no evidence of a political culture of deliberately blocking answers.

Mr. Chope: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that on 18 March, the Prime Minister refused to answer a basic

question from my hon. Friend the Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns), who asked

"to whom complaints about breaches of the Ministerial Code should be made"?—[*Official Report*, 18 March 2002; Vol. 382, c. 2W.]

Does the hon. Gentleman regard that as a deliberate refusal and as blocking, or did the Prime Minister have some other motive?

Kevin Brennan: My first reaction is that I am surprised that the hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) bothered to ask such a question. It is quite clear that the Prime Minister is responsible for the ministerial code of conduct. I should have thought that that was obvious, but I may be wrong about that.

Mr. Chope: To put it on the record, I think that the hon. Gentleman is wrong in assuming, as I did, that the Prime Minister is prepared to take responsibility for other Ministers' breaches of the ministerial code.

Kevin Brennan: In fairness, I said nothing about him being prepared to take responsibility; I said that, in my view, he was responsible for the code, as things stand. No doubt we can return to that.

Tony Wright: I intervene only because I regret the partisan way in which the debate is developing. This Government and this Prime Minister have been the first to accept the recommendation from the Committee on Standards in Public Life that we change the wording of the ministerial code to make it clear that the buck stops with the Prime Minister. The issue is quite straightforward.

Kevin Brennan: As always, I am grateful to my vastly experienced and very able colleague who chairs the Public Administration Committee for having made that absolutely clear.

To an extent, hon. Members sometimes abuse the privilege of asking parliamentary questions. If we received some of those questions from constituents, we might categorise them as vexatious complainants. It is the legitimate role of parliamentarians to scrutinise the work of the Government, and that of Opposition parties to find out what Government policy is about, to hold the Government to account, to probe them and to get to the truth.

Perhaps some hon. Members suffer a little from league table-itis—it is a problem throughout public administration. Because people's voting records and the number of questions that they ask are published in newspapers, hon. Members are sometimes criticised because they have not asked 250 questions. They might have asked two brilliant and important ones, but league table-itis comes into play and they are criticised in their local press. I have seen evidence of that syndrome influencing the behaviour of parliamentarians. I do not have the statistics here, but I should be interested to see whether the number of questions that have been asked in the last 30 years has grown.

However, there are justified criticisms—some of which have been made today—about the way in which Departments handle and answer questions. The Committee, before I joined it, raised many such matters and received responses from the Government. The occasions that worry me are those on which the Government do not follow the course that they have agreed. For example, with regard to the code of practice on access to Government information, they have agreed that when they answer questions and refuse to give information, they should refer to the part of the code that is relevant to that refusal. I am concerned that there are occasions on which the Government give the reason of disproportionate cost but do not make available such information as can be supplied without incurring disproportionate costs. The suggestion of my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, North-East (Brian White) that information given in response to a parliamentary question should not just be placed in the Library but should be published in *Hansard* is a good and helpful one.

I am also concerned about the fact that there have been difficulties in the Department of Health. However, rather than emphasise, as the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) did, that it took time for the problem to be discovered, it would be fairer to give credit to the Government for the fact that it was discovered and that steps have been taken to put it right. It is symptomatic of the pressure on civil servants as a result of parliamentary questions that they should have given their boss false statistics showing that questions had been answered within the time limits. We must look realistically at civil servants' work loads and not merely try to score political points against the Government on account of such problems. It was an administration failure, not a political conspiracy. That is the only reasonable interpretation of the evidence.

Just to demonstrate that I am a free-range, not battery-farmed, politician, on my way to the debate I picked up an envelope from the Letter Board in the Members' Lobby. I do not know what it contains, but it says on the outside "Immediate, by hand, parliamentary questions". With your permission, Mr. Olner, I shall open it and we shall find out at random whether the Government are answering questions effectively.

I asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what

"steps she is taking to promote knowledge transfer between the university sector and British industry".

She has answered:

"The Government's two White Papers, 'Excellence and Opportunity', published in July 2000, and 'Opportunity for All', published in February 2001, set out our science and innovation policy for the 21st century, and include a comprehensive range of measures to help promote knowledge transfer between the university sector and British Industry. We are making excellent progress.

We are considering, as part of the Government's spending review, how to further develop these initiatives to build on universities' potential as drivers of growth in the knowledge economy."

That might be parliamentary scrutiny at its best.

Mr. Tyler: Will the hon. Gentleman share with us when he tabled that question, the date that it was intended to be answered and whether it was answered on time?

Kevin Brennan: I can. I will confess that it is a slight cheat, in that it was an oral question that I tabled for

[Kevin Brennan]

answer today, and that is the written response. I did not know what was in the envelope before I opened it, and I am satisfied with the answer that I was given.

3.55 pm

Mrs. Annette L. Brooke (Mid-Dorset and North Poole): I want to speak briefly, as there is a danger of the debate becoming a catalogue of misdeeds that loses sight of the overall picture.

Since I came to the House a short time ago, I have found the process of written questions to be an elaborate game. We are limited to considering the quality of the answers today, but the process is important. As a new Member, I found it daunting when I entered the Table Office to see my questions all changed in pencil. I have been a teacher for more than 20 years, and did not like that much. On one occasion, I asked why the staff did not use a red pen, and even that joke did not strike home.

If a Member is reasonably intelligent, he knows what questions he wants to ask and the overall rules about what can and cannot be done. I do not see why it is necessary to interfere with one's language, if one wants to ask a straightforward question. Clearly the questions fall into different categories. I am not sure whether there has been any analysis of those categories, but that would be interesting. In my first few months, I asked questions in total innocence, simply to obtain information for constituents who had come to my surgeries.

For example, we are trying to site a children's hospice in Poole, so an early question of mine simply asked the Secretary of State for Health

"what Government funding is available nationally for *(a)* hospices and *(b)* children's hospices."—[*Official Report*, 11 March 2002; Vol. 381, c. 818W.]

I tabled it on 10 July, but it was not answered until 11 March. That is especially tragic, given that there was no guile behind the question. The charity on behalf of which I asked that serious question was still looking for the answer.

I want to reflect on the suggestion made by my hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler), which was that there should be a built-in mechanism. It seems incredible that a question could get lost for that length of time. It was not entirely lost, because I was concerned about the problem and made queries about it, even though I had no staff. I was told to ring the Department of Health, which I dutifully did in October or November. I have a feeling that that might have produced a holding reply, but I have not tracked it as efficiently as I might have done. However, the question is not a one-off case. There will always be instances like it, but there were rather a lot of them, and there was nothing devious in my questioning.

I return to the point that one must understand the rules of the game. The question was changed, although it was straightforward, but we do not always get the answers that we want, even when we receive them on time, and then we are led to table further questions. A mountain of questions builds up simply because we are not given the answers that we want in the first place. The number of questions must create an enormous burden. It is difficult to see the purpose of some of them, although some of them may be really clever. My hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) obviously has his own purposes for asking his questions, and I would probably not immediately recognise his overall objective.

Norman Baker: For the record, I do not think that I have asked the most questions; that is the achievement of the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow).

Mrs. Brooke: I think that we have that fact about the hon. Member for Buckingham on record now.

I was referring more to the category of questions and the game playing that they involve. Perhaps the Select Committee could examine the pattern of questioning—retrospectively, as I should not like to embarrass hon. Members—and do some casework questions on an individual basis to ascertain their purpose, if hon. Members would consent to be honest about that. Given that hon. Members are calling for Ministers to be open, one might appeal for a similar openness from them during a study on questions. It is too airy-fairy simply to choose examples from here, there and everywhere: we need to examine the systematic reasoning behind the questions and to exert some control on the overall level of questions.

Tony Wright: I am slightly alarmed by the hon. Lady's proposal to demand of the hon. Member for Buckingham, for example, why he is moved to ask the questions that he asks and in such numbers. She is recommending an inquiry that we are not equipped to handle. In fact, I hoped that the hon. Gentleman would come this afternoon and assist us with our inquiries, but I suspect that he is detained in the Table Office.

Mrs. Brooke: I was thinking of sampling questions some time after they had been asked and making some inquiries. I suppose that, statistically, we would be bound to pick out a question asked by the hon. Member for Buckingham in that process. People would choose to give the answers that they wanted, but we could simply pull out the straightforward constituents' questions, because all hon. Members would own up to and identify them. Even by default and by occasional sampling, we could extract some interesting information. We might make some progress if we had more information.

I once tried to get an answer from the Prime Minister, and did not do terribly well. That was a bit unfortunate, because I was mindful of the rules of the Select Committee. I wanted to ask a question that had arisen from the evidence that we were examining and, because I did not want to break any rules, I phrased the question carefully. When I received a nonsense answer back, I decided that it would not do and wrote a letter, the answer to which took a further three months and was still no real answer to the question. That is a frustrating situation, but one does not always have time to follow such things through.

Another example of the same problem, which in retrospect is amusing, relates to the massive redundancies at Marconi that occurred shortly after I became an MP. As one would expect, I tabled a lot of

questions and received a draft answer from the local officials. I did not know how these things worked at the time, but I can tell hon. Members that I have never had an answer through the parliamentary system. I shall not waste civil servants' time by chasing it up now, however. That is another example of how we might decide not to bother with something because we are sensible enough to realise that time has moved on. However, it suggests that quite a few errors are made around this place.

I welcome everything that was said in the report and the Government response, which was very robust. The words were fine, as were all the promises, but I do not think that we would be making all the statements that hon. Members are making today if those promises were being enacted. In this great game, I am coming round to the suggestion that we need an enforcer of the rules. I do not envisage anything draconian, but we are all playing the game and the rules seem to have changed. The unwritten rules and what is happening now are not satisfactory to everyone. I hope that we can move forward and make the right noises. We need an enforcer and we must return to the beginning and examine the whole process of tabling questions, including the way in which they may be phrased, how they are submitted and the responsibility on Members' not to waste public money, which is important.

4.5 pm

Mr. John Lyons (Strathkelvin and Bearsden): I thank the Chairman of the Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock Chase (Tony Wright), for introducing the debate. It is important to discuss the matter and to make progress. Central to parliamentary democracy is open government, accountability and general openness between Ministers and Members of Parliament. We have heard a number of contributions about the ministerial code. All related to important issues that are central to the debate and that underpin our democracy. However, we must maintain a balance and ensure that we have proper discussion as we make progress. It is infantile to use this issue to attack the Prime Minister and other Ministers. That does not take us forward.

My hon. Friend described the background from the mid-1990s to the resolution in the House in 1996, the development of the ministerial code, the annual report on questions and accountability and the Government's response in December 2000, which the hon. Member for Mid-Dorset and North Poole (Mrs. Brooke) described as robust. I shall not go as far as that. It is a good and promising response, but it does not go far enough. It is not clear enough or firm enough. I shall give some examples. The response refers to a recommendation to Departments when they are

"considering refusing to answer a question on the grounds of 'disproportionate cost'".

We should not be recommending anything; we should be instructing them on what should be done. Similarly, when information is deposited in the Library in response to a parliamentary question it is recommended that

"a copy of it should always be supplied to the Member."

That should not be a recommendation; there should be a clear instruction that that should happen. That lays the basis for much of what we want to do.

The document concludes:

"We hope that following the intervention of the Cabinet Secretary and the Minister there will be improvements in departmental responses."

We should ensure that civil servants are instructed to abide by all the recommendations. There should be no question of picking and choosing and only a clear, across-the-board instruction will suffice. That would make a qualitative difference. There have been failures and difficulties and we must insist that they are rectified at the earliest opportunity so that in the coming months we can say with satisfaction, "The debate has brought about certain changes and the improvements that we all wanted." We can still do that.

The NHS and Ministers' response to questions about Departments were mentioned. Clearly, there was falsification in the Department of Health with regard to the answering of parliamentary questions. That sometimes happens. In a written answer, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health stated:

"Ministers and officials within the Department are fully committed to supporting the system of accountability to Parliament which underpins our democracy. We aim to provide timely and accurate responses to parliamentary questions. There has been a serious failure in honouring that commitment which I deeply regret."—[*Official Report*, 5 March 2002; Vol. 381, c. 192W.]

It is good that the problem has been recorded, but we need to ensure that it does not reoccur in the Department of Health, and that it certainly does not surface in any other Department. A checking system should ensure that answers are dealt with properly and that Members of Parliament feel satisfied and comfortable.

The 144 questions that were tabled by the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) and answered in a particular period were referred to earlier. We also heard that, from June 2001, 2,619 questions were asked at a cost of £316,000. Some will say that that is good because it shows seriousness and assiduity, but my view is that such questioning undermines the system. The system is being treated with contempt because there is clearly no need for that amount of questioning of any Minister or Department. We were told that those questions were about trying to develop a critique of Government spending, but can one not wait until Budget day to hear the economic analysis instead of asking about crèches and damage to property in Departments? Such questions are nonsense and undermine the system and all who want a scheme that will secure proper answers for us at the end of the day.

Mr. Greg Knight: Does the hon. Gentleman not accept that, in discharging our duties as Members of Parliament, we have to make a subjective judgment about how we best do our job? I am rather alarmed by the line that his argument is taking. Does he feel that there should be a statutory limit on the number of questions that an Opposition Member is allowed to ask?

Mr. Lyons: I am not making that point—there should be no restriction—and I am certainly not making my point with reference to the Opposition. Every Member of Parliament should work on the basis that the system would break down if we were all to repeat that level of questioning. It would be nonsense if we were all to do

[Mr. Lyons]

that. We want the system to work effectively, we want people to give proper answers and we want the answers to be given in a proper time scale. As I have said, however, if every single Member were to work in that way, the system would collapse. That would undermine our fight and the arguments for improving it. We want to make it more effective, so that we have greater confidence in it.

There are, will be, and have been circumstances in which the argument about commercial confidentiality can be used, but it can be used only for a certain time. It has a sell-by date and it cannot last for ever. On private prisons, for instance, many people are hiding behind the issue of the cost of not only building such prisons, but maintaining them. That is unfair and we need to challenge such an approach because it does not provide a genuine reason for withholding information.

There are clearly serial questioners and in some cases there is almost the stalking of Ministers, and that is all about trying to score points. As I have said, the argument is not about how we can attack the Prime Minister. If that alone would improve the system, I would be happy to use that argument seven days a week, 24 hours a day. That, however, is not the answer. The answer is that, when we receive a response from the Government, even if we feel that it has not gone far enough, we should use it as a foundation from which to build. If we do that, we will start to have genuine and real improvements with which we will feel comfortable.

4.13 pm

Norman Baker (Lewes): I apologise for being slightly late because I was covering the hunting statement in the House for my colleagues. I also apologise to the hon. Member for Cannock Chase (Tony Wright) for missing some of his contribution. I am pleased that he is Chairman of the Public Administration Committee, because he seems to be a principled, committed democrat who is doing a good job. I am sorry if those comments are unhelpful to him.

We have heard the powerful argument that the system is not working as well as it might do. We have heard it from my hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler), from the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) and from Labour Back Benchers, who all outlined in their own inimitable ways different faults with the system as it is presently constituted. I hope that the Government will take the comments that have been made hitherto, and indeed my comments, in a spirit of constructive criticism and not see them as the blunderbuss approach that is very easy to adopt if one chooses to do so.

My starting point is about securing the accountability of Parliament and Ministers, irrespective of the Government in charge. I would make the same point were a Conservative Government in power; indeed, I hope that I would make the same points if we had a Liberal Democrat Government. *[Interruption.]* Hon. Members are welcome to remember that. In due course—soon, I hope—they will have a chance to see whether that is the case. I suspect that I will still be on the Back Benches, as I am now.

It is important for democracy that the Executive are held to account. None of us must lose sight of that, particularly Ministers because it is easy for them to do so. They are busy people; they have a manifesto that they want to fulfil; they have commitments that they hold to dearly; they want to make the country a better place; and they want to use politics to achieve that aim. The last thing that they want is the nuisance, as they see it, of Back Benchers from their own or other parties asking impertinent questions that slow them down and divert them from what they want to do. However, questions and holding Ministers to account are key parts of our role in this place. We must have an opportunity to drag out the information from the Government that they do not want to disclose.

Of course, all Governments in all countries want to hide information. That is the way that the system works, but it works properly only if those who are not part of the Government can elicit information. The question is not whether the Government are behaving properly but whether the system enables others to hold them to account properly.

Mr. Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater): I agree totally with the hon. Gentleman, but he needs to go further. If Members ask a question but do not get an answer, we have no recourse to anyone. Does he agree that perhaps we need a more stringent way of holding civil servants to account?

Norman Baker: I agree that we need a method of getting the answers to which we are entitled. That is the crucial point of the debate. I hope that the Public Administration Committee will consider the matter.

The Procedure Committee has considered the practicalities of tabling questions—recently, I gave evidence to it, as have other hon. Members—and it is producing a helpful report. Clearly, procedures could be improved; for example, by the electronic tabling of questions. Oral questions are tabled so far in advance that, when they are asked, they may be out of date. One need only look down the list of Foreign and Commonwealth Office questions. They bear no relation to international events of the previous seven days so, to the outside world, they seem completely mad. At the most recent Foreign and Commonwealth Office questions—for the first time for a long time—the questions were topical, but that is the exception rather than the rule.

Another issue is whether we should be able to hold the Government to account through questions during the recess. Some Ministers may groan; that would mean having more and more questions at a time when they want to be on holiday. If something happens in the outside world when the House is sitting, we can have a statement from the Minister at 3.30 pm and within hours of the event. However, if something happens on 1 August, we have to wait until 15 October, or whenever, to raise the issue in any way other than by letter to a Minister. That is completely absurd. We need to deal with lack of accountability through the summer recess, in particular. I welcome the proposals from the Leader of the House, which will go some way to dealing with that by changing the recess dates. That will not entirely deal with the matter, but it will help.

The hon. Member for Milton Keynes, North-East (Brian White) made a point about information that is now outside direct Government control. We must deal

with that. My hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake), who regularly asks questions about the London underground as part of his duties, gets far more detailed answers about that aspect of public transport than about Connex South Eastern or one of the privatised companies. We are told that certain questions are a matter for them, as they are private companies. Nevertheless, the public at large regard them as public services. The public make no distinction between underground and overground lines. They want to know—and should be able to find out—what is going on. We need to find a way of getting information about the privatised industries that people regard as public services into *Hansard*, the House of Commons Library and the public domain generally in a more effective way.

The most difficult and potentially most political issue—I hope that the Minister accepts that I am not trying to make a political point—is the quality of the answers that come back. That concerns me most. It applies not only to this Government, but to previous ones, as my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Dorset and North Poole (Mrs. Brooke) pointed out.

When I was a researcher in this place in the late 1980s, I saw a question from a Labour Member to the then Prime Minister, Mrs. Thatcher. She was obviously annoying the Member by using the excuse of disproportionate cost to avoid answering questions, so the Member tabled a question that asked on how many occasions in the past 12 months the Prime Minister had replied that a question could be answered only at disproportionate cost. The answer that was returned stated that that could be answered only at disproportionate cost—if one looks hard enough, one can find irony and humour in No. 10. Thus, the blocking of questions and the giving of deliberately evasive answers has not occurred just under this Government.

The openness of Departments varies. Some Ministers are good and straight at answering questions. For instance, I pay tribute to the Foreign Secretary who has always been—in his present capacity and in his previous capacity as Home Secretary—absolutely straight. If hon. Members ask him a question, they get an answer, no matter how inconvenient it might be. That is the way it should be. I know that he puts particular stress on that. The same cannot be said of other Ministers, and I do not know whether that is their fault or because of the civil servants or the culture in the Department—I do not know enough about Departments' inner workings. However, there is a discrepancy between Departments on how questions are answered.

I have become known—erroneously—for tabling the greatest number of questions, but that honour belongs to others. If hon. Members set out, with a league table in mind, to ask a certain number of questions, they are mad. That would be completely pointless. Is tabling more questions than anyone else the best thing that a Member can do? I do not believe that a single Member has that intention, and I certainly do not. I have no idea how many questions I have tabled in the past, or during the last Session—it does not bother me.

I should add that there is no advantage to be had from being top of the table because someone in No. 10 or elsewhere simply talks to a friendly journalist and says, "How about running a story saying that this MP is costing us lots of money?" I know from journalists that that has happened, so there is no point the Minister denying it should he subsequently try to do so. It is not my intention to be at the top of the table; I shall leave that to the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow).

Much has been said about the hon. Member for Buckingham, but he is not here. In his defence, I shall say that he is entitled to pursue his parliamentary objectives in the same way as any other Member. He is entitled to interpret the mandate from his electorate in the manner in which he sees fit. Hon. Members are held to account by the media, which scrutinise this place, by their colleagues, who are aware of their activities, and—most of all—by their electorate. If the electorate conclude that Members have misused this place, Members will pay for it at the ballot box.

Kevin Brennan: I do not think that anyone argues for a limit on the number of questions that Members can ask. However, is it not right and reasonable to draw attention to the fact that, had all Back Benchers followed the precedent set by, for example, the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow), the cost, according to official calculations, would have been £120 million over the past few years?

Norman Baker: The hon. Gentleman may draw that point to the public's attention in the Chamber. The hon. Member for Buckingham, others hon. Members and I shall defend ourselves robustly, and say why questions have been tabled.

I am always slightly suspicious about figures for the cost of questions. I am not aware that civil servants have been taken on to answer questions, or that any would have been sacked had not so many questions been asked. Questions may have redistributed civil servants' time from the Executive to Parliament, which might be a good thing. They may also bring out information that the Government do not want brought out, which could also be a good thing.

The alleged cost of questions varies each time the issue is raised. It is never the same from one debate to the next, and goes up and down like a yo-yo, so the point made by the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Kevin Brennan) is not entirely realistic. The Procedure Committee has considered the issue of the number of questions—it was discussed during the sitting in which I gave evidence. Someone may have suggested limiting the number of questions.

I would be prepared to accept something along the lines suggested if—a very big "if"—alternative mechanisms were in place to allow hon. Members to hold the Government to account properly. The reason why some of us spend time tabling parliamentary questions is not for the love of it, or that they are the best weapon that we can find, but they are one of the few weapons that we have in the House to hold the Executive to account. That is why parliamentary questions are so important and why we are discussing them this afternoon. It is also, no doubt, why the Public Administration Committee has examined the matter. Questions are one of the few weapons that we have.

We do not have the freedom of information culture that other countries have. My hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall referred to an incident relating to agriculture, and how open the United States is compared with the United Kingdom. I am always

[Norman Baker]

hearing from Ministers—and, indeed, Conservative Members—how we should look to the US for good examples of policing and so forth. Let us follow this example as well, and have US-style freedom of information in the United Kingdom. I pay tribute to the Government for the Freedom of Information Act 2000, but it does not go far enough and the exemptions are drawn too widely. It remains to be seen how the Act will be interpreted in due course.

If we place restrictions on parliamentary questions, we must have alternative means in place. That means strengthening freedom of information above all else. We must have a different culture that encourages citizens to embrace freedom of information and data protection. We must also give more powers to Select Committees to strengthen their role. The Prime Minister should make a statement in Parliament once a year that is open to question about his activities. A range of things could be done to improve accountability in the House.

Extra accountability would not simply benefit the Opposition and Labour Back Benchers, but the Government themselves. The Government might benefit even if information came out that they did not want to release. For example, I asked a range of parliamentary questions about the dome to the then Minister without Portfolio among others. The answers were characterised by a lack of information. Information was deliberately not supplied, which was irregular and improper. Moreover, had the information to the questions that I asked back in 1997 and 1998 been supplied, someone in the Government might have noticed that the dome was going to be a bit of a fiasco. They might have pulled the plug before the whole thing went pear-shaped—to mix my metaphors wildly.

Mr. Tyler: I am sure that my hon. Friend is right. Ministers should be the first to read answers on some occasions. Otherwise, if the question is not put squarely and is not properly answered, the relevant information is not available to them. Does that not answer the point made by those who worry about the cost of questions? If Ministers knew precisely what was going on, the amount that could be saved through good government would far exceed the most extravagant estimate of the cost of answering questions.

Norman Baker: My hon. Friend is right. If one multiplies the number of question asked by the hon. Member for Buckingham by 100, the cost of questions would still be dwarfed by the cost of the dome, which cost £832 million. If some of my questions about the dome had been answered, I might have saved public money. It was a fiasco that could have been avoided.

Cover-up is not good for government. It does not help. People such as me perform a public service and help the Government every day of the week by asking questions to elicit information that could help them. Perhaps, as my hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall said, the civil service does not give Ministers the information that they should be given.

Back Benchers and other hon. Members are not unreasonable about parliamentary questions. On one occasion in the past couple of weeks, the Home Office telephoned me to ask me to withdraw a question—for good reasons that would be improper to go into. It was helpful to the Government pursuant to their duties for that question not to be asked or answered. The situation was explained to me, and I was happy not to pursue the question. Members of Parliament are reasonable if we are given reasons for particular behaviour.

Mr. Greg Knight: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that that is the correct way for a Minister to proceed? Instead of asking the Member privately to withdraw the question, perhaps under the Chatham house rule, sometimes the question is either blocked or a non-answer is given. The example that he just quoted should be best practice.

Norman Baker: I agree, and I again note the difference between Departments. The Home Office has always been pretty straight with me on its parliamentary answers, which not only is proper, but commands respect from Members of Parliament. We are much more willing to co-operate with Departments when we are treated properly. The converse is when some Departments and Ministers treat us like rubbish, which does not encourage us to do anything but pursue those Departments more actively. I do not want to make a party political point, but I am sorry to say that the answers from the Prime Minister are thinner and more evasive than they tend to be from most Ministers. I am sorry about that, and I wish that he would examine his answers and realise that being more open is more helpful all round.

The Prime Minister has a culture of using people outside the ministerial circle for key activities. For example, he has Lord Levy acting as a duplicate Foreign Secretary. That is the Prime Minister's choice, and no one will deny that, if he wants to appoint Lord Levy to roam around the world, it is a matter for him. However, as far as I am aware, Lord Levy has never spoken in the House of Lords on foreign affairs, and whenever anyone asks the Prime Minister about him, we are met with a portcullis coming down and an absolute refusal to answer questions. What is this guy doing? He may be doing a valuable job and complementing the Foreign Secretary's work perfectly, but I do not know because we are not told. Why are we not told? How can the Prime Minister appoint someone to a key position and then, effectively, refuse to answer questions about him? That is not right.

There is also the Lord Chancellor, Lord Irvine, who, the last time I checked, was on more Cabinet Committees than any other Minister. Again, that is fine. He may be a very intelligent and useful person, and I believe that he is more committed than many Ministers to subjects such as freedom of information. However, it is difficult to find out what he does. He is a key figure in Government, so why can we not know what he does?

The Minister will no doubt groan or smirk if I mention Lord Birt, but this is a serious point. The Prime Minister has appointed someone as transport supremo, but no one is entirely clear about his job. Not even the Select Committee on Transport, Local Government and the Regions, under the redoubtable chairmanship of the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody), can find out.

I will not bore the Minister by reading out a huge list of questions of which he is well aware, but I remind him that on 22 January, I tabled several questions to elicit information on the nature of Lord Birt's activities. I did not question the nature of his advice, as I am happy to accept that that is private and up to the individual, but asked basic questions such as how many times he has met Ministers, how many hours a week he works, what he has claimed in out-of-pocket expenses, to whom he reports and for what period he has been appointed to form a strategy unit. Those are not intrusive questions to reveal confidentialities that will rock the Government, but run-of-the-mill stuff. Apart from telling me the last time that Lord Birt travelled by train, which was the answer to one of about 10 questions, we were told nothing. The only thing we know is that he is involved in blue-skies thinking, whatever that may be. We also had an Adjournment debate on the subject, to which the Minister replied. I repeated the questions on that occasion, and, as *Hansard* shows, the questions were not answered then either.

The Minister may think that I am wasting Government time talking about Lord Birt. He may think that that is not relevant, but it is my right as a Member of Parliament to hold the Government to account in the way that I believe is most appropriate. I will hang or fall by that. It is the Minister's job to answer questions, not to decide that he can avoid answering them, which is what has happened in this case. Clearly, given the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall and the hon. Member for Christchurch, it has happened on other occasions.

It is proper, necessary and just that Members' questions are answered. If Members are treated with respect, they will not abuse the system. However, failing to answer questions elicits further questions. Those who failed to answer questions in the first place, or who failed to put into the public domain information that should be there, are therefore responsible for the plethora of questions tabled, not the Members who are doing their job and trying to hold the Government to account.

I hope that the Minister will pay serious attention to a point that several hon. Members raised today. There is a need for an independent right of appeal, or other mechanism, to elicit an answer from a Minister who has not answered the question and who cannot provide a reasonable excuse or reason—the word "excuse" is pejorative—under the ministerial code of conduct. Under those circumstances, Ministers should be obliged to answer questions. I do not know exactly how that can be done but, when I intervened on the hon. Member for Christchurch, I suggested that, in extreme circumstances, the Minister should be brought to the House and made to answer the question orally.

There may be less dramatic methods of achieving the same end, but we cannot have a situation in the House where Ministers feel, as one or two of them do, that they do not have to answer questions and that no sanction will be applied against them if they do not. We are in that situation today. The only avenue that works is the code of conduct, but that might mean a four-month delay followed by another three-month delay, with the result that we receive information a year later. That is completely unacceptable. Mr. Speaker issued guidance that could not be clearer, but it will work only if there is good will on all sides. I am sorry to say that it will not work if there is a determination to block a question or an answer.

I hope that the Minister will recognise that there needs to be a mechanism for ensuring that answers are given to questions that are properly asked and when there is no reason not to answer them. If he does not do so, I hope that the Public Administration Committee will take it upon itself to find such a mechanism.

4.37 pm

Mr. Greg Knight (East Yorkshire): First, I pay tribute to the Select Committee for all its hard work and effort in producing the report. Unfortunately, most Select Committee work is unglamorous and unreported. However, it is essential to the parliamentary process of scrutiny. On behalf of the Opposition, I want to place on record our thanks to all Members of all parties who serve on that Committee.

Most of the contributions today contained an anecdote, so perhaps mine should not be an exception. There is a story, which may be apocryphal, of an elderly Conservative knight of the shires who sought re-election that may have been one election too many. He had to face a public meeting, in which he realised that things were not going his way. In an attempt to impress the audience, he said, "I will have you know that on your behalf I have asked no fewer than 150 parliamentary questions in the last year," to which a voice from the back of the hall shouted, "Ignorant bastard," at which point he felt that he had started to lose his audience's attention.

We should accept that there will always be some dissatisfaction with ministerial replies. The motive behind most questions is not merely a quest for information, but an attempt to influence the direction of policy or an endeavour to embarrass a Minister where a policy is perceived to have failed. If it is an attempt to influence a Minister, most Ministers are not for budging, or at least not until their civil servants suggest it. Their answer therefore tends to pour cold water on the questioner's idea, even if they later adopt it. If it is an endeavour to embarrass a Minister, the knee-jerk protectiveness of the Department will usually seek to ensure that the parliamentary reply reveals as little as possible. Even if the question is straightforward and merely seeks to elicit information, some Ministers will still issue an obtuse reply, which is to be regretted.

I accept, in all fairness, that that practice is not confined to the present Administration. Some years ago, when Tim Renton—now Lord Renton of Mount Harry—was the Minister for the Civil Service under the Conservative Government, the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) asked

"how many civil servants in employment at the latest date are (a) men or (b) women."

The Minister replied:

"All of them."—[*Official Report*, 3 February 1992; Vol. 203, c. 20.]

It was an amusing riposte, but it was not an answer. I am with the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler). Since then, things have got worse, not better.

I accept that the general guidance issued to civil servants about the answering of parliamentary questions stresses that Departments should be as open

[Mr. Greg Knight]

as possible. However, that guidance is not entirely unequivocal because it says that any information given should be as concise as possible. Civil servants still make presumptions about the content of a ministerial answer, which is that the Minister wishes to, and should, reveal as little as possible.

The hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Kevin Brennan)—he is not here at the moment—got right to the nub of the problem. Despite the current codes and the published guidance, there is still alive and well in Whitehall a culture of secrecy. That is the main problem. I am not a recent convert to openness. When I was a Minister before the 1997 general election, I frequently altered the terse draft replies that were placed in my red box for me to approve. I redrafted them regularly to give as much information as I felt was necessary to answer the question properly. I am more than disappointed to say that such practice does not seem to have caught on.

In my early days as a Minister, I was taken aback by the civil service approach. When I altered the first draft answer, someone in my private office said, "Minister, surely you do not want to give that reply. He is a member of the Opposition." The civil servants were not being malevolent. I do not think that they were members of the Conservative party being party political. They see what happens in the parliamentary arena, when Ministers are often put on the rack for some temporary policy difficulty, and they think that they are being helpful. They were surprised that I believed that we must fully answer the question, irrespective of whether the person who asked it was a Conservative, a Liberal Democrat or a member of the Labour party.

Mr. Tyler: Has the right hon. Gentleman noticed that, in its present format, an unanswered oral question—which becomes a written question—gives not only the name of the Member of Parliament and his or her constituency, but his or her party? That is a new development and relates precisely to his point.

Mr. Knight: I confirm that that is a new development. It never happened during 1996-97 or previously. I am forced to ask why it is felt necessary to give an hon. Member's party.

I have first-hand experience of civil servants in the Department realising that I wanted to be more open than perhaps they had assumed and then drafting what I regarded as better answers. My argument is that the Minister must take the lead to make that happen, a point made by the hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) when he was complimentary about how the Foreign Secretary was prepared to be more open than some other Ministers.

My argument is supported in the report of the Select Committee when my hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr. Tyrie) and the hon. Member for The Wrekin (Peter Bradley) made a similar point. The hon. Member for The Wrekin told the Committee that he thought that there was a

"prevailing culture within many sectors of the civil service which leads them routinely to withhold information".

I fully endorse that argument. That is what is happening and what is wrong with the system. All of the report makes interesting reading, but some of it is damning in its assessment of what the Government are doing.

The response tabled by the Government is not entirely satisfactory, so I have a number of questions for the Minister. On page vi, paragraph d, the Committee says that it deplores

"the practice of leaving a question unanswered"

until another comes along, whereupon the latter is answered and the original questioner is referred to that. The hon. Member for North Cornwall was spot on about that. We know what goes on. The Minister answers a later, more helpful, planted question and the less helpful interrogatory question is ignored, with that Member being referred to the subsequent answer. I hope that the Government will think again on the matter. I am trying my best not to make a party political critique of what is wrong with the system. Certainly, I cannot remember doing that. The first question tabled is the one that should receive the substantive answer, and the later question may refer back to that answer. Will the Minister agree to reconsider the Government's response, although perhaps not today?

Paragraph e on pages vi and vii is a slightly more welcome response, but again it is not entirely satisfactory. There is an element of trying to fob us off with the comment that

"Ministers are accountable to Parliament".

We know that in reality there is no effective parliamentary or ministerial mechanism to review and adjudicate on inadequate or derisory answers. Ministers are not being judged on their performance in that regard. The hon. Member for Mid-Dorset and North Poole (Mrs. Brooke) made a valid point on that matter, and I agree with her. I also agree with what the hon. Member for North Cornwall had to say. We need a better and more immediate way of bringing Ministers to book.

The Public Administration Committee works well, but by their very nature a Committee's deliberations take time. I thought before the debate, and am now more convinced than ever, that there is a case for having a scrutineer of parliamentary replies who monitors Ministers' adherence to the ministerial code. Ignoring the advice of that person would amount to a ministerial disciplinary offence. Perhaps the Cabinet Secretary should take a more proactive role, or perhaps we need a ministerial code tsar to take over that responsibility. The issue needs to be examined, and I hope that in its future deliberations the Committee will reflect on that matter.

Tony Wright: I appreciate what the right hon. Gentleman says; it echoes what other hon. Members have said, and I flagged up the issue at the end of my remarks. The Committee has, in a different incarnation, recommended in another report on the ministerial code that there should be a mechanism for trying to enforce the code. Our view is that that would be beneficial to Government as well as to Parliament, and the emerging proposal for a mechanism to monitor the answering of parliamentary questions sits alongside that. We have to find a way of bringing them together.

Mr. Knight: I am grateful for that response. All power to the hon. Gentleman's Committee's elbow in pursuing the matter further.

We have had a constructive and interesting debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater (Mr. Liddell-Grainger) has asked me to give his apologies

because, as so often happens in matters of this sort, there are two debates in which he wanted to take part today. One is in the Commons proper and one here, so he was able to be with us for only one brief contribution.

The hon. Member for Cannock Chase (Tony Wright) set the tone of the debate, and he is rightly gaining a reputation as something of a parliamentary terrier. The Select Committee is fortunate to have him as its Chairman. He is fearless in pursuing the matters that the Committee is examining and that is all that any of us can expect of a Select Committee Chairman. I congratulate him on what he is doing and support him in that. I hope that he long remains in the post.

My hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) made a powerful contribution. The hon. Member for Milton Keynes, North-East (Brian White) thought that it was a little party political, but my hon. Friend produced a damning indictment of how some Ministers, including the Prime Minister, avoid answering legitimate questions. I hope that the Minister will give us some cause to live in hope that there will be progress in the matter because effective action is necessary.

I hope that the hon. Member for Milton Keynes, North-East will not take it the wrong way when I say that I am disappointed to see him here, but only because Mrs. Marion Rix, his Conservative opponent at the last election, is a friend of mine. As long as he is willing to play a full role in examining the Government's failure properly to answer parliamentary questions on the Select Committee, I wish him well.

The hon. Member for North Cornwall said, rightly, that the situation is deteriorating. I do not know whether that is because of politicisation of the civil service or Ministers failing to give a lead, but my impression is that the number of parliamentary questions that are blocked or just not answered is much higher now than a decade ago.

I agreed with the assessment made by the hon. Member for Cardiff, West. There is a culture of secrecy in Whitehall and that is the biggest problem that must be addressed. If Ministers give a lead, most of the difficulties that have been laid bare in this debate will be properly addressed.

The hon. Member for Lewes said that some Ministers are losing sight of the fact that they are accountable to the House and he is right up to a point. I remember meeting President Ronald Reagan shortly after he left office and asked him what it was like being the most important and powerful politician in the world. I was touched by his response. He said that anyone who regards the job in that way will foul up and that he reminded himself daily when he was in the White House that he had only temporary custody of the office. That thought should be printed and put above the doors of all Ministers because they are servants of the House and should remember that they are accountable to the House.

I did not agree with everything that the hon. Gentleman said. He said that any Member who tables questions merely to get to the top of a league table is mad. Perhaps he will have a word with the Liberal Democrat parliamentary elections unit. In seats that it believes the Liberal Democrats can win it compares the number of questions asked by Liberal Democrats with the number asked by candidates they are trying to defeat. Perhaps he should ask his party to follow his own advice.

The hon. Gentleman's point about Lord Birt was valid. Questioning what he is up to is difficult, not because he is an adviser, but because he is a Member of the other place. I sit on the Select Committee that is examining modernisation of the proceedings of the House and, with cross-party support, we may recommend abolition of that rule. It is ludicrous that we cannot question Ministers, and now ministerial advisers, who sit in the other place. We should have the right to question what they are doing with public money.

This ongoing debate is far from over. I hope that the Minister will give us some encouragement and assure us that improvements in the speed and quality of answers will be made and sustained, and that Ministers will be told, not encouraged but instructed, to lure their Departments away from their natural and long-held instincts of secrecy. Here in Parliament we are right not to be fobbed off with inadequate answers. If, as a result of the work of the Public Administration Committee, Ministers become more punctual, open, honest and accurate in their replies to hon. Members, not only will the House be grateful, but the cause of the democracy, which we all hold dear, will be properly served.

4.57 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Mr. Christopher Leslie): It is a pleasure to be able to respond to this debate so soon after its commencement. It is always a challenge for me as a new Minister to engage in the process of accountability, which is precisely the topic that we are talking about today. I join other hon. Members in congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock Chase (Tony Wright), who in the process of holding me to account along with his parliamentary colleagues on the Public Administration Select Committee is spurring me on to ensure that I try my best to be held to account, on securing the debate.

Today's debate focuses on the fourth report, which was published in December, of the Public Administration Select Committee. It is a concise, pithy and pertinent report. It reiterated the Committee's annual monitoring ambition, asserted the importance of openness and accuracy and suggested a programme of taking evidence for a forthcoming report on the matter. The Government take the report seriously and recognise that Ministers have many responsibilities, the most important of which is to be held accountable by Parliament. That is, of course, a firm cornerstone at the foundation of our British constitutional system. Indeed, my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, West (Kevin Brennan), who spoke well and eloquently, indicated that there is not a grand conspiracy to thwart accountability or an attempt to weave a web of secrecy. There are genuine, earnest efforts to be as open and accountable as possible.

Having reviewed some of the evidence and statistics that form the background to the debate, I believe that high standards of accountability are being maintained and improved, and that great efforts are constantly being made throughout all Departments genuinely to strive to keep Parliament informed and served at all times.

[Mr. Christopher Leslie]

It is worth reviewing the context of the debate by comparing Administrations. Today we have focused on parliamentary questions, but there are many other ways in which—as in the title of the debate—ministerial accountability takes place. Statements to Parliament on the Floor of the House of Commons are, for example, an important way in which to hold Ministers to account, particularly on issues of immediate, contemporaneous importance. In the last Parliament of the Major Administration, there was a statement roughly every 3.7 days. In our first Parliament, there was a statement every 2.3 days, and I believe that that increased frequency is partially a sign of the extra accountability to which the Government sought to lay themselves open.

The hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) made various allusions to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, but I would like to remind him that the Prime Minister has been statistically more accountable to the House of Commons than previous Administrations. In the comparable period, my right hon. Friend has spent more time in the Chamber answering questions and making statements than his predecessor.

There are other ways, outside the framework of parliamentary questions, for Ministers to be held accountable. Correspondence, the good old-fashioned letter or I presume as we move into the technical age the e-mail, between Members of Parliament, as well as members of the public, and Ministers, is such an example. All Departments have a target of 20 working days or fewer in which to respond to Members' correspondence. In 2000, the last full year for which we have managed to account, 64 per cent. of correspondence was replied to within departmental targets, a gradual improvement of 4 per cent. on the figure for the year before. We have tried to publish stronger guidance for Departments on handling correspondence from Members, which is something that I have constantly tried to push with my ministerial colleagues. Correspondence is an important means of exchanging views as well as of obtaining information. We are currently collecting data for the 2001 annual report on the matter.

Brian White: In giving evidence this morning to the Public Administration Committee, the ombudsman said that cutting the money available for keeping records was one of the easier cuts for Departments to make when they try to achieve efficiency savings. Will the Minister assure us that sufficient money is being made available for keeping records relating to parliamentary questions?

Mr. Leslie: It is a rare opportunity to be able to make a budget representation relating to good old-fashioned administration archiving and data collection, which is an important task, although unfashionable. As a Minister at the Cabinet Office, where such work is the bread and butter of our activity, I shall pass on that representation. In fact, from 1999 to 2000, there was a significant increase in the volume of correspondence to the Cabinet Office. We respond to 88 per cent. of correspondence within 15 working days, an increase of 3 per cent. on the previous year.

In general, Parliament can hold Ministers to account in several other ways, including oral questions, private notice questions and Second Reading debates, the pattern and frequency of which in this Administration follows a similar trend to that of previous Administrations. The Library produces useful sessional digests of figures, which are worth consulting for more detailed statistics. With such a massive turnover of business in our Parliament, as in any organisation, errors are bound to occur from time to time. These are obviously to be regretted, but also to be acknowledged and corrected.

We have focused today on parliamentary questions and I am tempted to say that there is more to life, in terms of ministerial accountability, than parliamentary questions alone. Questions and answers are integral to the accountability process, but they are not the only way in which Members may request information from the Government. The White Paper process and the Select Committee system offer other means.

I am informed that, in this Session—and since 1997—the average number of parliamentary questions tabled on each sitting day by Members has doubled. I accept that there is always room for greater efficiency but we are endeavouring, honestly and openly, to meet our obligations to Parliament. My hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, North-East (Brian White) talked about parliamentary questions that are referred to chief executives of agencies. Much of that process has been prompted by the next-steps review. Many such questions are now printed in *Hansard*, unless they are bulky, in which case they are placed in the Library. We must remain vigilant on these matters to ensure that the lines of accountability relating to new systems of administration are as clear as possible.

There is much to be said for today's debate and for the opportunity to take an in-depth look at the efficacy of written and oral parliamentary questions, measured against the objectives of those hon. Members who ask the questions. Many questions are tabled in a genuine attempt to elicit information for the benefit of constituents, but might I be wrong to think that some questions are influenced by more partisan considerations?

Norman Baker: That is an interesting point. I hope that the Minister will not say that the quality of the answer depends on an interpretation of whether the question is partisan or seeks information for a constituent.

Mr. Leslie: Certainly not. I am suggesting that, considering the vast turnover of parliamentary questions, Ministers need to bear in mind that we must strive to fulfil our provision of answers as quickly and efficiently as possible, and to be helpful and genuinely informative on all questions, especially those on constituency cases that need to be resolved.

Members can write directly to Ministers. However, as Mr. Speaker said in his statement:

"One pointed question can . . . achieve more than 20 vague ones".—[*Official Report*, 28 November 2001; Vol. 375, c. 971.]

Accuracy is important in the answers that we give as Ministers. The Cabinet Secretary has revised the

guidance for drafting officials to stress the need for timely and accurate replies.

Many Members have highlighted examples of when parliamentary questions and answers have not disclosed information because they were subject to exemptions in the code of practice on access to Government. My hon. Friend the Member for Cannock Chase referred to that, as did the hon. Members for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler), for Lewes and for Christchurch (Mr. Chope). As responsible Members, we must recognise that some exemptions must be made on, for example, issues of national security and potential harm to the nation should information be disclosed. Also, there must be exemptions on answers that might harm international relations or prejudice the course of justice, and even on matters relating to personnel records and privacy of the individual, as well as on some commercial confidentiality issues when the competitive position of third parties could be harmed. The harm test is well embedded in the code of practice on access to Government information. That initiative began in 1993, and Governments have sought to place many parliamentary questions in that context since.

I am bound to say to the hon. Member for Lewes that the Scottish Parliament operates on a similar exemption-based system, so the matter is not simply party political. Liberal Democrat Ministers may sometimes use exemptions for answers in a similar way.

Norman Baker: I am content that there are exemptions. For the reasons that the Minister has given, such as national security, no one could doubt that information should be withheld on occasion. However, the question in my mind, and perhaps in those of other hon. Members, is about information that we do not believe is covered by exemptions but is still not forthcoming.

Mr. Leslie: I accept that there are always bound to be questions about the interpretation of the code's application.

I was interested to hear the speech of the hon. Member for Christchurch. He vociferously insisted that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister was remiss and that he dreadfully misbehaved by not disclosing information and by invoking exemptions under the code. My understanding is that when the hon. Member for Christchurch was a Minister with, I think, responsibility for transport, he refused or declined to answer a question in March 1992 on the ground of commercial confidence.

The hon. Gentleman criticised the Prime Minister on the exemption for international relations, but I understand that he would not answer a question in November 1991 because it was not an accepted convention to release information that was passed between the Government and the European Commission. Politely and with great respect, I say that he should look to his own activities before throwing stones at the Prime Minister.

Mr. Chope: I am grateful to the Minister for reminding me that it is 10 years since I did the same job as he does now, that of trying to answer questions. He has not said that, at any stage, I prayed in aid a code or exemptions when I should not have done so, or prayed in aid a code or exemptions when I should have done so. How, however, can a question about the number of letters that the Prime Minister has sent to the Romanian Prime Minister in the past two years be subject to any of the exemptions to which the Minister referred? Surely, it is subject to none of them, and the Prime Minister has not answered the question because he finds it embarrassing.

Mr. Leslie: The hon. Gentleman was himself asked a question about correspondence between Ministers and the European Commission, which he declined to answer because it would apparently have harmed international relations. I suppose that there was no code of conduct on access to Government information during the hon. Gentleman's tenure in office. I would not say that that was a virtue; rather, it was a pity.

Mr. Chope: I have asked the Prime Minister how a question about the number of letters that he has sent to the Romanian Prime Minister in the past two years would damage international relations, but he has declined to answer. Surely that also is unreasonable.

Mr. Leslie: There comes a point when one must ask how many angels can dance on the head of a pin. The answer that the hon. Gentleman received is fairly self-explanatory. I recommend that he read *Hansard* from 1991 and 1992 before pursuing the matter much further.

Tony Wright: Those points go to the heart of the report and reflect its central recommendation. I think that we are getting a little confused. Surely the central issue is whether Ministers should be obliged to cite exemptions when they do not answer questions. I cannot think of instances where that would not apply, but perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister will tell us whether there are any. The Committee said that that practice should apply universally, and I should like the Minister to say that it should, too. That is what we recommended, and I think that the Government have said that they are in favour of it. If the practice does not apply universally, we shall get into all kinds of trouble, as we have seen from the instances about which we have heard. Some Members have had to go to the commissioner to obtain answers that they could not receive through parliamentary questions. It is, therefore, important that we get this right.

Mr. Leslie: The Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration certainly has a role to play in monitoring the invocation of the code of practice on access to Government information. As we know, the code will be overtaken when the Freedom of Information Act 2002 is implemented. My hon. Friend is perhaps suggesting that reference should be made to particular exemptions in cases where the code is to be invoked, and I want to consider that suggestion in much more detail. It would be useful to have more information and for the Select Committee on Public Administration to consider the matter further.

The point remains, however, that there is a reason why we have a code of practice on access to Government

[Mr. Leslie]

information. On many occasions, Ministers must make a judgment. They have the information and must consider whether harm will be incurred if answers are given. Ultimately, they are accountable for their decisions to Parliament. They can be held to account not only through written parliamentary questions, through a variety of methods and on the Floor of the House. Parliament has the ultimate sanction.

Norman Baker: Will the Minister explain what harm is done by telling us how many days a week Lord Birt works and under what element of the code of conduct that information is withheld?

Mr. Leslie: It is so tempting to return to the debate on an issue that we enjoyed so much only a matter of weeks ago. I set out my views at great length. Lord Birt is not a Minister, but I, as the Minister responsible, came here to account for the matter.

We have revised the guidance for officials on drafting answers to parliamentary questions. It is of paramount importance that Ministers give accurate and truthful answers to Parliament. Correcting any inadvertent error at the earliest opportunity is also extremely important. A refusal to provide information should take place only when disclosure is not in the public interest, in accordance with the relevant statutes and the code of practice.

We approach every question predisposed to give relevant and full information, but as concisely as possible and in accordance with guidance on disproportionate costs. That aspect was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Lyons) and the hon. Member for North Cornwall. What constitutes disproportionate cost is a matter of judgment, because there are not bottomless pools of resources. This Administration have revised the guidance details to refine and clarify matters about disproportionate costs; we want also to stress that any information that is readily available should be provided if at all possible.

Mr. Tyler: I read with great care the guidance given to officials on drafting answers to parliamentary questions, dated November 2001. Does the Minister accept that the examples that other hon. Members and I have given have all arisen since November? Will he give an undertaking that the guidance will be updated again in the light of any slippages in the way in which Departments have responded to advice, given the examples that he has heard from Members of various parties this afternoon?

Mr. Leslie: We keep our guidance under review. We must rely on Ministers in each Department to make judgments about disproportionate costs, as it would be unfeasible for such matters to be adjudicated wholly from one Department. I shall certainly examine the references and examples, many of which I found interesting, in respect of the application of disproportionate cost.

Mr. Tyler: I am not referring to disproportionate cost, which is only one item in the guidance. I was saying that the examples cited this afternoon relate to problems referred to in the guidance, and that the guidance is clearly not being met.

Mr. Leslie: Without being able to go into the detail of every example, I shall consider them in more detail.

Tony Wright: A lack of clarity at this point will not help us in the long term. I can be genuinely helpful to the Minister in pointing out that the Government have already agreed to do what I am asking him to do—that is, to cite the exemption that applies when there is a refusal to provide information. They should cite either the exemption or the statue that overrides the code. The choice is between one or the other. I cannot see any difficulty in doing that and, indeed, I thought that the Government had agreed to do it.

Mr. Leslie: I welcome my hon. Friend's intervention. I am tempted to read through the Government reply until I reach the particular phrase that he mentions. All that I can do is commend to hon. Members the report and response. I shall study it again myself with great interest.

Mr. Chope: Does the Minister agree with Mr. Speaker's statement on 28 November? The statement suggests that

"when Ministers refuse to answer questions, they are expected to indicate in their reply why they have refused by reference to the Government's code."—[*Official Report*, 28 November 2001; Vol. 375, c. 971.]

Mr. Leslie: Of course I agree with Mr. Speaker's statement, and would not seek to do anything but agree with it.

I understand that the House is considering a number of changes to the mechanisms for the tabling and answering of parliamentary questions, and that the Procedure Committee—among other aspects of parliamentary practice—is considering the extent to which the current system contributes to effective parliamentary scrutiny. The hon. Member for Mid-Dorset and North Poole (Mrs. Brooke) asked about the wording of questions, the timing of publications and answering of parliamentary questions, the notice period for questions and whether it should be shorter and the process of the named day parliamentary question, which involves 48.8 per cent. of questions. The hon. Member for Lewes referred to what would happen during a recess. I understand that that is another issue that is being considered by the Procedure Committee—we are fortunate to have its distinguished Chairman here.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): I apologise to the Minister for interrupting. All the matters that he has described are being considered by the Procedure Committee. Its report, which will be radical, progressive, reforming and helpful to the House of Commons, will be published in mid-June.

Mr. Leslie: What a useful opportunity to demonstrate how the House of Commons can work at its most effective. These are ultimately matters for the House to consider and decide upon. I also commend the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Milton

Keynes, North-East about the use of modern technology in processing parliamentary questions. If I can facilitate that representation here, I shall have done something useful.

Mr. Greg Knight: The Minister is very generous in giving way. Does he accept that one of the problems that has been identified today is not so much the updating of the code but the upholding of it? Which member of the Executive does he advise us to communicate with when a continuing breach occurs?

Mr. Leslie: The Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration, under whose jurisdiction the application of the code of practice on access to Government information falls, is the ultimate authority on the use of the code in respect of parliamentary questions. However, Ministers are ultimately accountable to Parliament. If Members wish to censure Ministers for their behaviour, there are several ways in which that can be done. I note that none has been used under this Administration.

I was looking forward to debating these matters with the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow). It is a great pity that he has not been able to attend. Unfortunately, I did not give advance notice that I wanted to discuss them, so it would not be appropriate for me to correct the figures given by my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock Chase regarding the 4,494 questions tabled by the hon. Member for Buckingham since the 2001 general election at an average cost of £123 each, totalling £552,762—about £78 per hour. However, it would be entirely appropriate to discuss with the hon. Member for Lewes, who is present, the number of parliamentary questions that he has asked since the 1997 general election—3,899, a snip at a price of £479,577, which is probably enough to run a small primary school. In light of the statement by Mr. Speaker yesterday, I might ask whether every one of those was tabled in person, but I would not be so unkind.

Ministers are held accountable by the Prime Minister, under the ministerial code of conduct, particularly in respect of parliamentary accountability, and paragraphs 27 and onwards go into much more detail. Most important announcements of policy should of course be made first to Parliament. In important or sensitive cases, Ministers should give careful consideration to the desirability of making an oral statement rather than giving a written answer. Propriety, timings and consultations should all be at the top of a Minister's agenda as set out in the ministerial code. It has been published, and I recommend that all hon. Members peruse it.

Transparency and openness are the underlying themes of today's debate. I firmly believe that many of the measures taken by the Government to open our processes and to expose the machinery of government to daylight have been relatively successful. Work still has to be done, but I believe that we are taking firm steps forward in enforcing the code of practice on access to Government information made under the Freedom of Information Act 2002, with a statutory right of access from 2005. I understand that publications will be available from September this year. In the light of comments about new technology, we should not neglect departmental websites and other electronic means of voluntarily promoting access to news and policy information for the public and for Members of Parliament. Those are all important ways of making Government more accessible.

In the last Parliament, and under a Labour Government, we saw the establishment of the Modernisation Select Committee. It is now pressing for improvements and refinements to be made to our accountability processes. Recent recommendations are being considered on the work of Select Committees, and a number of changes and improvements have been made since 1997. For example, the European Scrutiny Committee allows Select Committees to sit together.

Pre-legislative scrutiny has not been mentioned today, but it should not be neglected. The Government have sought to increase the use of that in-depth accountability mechanism. Since 1997, 10 draft Bills have been given pre-legislative scrutiny by parliamentary Committees. We aim to produce better Bills, but that requires more effort.

We should not debate ministerial accountability without talking about Westminster Hall itself. It was an innovation explicitly devised to broaden accountability and the amount of time available for detailed parliamentary debate. It evolved from recommendations made by the Modernisation Select Committee in 1998. It gives Back Benchers much more debating time, and in theory it extends our proceedings to give a more consensus-based approach. Westminster Hall has more than doubled the opportunity for Adjournment debates which, on two of every three Thursdays, are given to debating Select Committee reports.

Had Labour not been elected in 1997, we would not be spending these three long, long but productive hours discussing this matter today. Yes, we are striving to improve our processes, and much more effort always needs to be put into these matters, but I believe that the Government are putting Parliament first—and we are making every effort to support and enhance our democratic system.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-eight minutes past Five o'clock.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 18 March 2002

PRIME MINISTER

Ministerial Code of Conduct

Mr. Beith: To ask the Prime Minister (1) if he will set out the circumstances in which he considers it acceptable for major policy changes not to be first announced in the House in accordance with the Ministerial Code of Conduct; [43371]

(2) on how many occasions since 8 January the No. 10 Press Office has, in accordance with paragraph 88 of the Ministerial Code of Conduct, authorised initial announcements of *(a)* Government White Papers and *(b)* other major policy changes outside the House; and if he will make a statement. [43370]

The Prime Minister: Individual Ministers are responsible for determining the timing and form of individual announcements taking account of the requirements of the Ministerial Code.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Prime Minister (1) which Minister is responsible for the enforcement of the Ministerial Code of 2001; [43843]

(2) to whom complaints about breaches of the Ministerial Code should be made; [43842]

Mr. Chope: To ask the Prime Minister how many breaches of the Ministerial Code there have been since July 2001. [43839]

The Prime Minister: Section 1 of the Ministerial Code makes it clear that Ministers are personally responsible for deciding how to act and conduct themselves in the light of the Code and for justifying their actions and conduct in Parliament. It also sets out Ministers' responsibilities in relation to alleged breaches of the Ministerial Code.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 12 March 2002, ref 42839, for what reason Ministers' responsibilities in relation to the public do not specify giving accurate and truthful information outside Parliament. [43838]

The Prime Minister: Ministers are personally responsible for deciding how to act and conduct themselves in the light of the Ministerial Code and for justifying their actions and conduct in Parliament.

Ian Stillman

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Prime Minister if he raised the case of Ian Stillman with *(a)* President Narayanan and *(b)* Prime Minister Vajpayee on his trip to India in January. [43910]

The Prime Minister: The case was not raised during my discussions with President Narayanan and Prime Minister Vajpayee, which focused on other issues. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary raised the case on 27 February 2002 with the Indian Home Minister, L. K. Advani, and my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office raised it on 18 February 2002 with the Indian Minister of State for External Affairs, Omar Abdullah.

Our high commissioner in New Delhi raised Mr. Stillman's case with the Indian Home Secretary, Kamal Pande, on 20 December 2001. He also discussed it with Mr. Advani on 2 January 2002.

Our high commission is doing all it can to ensure that the Indian authorities are meeting Mr. Stillman's welfare requirements adequately and that his forthcoming appeal to the Supreme Court is heard as quickly as possible.

Senior Salaries Review Body

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make an announcement about the Chair of the Senior Salaries Review Body. [44664]

The Prime Minister: I have appointed John Baker CBE to be Chair of the Senior Salaries Review Body from February 2002 for a period of three years.

WALES

Stolen Equipment

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 22 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 706–07W, on stolen equipment, what criminal proceedings have been undertaken for cases of theft against his Department, stating in each case *(a)* whether the proceedings (i) led to a criminal conviction and (ii) were unsuccessful, *(b)* the cost incurred by his Department in pursuing a conviction and *(c)* the value of items recovered; and if he will make a statement. [41502]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Unfortunately no culprit was identified for either theft, so it was not possible to launch criminal proceedings.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Relocation Expenses

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General what her policy is on the payment of relocation expenses to staff in her Department. [41026]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* My own Department, the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers, is a small Department situated in central London and its staff are seconded to it from a number of parent Departments. The issue of relocating LSLO staff does not, therefore, arise.

In the Departments for which the Attorney-General is responsible, details are as follows:

Crown Prosecution Service

The Crown Prosecution Service provides financial assistance to staff who are permanently transferred to a new location in the interests of the Department and, as a consequence, need to move home. The general principle employed in this situation is that staff will be reimbursed for all reasonable expenses actually and necessarily incurred as a result of the relocation. Details of the financial assistance available to CPS staff are contained in the Department's Travel and Subsistence Code.

Treasury Solicitor's Department

All the Treasury Solicitor's Department staff are located in London apart from a small group of eight staff who are co-located with their clients, the Ministry of Defence in Bristol. This small section was relocated from London to Bristol in 1998 and they were given the same relocation terms as applied to MOD staff.

The Treasury Solicitor's Department policy is that, where moves are voluntary, relocation expenses are not paid. As nearly all Treasury Solicitor's Department staff are based in London, the Department does not have a specific relocation policy. The circumstances where the Department might pay relocation expenses would be where staff who were co-located with their clients were being compulsorily moved. In such cases the Treasury Solicitor's Department would ensure that its staff received the same benefits as the clients.

Serious Fraud Office

Almost all of the Serious Fraud Office's permanent staff are based in central London. The very few that are not based in London are regionally based investigators working either from home or in local police stations.

Therefore, the Serious Fraud Office does not offer relocation expenses to its existing staff.

Nor does the Serious Fraud Office offer relocation expenses to persons transferring to the Serious Fraud Office from other Government Departments, or to newly recruited staff who need to relocate in order to take up a post with the Serious Fraud Office.

Staff Numbers

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General how many staff have been employed by her Department in each of the last 10 years. [42460]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 14 March 2002]:* The total numbers of staff employed by my own Department, the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers, over the last 10 years are included in the Treasury Solicitor's Department figures. Records are not available for the years 1992 to 1994.

In the Departments for which the Attorney-General is responsible, details are as follows:

Crown Prosecution Service

The Crown Prosecution Service has employed the following number of staff in each of the last 10 years:

5,920.5 in 1992
6,327.5 in 1993
6,386.5 in 1994
6,409 in 1995
6,202.5 in 1996
5,677 in 1997
5,461.5 in 1998
5,666.9 in 1999
5,562 in 2000
5,593.9 in 2001.

These figures include all lawyers and administrative staff. Casual staff numbers are not included.

Treasury Solicitor's Department

The Treasury Solicitor's Department has employed the following number of staff in each of the last 10 years:

Treasury Solicitor's Department

484.5 in 1992
363.5 in 1993
404 in 1994
387.8 in 1995
382.4 in 1996
378.2 in 1997
376.3 in 1998
394.6 in 1999
440 in 2000
476.2 in 2001

Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers

24 in 1995
26 in 1996
23 in 1997
30 in 1998
28 in 1999
30 in 2000
30.8 in 2001

Government Property Lawyers

125.5 in 1993
138 in 1994
135.6 in 1995
119.1 in 1996
118.1 in 1997
101.3 in 1998
82.2 in 1999.

Serious Fraud Office

The Serious Fraud Office was established in 1988. The numbers of staff employed by the Department since April 1988 are as follows:

63 in 1988–89
103 in 1990–91
117 in 1991–92
136 in 1992–93
138 in 1993–94
137 in 1994–95
162 in 1995–96
166 in 1996–97
154 in 1997–98
149 in 1998–99
170 in 1999–2000
178 in 2000–01.

The figures have been obtained from Serious Fraud Office annual reports. The report for 1989–90 does not quote staff numbers. There are no other historical records containing staff numbers.

Departmental Website

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General what the total cost of her Department's website was in real terms in each of the last four years; and how many hits it received in each of those years. [36150]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 25 February 2002]:* My own Department, the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers, has had a Department website since February 2000. The costs incurred in connection with the Department website since its introductions are as follows:

December 1999 to September 2000

£1,000—Web hosting foundation

February 2000

£255—Housing costs

£1,500—Design and build costs

October 2000 to September 2001

£1,000—Web maintenance

February 2001

£75—Hosting costs

October 2001 to March 2002

£600—Web maintenance

February 2002 to February 2004

£80—Domain name fee

March 2002

£7.50—Domain name hosting fee.

The website has received approximately 20,414 homepage hits since February 2000.

Details of the other Departments for which the Attorney General is responsible are as follows:

Crown Prosecution Service

The costs which have been incurred by the Crown Prosecution since 1998, in connection with its website are as follows:

£625 in 1998–99

£2,394 in 1999–2000

£2,063 in 2000–01, and

£5,721 from April to December 2001.

These figures represent development costs as well as annual maintenance charges. The number of hits the website received in each of the last four years 1998, 1999, 2000 and 2001 were 17,139, 31,152, 37,904 and 36,823 respectively.

Treasury Solicitor's Department

The Office of Government Commerce (OGC) has hosted the Treasury Solicitor's Department website since February 1997 at a maintenance cost of approximately £500 per annum. In October 2001 the maintenance level was upgraded at an additional cost of £1,413.67 to the end of 2001. The website was upgraded in 2001 at a cost of £15,552. The annual costs since 1997 have been as follows:

£549.06 in 1997

£534.13 in 1998

£521.54 in 1999

£512.50 in 2000, and

£17,465.97 in 2001.

No records were kept of the number of hits on the website until April 2001. Since 30 April 2001 there have been 43,820 hits.

Serious Fraud Office

Prior to 1999 Serious Fraud Office website costs were subsumed into other CCTA costs and so cannot be identified without disproportionate cost. The Serious Fraud Office website which was in use between 1998 and 2001 was designed at no cost.

The annual costs incurred by the Serious Fraud Office since 1999 are as follows:

£750 in 1999–2000

£585 in 2000–01, and

£32,825 in 2001–02.

The costs indicated relate to charges for amendments to the website rather than design or hosting. The new SFO website activated in August 2001 is considerably more sophisticated and up-datable than the previous website and this is reflected in the increased costs.

Information on hits has been provided by the website administrative staff from the Open Government website, where Serious Fraud Office website hit details were previously displayed. More recent information on the new Serious Fraud Office website has been provided by IDnet, the current website host.

A 'hit' has been interpreted to mean a request for information in the commonly accepted sense. The details of hits provided do not therefore equate with the number of individuals looking at the website.

The annual number of hits received by the Serious Fraud Office website since 1998 are as follows:

4,628 in 1998

15,886 in 1999

58,131 in 2000, and

172,771 in 2001.

Accommodation Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General what the cost was of hotel accommodation for departmental staff working away from home in each of the last four years. [41053]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* In my own Department, the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers, costs incurred in relation to travel and accommodation form part of the Treasury Solicitor's Department's records. The Treasury Solicitor's Department could not provide information in the form

requested without incurring disproportionate cost. The total amount spent on travel and accommodation in each of the last four years was as follows:

£56,000 in 1998–99

£58,000 in 1999–2000

£83,000 in 2000–01

£51,000 in 2001–02.

In the Departments for which the Attorney-General is responsible, details are as follows:

Crown Prosecution Service

The records held by the Crown Prosecution Service in relation to hotel costs do not permit the identification of hotel accommodation costs from the overnight subsistence rates paid to CPS staff.

The total cost of hotel accommodation and overnight subsistence payments for Crown Prosecution Service staff working away from home in each of the last four years was as follows:

£306,740.37 in 1997–98

£436,269.76 in 1998–99

£690,934.96 in 1999–2000

£915,051.34 in 2000–01.

Night Subsistence Allowance (NSA) is available to members of staff to cover the costs of overnight absences on official business. The Crown Prosecution Service reimburses the cost of bed and breakfast accommodation, within certain limits, and provides a flat rate personal allowance to cover the cost of meals and incidental travel. An additional allowance is payable to cover telephone calls, newspapers and soft drinks etc. The current accommodation cost limits and personal allowances are:

London, Birmingham, Manchester, Leeds, Liverpool, Newcastle and York—up to £95 per 24 hours bed and breakfast accommodation.

Elsewhere—up to £65 per 24 hours bed and breakfast accommodation.

24 hour meal and incidental travel allowance—£20.

24 hour personal and incidental expenditure allowance—£5.

The CPS also employs a hotel-booking agency through which staff are obliged to make arrangements for overnight accommodation. This provides the Department with discounted hotel rates and management control over accommodation expenditure.

Treasury Solicitor's Department

The Treasury Solicitor's Department could not provide information in the form requested without incurring disproportionate cost. The total amount spent on travel and accommodation by the Treasury Solicitor's Department and its agencies in each of the last four years was as follows:

Treasury Solicitor's Department

£327,000 in 1998–99

£202,000 in 1999–2000

£396,000 in 2000–01

£318,000 in 2001–02

Government Property Lawyers

£10,000 in 1998–99

£37,000 in 1999–2000

£1,000 in 2000–01

£0 in 2001–02

Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate

£0 in 1998–99

£0 in 1999–2000

£0 in 2000–01

£130,000 in 2001–02.

The above figures do not distinguish between travel and accommodation, nor between costs incurred in the course of official business and on events such as training courses.

Serious Fraud Office

Serious Fraud Office incurred the following subsistence costs in each of the last four years.

£129,707 in 1997–98

£92,628 in 1998–99

£97,564 in 1999–2000

£158,879 in 2000–01.

SFO staff incur expenditure on hotel and similar accommodation when on official duty, both within the UK and overseas. Costs are incurred in relation to both operational activity and administrative activity (training etc.). Costs incurred and recorded are either based on subsistence rates, actual cost or a mixture of the two but often include the additional cost of food (ie bed and breakfast).

Therefore the above subsistence costs include the cost of hotel accommodation. To derive the actual costs of hotel accommodation in each of the last four years would involve disproportionate cost.

Job Sharing

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General if she will make a statement on the extent of job sharing in her Department. [41045]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* In my Department, the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers, there are currently no members of staff who job share.

In the Departments for which the Attorney-General is responsible, details are as follows:

Crown Prosecution Service

There are currently 14 members of staff who are job-sharing in the Department: 10 administrators/ caseworkers and four lawyers.

Treasury Solicitor's Department

The Treasury Solicitor's Department strongly encourages job sharing. In the last year there have been four job share partnerships, two of which recently came to an end. Currently there is one legal and one administrative job share partnership in the Department.

Regular meetings are held to encourage those people who wish to work part time, to raise issues common to part timers and to promote the job sharing policy.

On recruitment, the Department will offer a person the opportunity of working part time or job sharing. The normal presumption is that any post can be job shared.

Serious Fraud Office

The Serious Fraud Office offers permanent staff the option to job share; however, at present none of the Department's staff has opted to do so.

In December 2001 the Serious Fraud Office introduced a range of flexible working arrangements for staff, including the option to job share. The purpose in doing so was (i) to offer staff more family friendly options and thus improve morale and motivation (ii) to improve the recruitment and retention position and (iii) to promote Government policies.

Gender Pay Gap

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General what assessment she has made of the extent of the gender pay gap among staff in her Department. [41001]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* My own Department, the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers, which has less than 35 permanent staff, is generally staffed by officials on secondment for a period of two to three years from their parent Departments. Their pay is determined by the particular arrangements of their parent Departments and as such is not susceptible for review by LSLO. Disparity of pay within LSLO is a reflection of the differing pay scales of parent Departments and so no useful assessment of gender pay gap could be made.

In the Departments for which the Attorney-General is responsible, details are as follows:

Crown Prosecution Service

In accordance with Government policy, the Crown Prosecution Service is committed to an audit of its pay systems and structure and the preparation of an action plan to address any equal pay issues, by April 2003. The Crown Prosecution Service is currently engaged in the trial of a new Equal Pay Audit Model to be published by the Equal Opportunities Commission in due course. This trial will produce data on the extent of any gender pay gap in the Crown Prosecution Service by the end of May 2002.

Following the Equal Pay Review, the aims of the Crown Prosecution Service are to:

- Jointly consider whether any reasons the Department may identify for differences in average basic pay or total earnings for men and women doing equal work provide an objective justification for that difference;
- Introduce an equal pay policy for the Crown Prosecution Service;
- Change the processes, rules and practices that may give rise to unequal pay;
- Give equal pay to current and future employees;
- Set up a system of monitoring and clear accountability to ensure the pay system is free of sex bias.

Treasury Solicitor's Department

In line with the Government policy enunciated last year by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, the Treasury Solicitor's Department is reviewing its pay systems to establish whether any equal pay gaps exist and, if there are gaps, to prepare an action plan to close them.

Serious Fraud Office

In response to the Government's programme to improve reward management systems, in August 2001 the Serious Fraud Office conducted a comprehensive review of its pay and grading systems. This resulted in the introduction of a new pay structure for all permanent staff below the Senior Civil Service, with effect from 1 August 2001. Staff were assimilated into the new structure by reference to their seniority and performance. The new structure guarantees satisfactory performers progression to 80 per cent. of their pay band within five years, and to the top of their pay band within a further seven years.

The Serious Fraus Office has not yet conducted an Equal Pay Audit, not least because central "How to" guidance was only issued by Cabinet Office in mid February 2002.

Rail Travel (Staff)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General what was the *(a)* percentage and number of rail journeys undertaken on first class tickets, *(b)* average cost of a first class journey by rail and *(c)* total cost of rail travel in each of the past four years broken down by grade of civil servant. [37494]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 25 February 2002]:* In my own Department, the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers, details of the cost of rail travel incurred by the Department in each of the last four years is included in the Treasury Solicitor's Department's records. Separate details could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

In the Departments for which the Attorney-General is responsible, details are as follows:

1997–98

Total Cost: £483,000

First Class: £168,000

Percentage: 34.8.

1998–99

Total Cost: £583,000

First Class: £247,000

Percentage: 42.4.

1999–2000

Total Cost: £770,000

First Class: £387,000

Percentage: 50.3.

2000–01

Total Cost: £742,000

First Class: £318,000

Percentage: 42.9.

The Crown Prosecution Service does not retain records of the number of rail journeys and cannot provide the average cost of a first class journey. Nor can the total cost be broken down by civil service grade.

Treasury Solicitor's Department

The contract management and financial analysis systems currently in place in the Treasury Solicitor's Department mean that the information requested could be supplied only at disproportionate cost.

The relevant systems are being upgraded as part of the improvement in financial management on which the Treasury Solicitor's Department embarked some months ago. Most of the improvements should be concluded during the course of the financial year 2002–03.

Serious Fraud Office

The details requested could not be provided without the Serious Fraud Office incurring disproportionate cost.

Equipment Leasing

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General if she will list the equipment leasing arrangements entered into by her Department in each of the last four years; and what the cost to public funds in each case is. [38940]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* The costs of the equipment leasing arrangements entered into by my own Department, the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers, in the last four years are included in the Treasury Solicitor's Department figures.

In the Departments for which the Attorney-General is responsible, details are as follows:

Crown Prosecution Service

The Crown Prosecution Service has equipment leasing arrangements for reprographic equipment. The expenditure for each of the last four financial years has been as follows:

£1,132,260 in 1998–99

£1,306,327 in 1999–2000

£1,378,663 in 2000–01

£1,001,299 in 2001–02 (to date).

The Crown Prosecution Service has had contracts with various reprographics suppliers during the period in question. These contracts provide a range of services including the rental of machinery, managed print room services and the provision of maintenance.

The expenditure quoted for reprographics includes all elements of the services including copy costs. It has not been possible to determine the costs of the equipment rentals themselves from the centrally held data.

Treasury Solicitor's Department

The Treasury Solicitor's Department and the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers have entered into equipment leasing arrangements for photocopying facilities. The costs in each of the last four years were as follows:

Treasury Solicitor's Department

£76,728 in 1998–99

£45,884 in 1999–2000

£101,612 in 2000–01

£71,879 in 2001–02 (to date)

Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers

£7,804 in 1998–99

£6,875 in 1999–2000

£6,151 in 2000–01

£1,972 in 2001–02 (to date).

Serious Fraud Office

The cost of the equipment "leasing arrangements" entered into by the Serious Fraud Office in the last four years is as follows:

Photocopiers

£146,895.33 in 1997–98

£98,184.79 in 1998–99

£118,237.36 in 1999–2000

£53,070.75 in 2000–01

Office Equipment

£0 in 1997–98

£0 in 1998–99

£69.33 in 1999–2000

£423.01 in 2000–01

Fax Machines

£0 in 1997–98

£636.72 in 1998–99

£699.58 in 1999–2000

£0 in 2000–01.

Much of the equipment is held on short-term hire arrangements rather than on leasing arrangements.

TREASURY

Stolen Equipment

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 22 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 704W, on stolen equipment, what criminal proceedings have been undertaken for cases of theft against his Department, stating in each case *(a)* whether the proceedings (i) led to a criminal conviction and (ii) were unsuccessful, *(b)* the cost incurred by his Department in pursuing a conviction and *(c)* the value of items recovered; and if he will make a statement. [41584]

Ruth Kelly: Our policy is to involve the police in all cases that involve theft. In the cases of those items recorded as stolen as set out in my answer of 22 January, there was insufficient evidence to support criminal proceedings.

Sponsorship

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 11 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 116W, on conference sponsorship, if he will place in the Library the document that sets out the benefits of sponsorship for the sponsor referred to in the July 1998 Cabinet Office guidelines on sponsorship; and if he will make a statement. [38311]

Ruth Kelly: I assume the hon. Gentleman is referring to the "Mintel Report 1998" which is referred to in the first paragraph of the July 2000 Cabinet Office Guidance on Sponsorship of Government Activities. This is a commercial publication entitled "Sponsorship 1998" and available from Mintel International Group Ltd. (Tel. 020 7606 6000). Mintel issued a further report in 2000 entitled "Sponsorship 2000".

Comprehensive Spending Review

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many meetings he has had with the First Secretary of the National Assembly for Wales to discuss the forthcoming Comprehensive Spending Review. [43224]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Secretary of State for Wales represents Welsh interests within the Government. Treasury Ministers meet on occasion with Ministers of the National Assembly for Wales.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received from the National Assembly for Wales regarding the Comprehensive Spending Review within the last 12 months. [43223]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Treasury Ministers receive representations from the National Assembly for Wales on a range of issues.

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the Public Service Agreement targets which have been revised and those which have been introduced since the publication of the 2001 departmental report. [43256]

Ruth Kelly: Public Service Agreement targets are an integral part of the spending review process. No changes have been made to the targets since the 2000 Spending Review.

International Monetary Fund

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what consideration he has given to the Assessment of the Executive Board of the International Monetary Fund following the conclusion of its 2001 Article IV consultation with the UK; and if he will make a statement. [43929]

Ruth Kelly: We welcome the IMF's 2001 Article IV report and the Assessment of the Executive Board, which commended the Government for the "impressive" performance of the UK economy, saying this "owes much to sound macro-economic policies, the unwavering observance of a strong policy framework, and sustained structural reforms".

Our response to the report is set out in the UK's statement to the IMF Executive Board, published on 7 March 2002.

Pension Schemes

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what information he collates on the relative value of public and private pension schemes in determining equivalence of remuneration. [43135]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Treasury does not keep data centrally on equivalence of remuneration and does not collate information on pensions for that purpose.

Travel-to-work Areas

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of residents of each travel-to-work area work outside that area. [43244]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Turner dated 18 March 2002:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question about travel-to-work-areas. (43244)

The Labour Force Survey (LFS) provides estimates of employment rates according to the travel-to-work-areas (TTWA) in which people are resident. Although information about people's workplace is also available from the LFS, this could only be analysed by TTWA at disproportionate cost.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) when he intends to reply to the National Audit Office report entitled "Joining Up to Improve Public Services"; [43102]

(2) when he intends to reply to the National Audit Office report entitled "Managing the Relationship to Secure a Successful Partnership in PFI Projects"; [43104]

(3) when he intends to reply to the National Audit Office report entitled "Modern Policy-Making: Ensuring Policies Deliver Value for Money"; [43106]

(4) when he intends to reply to the National Audit Office report entitled "Giving Confidently: The role of the Charity Commission in Regulating Charities"; [43105]

(5) when he intends to reply to the National Audit Office report entitled 'Innovation in PFI Financing: The Treasury Building Project'. [43103]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Public Accounts Committee held hearings on each of these reports on the following dates:

"Managing the Relationship to Secure a Successful Partnership in PFI Projects"—12 December 2001.

"Joining up to improve public services"—17 December 2001.

"Modern Policy-Making: Ensuring Policies Deliver Value for Money"—21 January 2002.

"Giving Confidently: The role of the Charity Commission in Regulating Charities"—28 November 2001.

"Innovation in PFI Financing: The Treasury Building Project"—21 November 2001.

The Government will of course reply at the earliest opportunity to the Committee's reports on these topics when they are published.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Rwanda

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what work her Department is funding to aid the refugees clustered around Lake Kivu in Rwanda after January's volcanic eruption in Congo. [43078]

Clare Short: DFID made contributions totalling £2 million to relief agencies active in addressing the needs of people affected by the eruption of Mount Nyaragongo shortly after the eruption. These agencies have been active both in DRC and in Rwanda. In Rwanda the Red Cross have been particularly active, assisted in part by a grant from DFID.

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment her Department has made of the impact on the stability of north-west Rwanda of the population moves following the volcanic eruption in the Congo in January. [43079]

Clare Short: We understand that relatively few of those affected by the eruption of Mount Nyaragongo are in north-west Rwanda. Although many sought sanctuary there immediately after the eruption, most returned to DRC soon afterwards. The Red Cross reported on 7 March that just over 5,000 people have remained in Rwanda. There is no evidence that the presence of these refugees is causing instability in the region.

Special Advisers

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the number and expected cost to her Department of special advisers in *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03. [43269]

Clare Short: The number of special advisers is two and the expected salary costs are as follows:

	£
2001–02	83,923
2002–03	101,000

Corruption

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment her Department has made of possible levels of corruption in relation to agreements under the CFP in *(a)* Angola, *(b)* Cape Verde, *(c)* the Comoros Islands, *(d)* the Cote d'Ivoire, *(e)* Gabon, *(f)* Guinea Bissau, *(g)* The Republic of Guinea, *(h)* Equatorial Guinea, *(i)* Madagascar, *(j)* Mauritius, *(k)* Mauritania, (l) Sao Tome and Principie, (m) Senegal and (n) the Seychelles; and what measures the Government have in place to monitor corruption in those countries. [43021]

Clare Short: UK responsibility for EU Common Fisheries Policy is taken by DEFRA. My Department has not assessed corruption in relation to Common Fisheries Policy agreements with the countries mentioned. However, the Government is seeking, along with our European partners, greater coherence in the implementation of EC's development and other external policies. We welcomed the endorsement of the EC's "Poverty and Fisheries" strategy at the Development Council in November 2001. The strategy calls for future fisheries agreements to be subject to "observance of the principles of good governance, with financial compensation having to be paid and used in accordance with sound budgetary management practice".

St. Helena

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assistance she is giving to the Government of St. Helena to diversify its economy; and if she will make a statement. [43496]

Clare Short: A Country Policy Plan, for the three year period 2000–01 to 2002–03, was agreed between HMG and the St. Helena Government (SHG) in January 2000. SHG committed itself to a significant change programme, designed to make St. Helena more self sufficient, by promoting the private sector and raising the efficiency of the public sector. In return, we agreed to provide £29 million in development assistance over the period 2000–01 to 2002–03. This represented an increase of £3 million over the previous three year agreement, and a modest increase in real terms. We hope to discuss a new three year programme towards the end of this year.

Afghanistan

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the humanitarian problems in Afghanistan are; and how her Department is helping to tackle them. [43080]

Clare Short: Despite three years of drought and 23 years of conflict, and the recent insecurity and population displacement, widespread famine in Afghanistan has been averted by the early and effective actions of the humanitarian community. Over 6.6 million people have been provided with food aid over the past six months, as well as other essential relief supplies such as tents, clothing and cooking equipment.

However, with the prospect of a fourth year of drought this year, and continued limited access to some areas of Afghanistan, the humanitarian situation remains fragile and significant needs will remain for a least the coming year in challenging and volatile operating conditions. The Immediate and Transition Assistance Programme for the Afghan People, prepared by the UN and agreed with the Afghan Interim Administration (AIA), sets out the current humanitarian situation and the challenges ahead, up to the end of December 2002. The programme estimates that approximately 9 million Afghans, including over 1 million internally displaced persons (IDPs), are in need of assistance in Afghanistan in 2002.

My Department has committed over £60 million since September 2001 to support both the AIA and the United Nations-led humanitarian and recovery effort. This assistance is being channelled through United Nations agencies, the Red Cross movement and non-governmental organisations for projects covering a wide range of sectors. In addition, at the Tokyo Conference on the Reconstruction of Afghanistan, we pledged £200 million over the next five years for both reconstruction and humanitarian assistance. The World bank is in the process of establishing the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF) as a way of streamlining donor assistance to Afghanistan from July 2002 onwards. We intend to contribute to the ARTF on its establishment, as well as continuing to channel funds directly through humanitarian and development agencies working in Afghanistan.

Stolen Equipment

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to the answer of 22 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 698W, on stolen equipment, what criminal proceedings have been undertaken for cases of theft against her Department, stating in each case *(a)* whether the proceedings (i) led to a criminal conviction and (ii) were unsuccessful, *(b)* the cost incurred by her Department in pursuing a conviction and *(c)* the value of items recovered; and if she will make a statement. [41586]

Clare Short: It is our practice to report thefts to the police. In the absence of any evidence as to who was responsible no criminal proceedings have been taken, nor have we recovered any of the items.

Departmental Contracts

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the 30 largest contracts awarded by her Department from *(a)* May 1997 to April 1998, *(b)* May 1998 to April 1999, *(c)* May 1999 to April 2000, *(d)* May 2000 to April 2001 and *(e)* May 2001 to the latest date for which figures are available, stating in each case the values of the contracts and the companies with which the contracts were placed. [43669]

Clare Short: I refer the hon. Member to the answer my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for International Development gave on 28 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1464W.

Departmental Functions

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the functions of her Department that have been *(a)* market tested and *(b)* outsourced in each of the last five years, specifying the (i) money saving and (ii) percentage saving in each case. [42995]

Clare Short: DFID has not market tested or outsourced any functions in the last five years.

Food Security

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many responses have been received to the consultation document, "Eliminating Hunger: DFID food security strategy and priorities for action". [43081]

Clare Short: We have received 27 written responses on the consultation document. In addition, verbal feedback has been received from a number of other organisations, which intend to provide a written response in due course.

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the public service agreement targets which have been revised and those which have been introduced since the publication of the 2001 departmental report. [43261]

Clare Short: No public service agreement (PSA) targets have been revised or newly introduced since the publication of DFID's 2001 departmental report. We will report on progress against targets under the 1999–2002 and the 2001–04 PSAs in our 2002 departmental report, which will be published next month.

Cuba

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much aid the UK Government have provided to Cuba in each of the last five years and for what projects. [42906]

Clare Short: Total bilateral aid to Cuba for the years 1996–97 to 2000–01 is detailed in Table 7.2 (on page 89) of DFID's report, "Statistics on International Development" (2001 edition), which is available in the Library of the House. A list of projects will be placed in the Library of the House.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

London Underground

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the level of Government guarantees being provided to Metronet and Tube Lines for debt raised to fund investment in the underground. [36317]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell (Matthew Taylor) on Monday 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 786W. No Government guarantee is being issued to Metronet and Tube Lines in respect of the debt they are raising to fund investment.

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) for what percentage of the debt on the moneys borrowed under the PPP for the London Underground he is prepared to offer a letter of comfort; [37212]

(2) if he will ask Ernst and Young to consider what effects a letter of comfort guaranteeing 95 per cent. of the debt on the PPP for the London Underground would have on their value for money report; [37211]

(3) if he will publish the letter of comfort written to the bidder under the PPP for the London Underground. [37213]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell (Matthew Taylor) on Monday 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 786W. Ernst and Young were aware of the terms of the proposed letter when they produced their value for money report.

Civil Servants

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will set out for each Civil Service grade within his *(a)* Department and *(b)* Department's executive agencies the (i) total number of staff employed, (ii) number aged (A) 16 to 25, (B) 26 to 35, (C) 36 to 45, (D) 46 to 60 and (E) over the age of 60 years, (iii) number of registered disabled and (iv) number of ethnic minorities. [39156]

Dr. Whitehead: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office on 13 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 1072W.

Railtrack

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 782W, how much Coucher Pender Ltd. is being paid for the services rendered. [39159]

Mr. Jamieson: The amount of payment will depend on how long the process continues and whether the CLG bid is successful or not.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many new carriages have been brought into use by train operating companies on the UK network in the last six months; and how many new carriages have been ordered since Railtrack went into administration. [44235]

Mr. Spellar: Approximately 270 vehicles have entered service on the national rail network in the last six months and 603 new vehicles have been ordered since Railtrack went into administration on 7 October 2001.

Transport Budgets

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proportion of total local government grant provided by central Government have been allocated to local transport plans and budgets in each of the past six years. [39429]

Ms [illegible]: The information is not available in the form requested.

Resignations

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what severance package was offered to Mr. Martin Sixsmith as a result of his resignation. [40177]

Dr. Whitehead: I refer the hon. Member to the statement made by Sir Richard Mottram, the permanent secretary of my Department, on 25 February 2002. A copy of this is available in the Libraries of the House.

Press Releases

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many press releases were issued by his Department or its predecessor *(a)* between 1 May and 31 December 1997 and *(b)* in each year from 1998 to 2001 inclusive. [40043]

Dr. Whitehead: The infomation is as follows:

(a) DETR (central) and the former Department of Transport and Environment:

1 May to 31 December 1997: 577

(b) DETR(c)

1998: 1,121

1999: 1,248

2000: 789

DETR(c)/DTLR

2001: 562.

Correspondence

Michael Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will place in the Library a copy of the letter from the Under-Secretary of State with responsibility for electoral law written to the hon. Member for Lichfield dated 12 February, ref: AW/001457/02. [40685]

Dr. Whitehead: I have arranged for a copy of this letter to be placed in the Library of the House.

Melton Borough Council

Mr. Alan Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans his Department has to remit the payment to Melton borough council under the Government's Pathfinder scheme owing since October 2001. [40845]

Dr. Whitehead: Melton borough council have had up to date funds paid to them against claims made in connection with their work on the local government online pathfinder scheme. Under the conditions laid out in the Special Grant Report to Parliament, release of such funding is subject to satisfactory performance. Additional funding for dissemination activities will be paid to all pathfinder authorities following the completion of their projects, subject to the approval of Parliament.

Railways

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what advice he has received from *(a)* the Strategic Rail Authority and *(b)* the Rail Regulator on the ownership of assets by special purpose vehicles in the rail industry. [43631]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 15 March 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answers given by the Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson), to the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) on 4 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 728–29W. Ownership of the assets created by special purpose vehicles is one of the matters to be resolved case by case.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many meetings he has had with the Rail Regulator since 5 October 2001; and on what dates those meetings took place. [43639]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 15 March 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson) to the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) on 11 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 789W.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 28 February, ref 32696, on rail passengers, if he will list those TOCs which have been required to develop action plans and indicate the type of action plans which have been undertaken. [41246]

Mr. Jamieson: A list of each train operating company, and the type of action plan that they have been required to produce has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if he will state the proportion of stations which have access to *(a)* customer information screens, *(b)* public address announcements and *(c)* help point buttons; and if he will list the stations which (i) have and (ii) do not have access to each; [40948]

(2) how much has been invested by the railway industry since 25 February 1999 on *(a)* security staff and *(b)* installation of video camera surveillance at stations and station car parks; and if he will state (i) how many and (ii) which stations and station car parks have received additional (A) security staff and (B) video surveillance over this time; [40960]

(3) how much has been invested by the railway industry between 25 February 1999 and April 2000 in passenger information systems in stations. [40959]

Mr. Jamieson: In the period from 1 April 1999 until September 2001, private sector capital of £155 million was secured by train operating companies, of which around £54 million was invested in stations. The detailed information is not held centrally.

The National Rail Summit commitments were made by the industry and the associated data were provided by them.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the responsibilities of his *(a)* Rail Delivery Directorate and *(b)* Railways Restructuring Directorate; if he will list the projects which are (i) under way and (ii) have been completed, in each directorate since June 2001; and if he will make a statement. [40954]

Mr. Jamieson: The Rail Delivery Directorate works with the Strategic Rail Authority, other railway stakeholders and other parts of government to improve the performance of today's railway and to deliver the key 10-Year Plan targets. The Railways Restructuring Directorate is working to ensure that the successor to Railtrack, and the regulatory system within which it will operate, are fit for purpose.

Both directorates support DTLR Ministers in a range of duties focused on these objectives.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list *(a)* the number of staff employed in each key area of the railway industry, *(b)* the total requirement for staff in each key area, *(c)* staff shortage numbers for each key area, *(d)* the number of individuals (i) in training and (ii) trained for each key area and *(e)* the number of individuals (A) retiring and (B) leaving employment in each key area for each year since 1995. [41125]

Mr. Jamieson: This information is not held centrally.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent research he has commissioned on the linkage between rail fares and demand. [41647]

Mr. Jamieson: The linkage between rail fares and demand was modelled for the 10-Year Plan, with the results published in the Background Analysis document. This modelling work will be reviewed and developed as part of the first review of the Plan this year, both in a rail specific context and on a multi-modal basis as part of the National Transport Model.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the improvements to the rail network in the West Midlands outlined in the 10 year plan document. [41759]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority's (SRA's) Strategic Plan sets out its priorities for the short, medium and long term and includes national schemes which will benefit the West Midlands, for example, the Train Protection & Warning System, Freight Facilities Grants, Incremental Output Statements for track, signalling and stations, and Rail Passenger Partnership and Rail Performance Funds.

The West Midlands will benefit too, from enhanced services provided under the Cross Country and West Coast franchises and from proposed freight upgrades—such as Felixstowe-Nuneaton. The SRA's Plan also identifies a number of specific projects for the West Midlands including service, performance and infrastructure improvements, as well as additional rolling stock.

Local Government Finance

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the local authorities which lodged complaints with his Department about SSA allocations for 2002–03. [41675]

Dr. Whitehead: The Department consulted local authorities on its proposals for the funding of local government revenue expenditure in 2002–03 on 4 December 2001. As part of that consultation the Government, as usual, received a large number of responses from councils with their view on the proposals and also correcting where necessary the data used in standard spending assessments as we had requested.

Council Housing

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what information he has collated on the average *(a)* market value based on right to buy sales, *(b)* adjusted vacant possession values and *(c)* value for stock transfer purposes of council houses in Walsall (i) under direct council management and (ii) managed by a tenant management organisation. [41750]

Ms Keeble: Walsall metropolitan borough council has provided the Department with an average market value based on right to buy sales of £35,100 for both the council houses in Walsall under direct council management and those managed by a tenant management organisation. Walsall is not required to submit information on adjusted vacant possession values of their stock. The valuations for housing transfer purposes have yet to be agreed.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what powers the Government have to compel councils to build houses under the unitary development plan. [43508]

Ms Keeble *[holding answer 15 March 2002]:* The Government have no powers in relation to unitary development plans to compel councils to build houses. However, unitary development plans are expected to provide sufficient housing land to meet the housing requirements of the whole community. Priority should be given to re-using urban brownfield sites in preference to greenfield land.

The Secretary of State can direct changes to unitary development plans which conflict with national and regional housing policies without good local justification. He can also call in planning applications where the provision of housing is at issue.

Parental Leave Directive

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimate he has made of the *(a)* financial costs and *(b)* benefits to his Department of the Parental Leave Directive. [42476]

Dr. Whitehead: It is estimated that the financial costs to the Department are minimal. There has been no significant take-up within DTLR since the directive was implemented. The Department is committed to implementing policies that help members of staff achieve a better work/life balance.

Electoral Reform

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what plans the Government have to review the electoral system used for elections to *(a)* the office of London Mayor, *(b)* the Greater London Assembly, *(c)* the Scottish Parliament and *(d)* the Welsh Assembly; and if he will make a statement on the structure and timing of any review; [42777]

(2) if he will make a statement on the Government's plans to implement the recommendations of the Jenkins Commission on changing the voting system for the House. [42780]

Mr. Byers: In our manifesto setting out our intentions for this Parliament, we said we would review the experience of the new electoral systems for the devolved Assemblies, the European Parliament and the Greater London Assembly, together with the report of the Independent Commission on the Voting System chaired by Lord Jenkins, to assess whether changes might be made to the electoral system for the House of Commons. We have no plans for other reviews of voting systems.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans the Government have to review the closed list electoral system for the European Parliament; and if he will make a statement on the structure and timing of the review. [42776]

Mr. Byers: A Home Office review of the 1999 European Parliamentary election, published in May 2000, and available on the DTLR website, included a review of the effect of the closed list voting system on turnout.

Staff Suspensions

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many members of staff have been suspended on full pay in each of the last five years; and how many were subsequently reinstated. [41994]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* There have been a small number of cases over the last five years, in which members of staff have been suspended on full pay, eg if alleged gross misconduct or criminal offences need to be investigated. Papers relating to such cases are kept separately and only added to personal files in the event that the allegations are proven. In the event that the allegations are unfounded and the individual is reinstated, any papers relating to the investigation are destroyed. It is not therefore possible to answer the question in the form requested.

Farming

Mr. Hague: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what advice his Department provides to local authorities and the Inland Revenue concerning the collection of business rates from farms engaged in *(a)* share farming, *(b)* contract farming and *(c)* machinery rings. [42679]

Mr. Raynsford: The Valuation Office Agency of the Inland Revenue, and its valuation officers, have a statutory duty to maintain the non-domestic rating lists, under the legislation in the Local Government Finance Act 1988 and relevant case law. It is a decision for the valuation officer in each case whether or not a farm qualifies for the current agricultural exemption from rates, in accordance with his or her statutory responsibilities.

It is not for my Department to provide formal advice to valuation officers on the exercise of their statutory duties. Nor is there any need for formal guidance to local authorities, whose responsibilities in this case are simply to issue bills in respect of hereditaments that valuation officers have entered in the rating lists. We will, of course, review policy when necessary and this process has led to the proposal in the White Paper, "Strong Local Leadership—Quality Public Services", to amend the legislation to extend the agricultural exemption to share farming, contract farming and machinery rings.

Mr. Hague: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will define the meaning of contract farming in paragraph 7.52 of the White Paper, "Strong Local Leadership-Quality Public Services". [42703]

Mr. Raynsford: The consultation paper on "Extending the Agricultural Exemption from Non-Domestic Rates to Machinery Rings and Share Farming Enterprises", published on 16 February 2001, referred to in paragraph 7.52 of the White Paper, included a detailed explanation of the meaning of contract/share farming.

Mr. Hague: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the Government plans to introduce legislation to extend agricultural exemption from business rates to share farming, contract farming and machinery rings as outlined in paragraph 7.52 of the White Paper Strong Local Leadership-Quality Public Services. [42708]

Mr. Raynsford: We will introduce legislation when parliamentary time allows.

Rural Work Force

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proportion of the rural work force travel to their place of work by *(a)* foot, *(b)* bicycle, *(c)* bus, *(d)* train and *(e)* car; and if he will make a statement. [42904]

Mr. Jamieson: Information is available only in respect of people living in rural areas, not by place of work. From the National Travel Survey, the distribution of mode of travel to work for people living in rural areas in Great Britain over the period 1992–2000 was as follows:

(a) foot—10 per cent.,

(b) bicycle—3 per cent.,

(c) bus—4 per cent.,

(e) car—79 per cent.

The sample size is too small to give an accurate figure for transport by train, but it is less than 3 per cent. Rural areas are those with a population of less than 3,000 as defined by the 1991 Census.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proportion of the rural work force lives *(a)* less than 30 minutes, *(b)* 30 minutes to one hour, *(c)* one to two hours, *(d)* two to three hours and *(e)* more than three hours away from their place of work. [42911]

Mr. Jamieson: Information is available only in respect of people living in rural areas, not by place of work. From the National Travel Survey, the distribution of time spent by travelling to work by people living in rural areas in Great Britain is as follows:

(a) less than 30 minutes—78 per cent.

(b) 30 minutes to one hour—29 per cent.

(c) one to two hours—12 per cent.

Data have been aggregated over the years 1992–2000 because the number of rural dwellers in the sample each year is small, and it is not possible to give accurate figures for journeys that take more than two hours. The figures are taken from travel diaries so they reflect actual journeys, rather than usual journeys, and may contain double counting as some people will have journeys of different lengths during the survey week. Rural areas are those with a population of less than 3,000 as defined by the 1991 Census.

Liquefied Petroleum Gas

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if he will undertake an analysis of the effectiveness of the Australian system of liquefied petroleum gas identification to alert emergency services in the result of a fire; [43097]

(2) what assessment the Government have made of the effectiveness of the voluntary red sticker system for identifying cars running on liquefied petroleum gas; and if he will make a statement. [43096]

Mr. Jamieson: We have no knowledge of the voluntary red sticker system and have made no assessment or analysis of the Australian system for alerting their fire services to the use of vehicles fuelled with liquefied petroleum gas (LPG). Consideration is being given to the marking requirements of vehicles fuelled in this way as part of the LPG construction standards.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many cases of boiling liquid expanding vapour explosion involving vehicles which run on liquefied petroleum gas have been reported in each year since 1999. [43094]

Mr. Jamieson: We do not hold any information on such incidents. The Fire Service is discussing safety issues with the vehicle manufacturers

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment the Government have made of the effectiveness of the guidance which is available regarding pressure relief valves in the conversion of UK vehicles to liquefied petroleum gas. [43098]

Mr. Jamieson: The Department does not issue guidance regarding the use of pressure relief valves as their performance requirements are clearly stated in the Road vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations 1986. The LP Gas Association (LPGA) issues guidance (COP 11) to its members and the general public, part of which refers to ECE Regulation 67:01 which is currently being implemented in the Construction and Use Regulations as an alternative to the existing requirements. We are content that this information is satisfactory.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what markings are required on UK vehicles to show that they run on liquefied petroleum gas. [43095]

Mr. Jamieson: There are no markings required by legislation to show that a vehicle is run on liquefied petroleum gas.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what regulations exist covering the fitting of liquefied petroleum gas conversion kits to UK vehicles. [43090]

Mr. Jamieson: The fitting of liquefied petroleum gas conversions kits is regulated by regulations 40, 94 and schedule 5 of the Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations 1986.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans the Government have further to regulate *(a)* the sale and *(b)* the fitting of liquefied petroleum conversion kits for UK vehicles. [43099]

Mr. Jamieson: Consideration is being given to the introduction of regulations to control the standards for the fitting of liquefied petroleum conversion kits for UK vehicles. As yet no decisions have been made as to what form these regulations may take and how they may be implemented.

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the Public Service Agreement targets which have been revised and those which have been introduced since the publication of the 2001 departmental report. [43251]

Dr. Whitehead: There have been no revisions to the Spending Review 2000 Public Service Agreement (PSA) targets published in the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions' 2001 annual report. Following the machinery of government changes in June 2001 responsibility for the following six targets transferred to the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs:

Improve air quality by meeting our National Air Quality Strategy targets for carbon monoxide, lead, nitrogen dioxide, particles, sulphur dioxide, benzene and 1–3 butadiene;

Improve the environment and the sustainable use of natural resources, including by reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 12.5 per cent. from 1990 levels and moving towards a 20 per cent. reduction in CO_2 emissions by 2010;

Enable 17 per cent. of household waste to be recycled or composted by 2004;

Reduce fuel poverty among vulnerable households by improving the energy efficiency of 600,000 homes between 2001 and 2004;

Open up public access to mountain, moor, heath and down and registered common land by the end of 2005; and

Bring into favourable condition by 2010 95 per cent. of all nationally important wildlife sites, compared to 60 per cent. of sites currently estimated to be in such condition.

Responsibility for the remaining DETR PSA targets remains with my Department. In addition, the following PSA target has been transferred to the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions from the Home Office:

Reduce the incidence of accidental fire-related deaths in the home by 20 per cent. averaged over the five year period to March 2004 compared with the average recorded in the five year period to March 1999.

Fire Safety

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he last made an assessment of fire safety at Shoreham Harbour. [43710]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 15 March 2002]:* Inspections of workplaces in respect of general fire precautions are carried out by local fire authorities. Inspections are made of individual premises and other workplaces and recorded as such. Consequently it is not possible to give a date for inspection of the harbour as a whole. The last inspection of a premises in the harbour area was of a factory subject to a fire certificate under the Fire Precautions Act 1971. This was carried out on 19 February 2002.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many fire-related deaths in dwellings in Buckinghamshire there were in each year since 1997. [43290]

Dr. Whitehead: The information requested is contained in the table and refers to those fires, which the Buckinghamshire fire and rescue service attended between 1997 and 2000.

Fire-related deaths by location, attended by Buckinghamshire fire and rescue service, 1997–2000

	Total deaths	*Dwellings*[1]	*Other buildings*	*Other outdoors*
1997	12	7	2	3
1998	2	2	—	—
1999	5	4	1	—
2000[2]	10	7	—	3

[1] Dwellings are defined as buildings occupied by households, excluding hotels, hostels and residential institutions. They also include caravans, houseboats and other non-building structures used solely as a permanent dwelling.

[2] 2000 data are provisional, and are subject to revision as later information from inquests and death certificates confirming cause of death is received.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list fire stations which have *(a)* opened and *(b)* closed in Buckinghamshire since 1997. [43291]

Dr. Whitehead: No fire stations have opened or closed in Buckinghamshire during this period.

Rough Sleepers

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proportion of those who were sleeping rough in 1998 and are no longer doing so are now in paid employment. [43108]

Ms Keeble: Personal details of rough sleepers in 1998 were in many cases not recorded, making it hard to track their progress away from the street and into housing, training and employment. As part of delivering its strategy the unit has now put in place client monitoring systems to track the progress of individuals in their move from sleeping rough to independent living. These systems are subject to review and further development.

The Rough Sleepers Unit has worked with Government Departments, other statutory bodies and voluntary agencies to help people with a history of sleeping rough to access statutory benefits, education, training and employment. The unit has funded the Homeless Routeway to Employment, "Learning Zones", a website to help rough sleepers into employment and a "jobs-led hostel" which specifically helps former rough sleepers into work.

The unit has also invested £2 million of its Special Innovation Fund in schemes to build self esteem and help former rough sleepers into employment, including Business in the Community which has helped businesses provide work placements, training and support to local homeless agencies and their clients.

Tenancy Sustainment Teams in London and other cities around England also help former rough sleepers and homeless people that have moved from hostels into their own accommodation to resettle permanently and to take up training and employment. Meaningful occupation workers in each Tenancy Sustainment Team identify and maximise specific support and training to help former rough sleepers to prepare for and take up employment opportunities.

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment his Department has made of the number of rough sleepers in *(a)* St. Helens, *(b)* Merseyside and *(c)* the north-west. [42412]

Ms Keeble: Tables showing the local authority HIP estimates and results of street counts for 1998, 1999, 2000 and the latest figures for 2001 were placed in the Libraries of the House on 11 December 2001. Local authorities not listed in the tables for those years submitted either an estimate of 0–10 or no estimate in their HIP returns.

Rent Increases

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the average rent increases for individual local authorities agreed for 2002–03 by *(a)* one bed, *(b)* two bed, *(c)* three bed and *(d)* four bed properties. [43237]

Ms Keeble: It is for each local authority to determine the rents on their properties. Neither the average nor the pattern of rents across different types of dwelling has to be agreed with the Department. No detailed information is yet available on the actual rents set by local authorities for 2002–03.

Rail Freight

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what

progress has been made in the last 12 months towards reaching the rail freight targets under the 10-year transport plan. [43055]

Mr. Jamieson: We shall publish a review of progress in July.

Evictions

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to require registered social landlords to submit annual figures on possession proceedings from actions entered in court to evictions. [43070]

Ms Keeble: We have no plans to require registered social landlords to submit this information. However, as mentioned in my answer of 29 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 146, my Department is discussing with the Court Service how to achieve a better breakdown of the data that they collect on possession orders by social landlords. This breakdown will show possession action in relation to rent arrears and anti-social behaviour and will enable us to monitor trends on such actions and improve our understanding of the causes of homelessness. The Court Service is aiming to put in place a revised system in the early part of 2002–03. Figures will then be available on a monthly basis.

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to investigate the use of mandatory grounds for eviction by registered social landlords. [43073]

Ms Keeble: None. Registered social landlords (RSLs) are independent organisations regulated by the Housing Corporation. They must demonstrate compliance with the Housing Corporation's regulatory code and guidance, which requires them to seek possession of a property only as a last resort.

The Corporation's new inspection regime focuses on the quality and efficiency of registered social landlords' housing management services. The Corporation's regulators will report on inappropriate or unreasonable use of mandatory possession grounds where this comes to light during an inspection.

Domestic Violence

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he intends to publish the 1998–99 research for the report on provision of refuge and access to domestic violence services "Households experiencing domestic violence". [43072]

Ms Keeble: Our plans are to publish the research report, currently titled "The provision of accommodation and support for households experiencing domestic violence in England" in the summer, at the same time as we publish a "Supporting People" Guide to accommodation and support options for women experiencing domestic violence, and a "Supporting People" Handy Guide to domestic violence. Consequently at present we do not have a firm publication date.

Railway Fencing

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many miles of railway track is separated from roads by *(a)* wire fencing, *(b)* wooden fencing, *(c)* brick walls and *(d)* nothing. [42970]

Mr. Jamieson: My Department dose not hold such information.

Road Accident (Monmouth)

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement about the collision involving a Stagecoach 69 bus and a car in Monmouth on 7 March; how many passengers were *(a)* seated and *(b)* standing; and how many were (i) adults and (ii) pupils. [43531]

Mr. Jamieson: Officials from my Department have made inquiries about this incident which it transpires was of such a minor nature (there were no injuries to passengers or damage done to the bus) that it was not reported to either the police or the vehicle inspectorate. I therefore cannot comment on the number of seated and standing passengers.

Telecommunications Masts

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will take further measures to ensure that telecommunications companies comply with guidelines regarding pre-application discussion and consultation over the siting of telecommunications masts. [43622]

Ms Keeble: On 22 August 2001 we significantly strengthened the public consultation requirements on mast proposals of 15 metres and below and for masts on buildings and structures so that they are exactly the same as for applications for planning permission. This was underpinned by revised Planning Policy Guidance Note 8 "Telecommunications" (PPG8) which strongly encourages operators to discuss mast proposals with local planning authorities and to consult local people on them before applications for planning permission or prior approval are submitted.

The Department is currently drawing up, in partnership with representatives of the mobile phone operators and local government, a revised Code of Best Practice, which will include further advice and best practice on consultation.

In addition, the five mobile phone operators have made a series of commitments to deliver improved communication and consultation with local authorities and local communities. We expect these commitments to be followed in every case. My hon. and learned Friend, the Minister for Housing, Planning and Regeneration will be meeting the operators shortly to take stock of progress in delivering the commitments.

Roads (Somerset)

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans the Government have for road improvement in Somerset. [43400]

Mr. Jamieson: The following Trunk Road schemes in Somerset were remitted to the London to the South West and South Wales Multi Modal (SWARMMS) Study:

(a) the A303 Sparkford to Ilchester improvement

(b) the A303 Ilminster By-pass widening to dual-carriageway

(c) the A303 Ilminster to Marsh improvement.

The Study findings are due to be reported to the Regional Assembly in early May 2002. It is up to the Regional Assembly to recommend to the Minister which schemes, if any, should be added to the Highways Agency's Targeted Programme of Improvements (TPI).

Other Major Schemes being progressed by Somerset county council as part of their Local Transport Plan strategies but partly funded by central government are:

The Bridgwater Northern Distributor Road, which is nearing completion.

The North West Taunton Package—Silk Mills, which has provisional approval

The Taunton Inner Relief Road, which has received funding for 2002–03 to enable design to be progressed.

Marine Safety

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will publish the findings of Associated British Ports recent individual risk assessment conducted by ERM Risk into its new pilotage scheme on the Humber. [43605]

Mr. Jamieson: It is for Associated British Ports to decide whether or not to publish assessments they have commissioned: they are not required to do so either statutorily or under the Port Marine Safety Code.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will establish public authorities specific to the individual estuaries for the authorisation of pilots. [43606]

Mr. Jamieson: There are already public authorities—competent harbour authorities statutorily designated under the Pilotage Act—which are responsible for the authorisation of pilots in our ports. The Government has no intention of separating responsibility for pilotage from other port marine safety functions, since the Port Marine Safety Code requires them to be managed by means of an integrated safety system.

Areas of Outstanding National Beauty

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps have been taken since 1997 to strengthen the protection of areas of outstanding national beauty. [43355]

Ms Keeble *[holding answer 14 March 2002]:* In June 2000 we amended Planning Policy Guidance for the Countryside to make clear that areas of outstanding natural beauty (AONBs) and National Parks should be given equivalent protection by the planning system. This means that proposals for major developments in AONBs should be demonstrated to be in the public interest before being allowed to proceed.

Protection of AONB's will be strengthened under the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000 through the requirement of a management plan for all and the option of a Conservation Board for those where local authorities think one would be suitable.

Broadspring Wood

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if he will publish correspondence exchanged between the Highways Agency and the Uxbridge and District Rifle Club, since August 2001; [43782]

(2) what plans his Department has to *(a)* sell Broadspring Wood and *(b)* transfer it to a charitable trust for its long term conservation with public access; [43779]

(3) what price was included in the contract for sale of Broadspring Wood, Denham, Buckinghamshire, to the Uxbridge and District Rifle Club; and how many hectares of land were to be included in the sale; [43780]

(4) if he will set out the terms of the licence allowing the Uxbridge and District Rifle Club to use Broadspring Wood, Denham, Buckinghamshire, for multiple shot shotguns for the practical shotgun discipline; and if the licence is different to that referred to in his answer of 14 February, *Official Report*, column 546W. [43826]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 15 March 2002]:* The substance of the correspondence between the Highways Agency and the Uxbridge and District Rifle Club was set out in my letters of 25 February and 11 March to the hon. Member.

The terms of the contract for sale of Broadspring Wood are still being finalised. If and when the sale is completed, details of the price and the area of land sold will be in the public domain at the Lands Registry.

As I noted in my answer of 1 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 1588W, this whole matter is currently under review by the Highways Agency who will write to the hon. Member when the outcome is known.

The licence between the Highways Agency and the Uxbridge and District Rifle Club permits the use of multiple shot shotguns especially adapted for the 'practical shotgun discipline'. Clause 2(k) states "not to use or permit to be used any gun other than a shotgun which shall not exceed 12 bore in calibre or a rifle and in particular not to use or permit to be used without the Owners' written consent first obtained any weapon requiring a Firearms Certificate under Section 1 of the Firearms Act provided that this shall not preclude the use of multiple shot shotguns specially adapted for the 'practical shotgun discipline'". This licence is that referred to in my answer of 14 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 546W.

Asbestos

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 26 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1177W, on what pathological basis he states it is not possible to confirm the source of asbestos trading to individual cases of asbestos related disease. [43830]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 15 March 2002]:* Individual cases of mesothelioma or of lung cancer caused by asbestos are not pathologically or clinically distinguishable from those due to other causes. The link between asbestos exposure and the occurrence of these diseases is established scientifically by the observation that the "rates" of these diseases are consistently higher in population groups with asbestos exposure than in comparable non-exposed groups. Now this link is established, a judgment can be made for individual cases as to whether their conditions are likely to have been due to asbestos exposure if the extent of the individual case's exposure to asbestos is known or can be estimated. However, such judgments are always a question of a balance of probabilities, and can never be totally certain. Since every member of the population has been exposed to asbestos from multiple sources, the definitive linkage of individual cases to a particular source is not possible.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 26 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1177W, on asbestos, if the cases of mesothelioma and lung cancer have been attributed by *(a)* estimates and *(b)* clinical pathology; and what the basis is of that methodology. [43792]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 15 March 2002]:* The attribution of mesothelioma and lung cancer cases to asbestos exposure by doctors participating in the Surveillance of Work-related and Occupational Disease, known as SWORD, scheme reflects the reporting doctor's best judgment based on their knowledge of the case's exposure history. The attribution is not based on clinical pathology.

The statement that almost all mesothelioma cases recorded on the mesothelioma register are due to asbestos is an estimate based on the strongly established links between asbestos and mesothelioma, and the fact that the growth in the numbers of mesothelioma deaths over the last 30 years (and the more recent decline in deaths at ages below 50) corresponds to the earlier growth and decline in national asbestos imports.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 26 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1177W, what assessment he has made of the independent reports of Poolety, Davies, Hoskins, Browne, Gibbs Meldrum and Donnigan. [43848]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 15 March 2002]:* It is not possible to give a reply to the hon. Member without further details. If he would care to write to me with full information on the specific reports and their authors I will ensure he receives a full reply.

Shoreham Harbour

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if his Department *(a)* has collated and *(b)* will publish statistical information on the average number of daily lorry movements on port-related activity to and from Shoreham harbour in each of the last 36 months. [43703]

Ms Keeble *[holding answer 15 March 2002]:* This information has not been collated.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he will give his formal response to the proposed Shoreham Harbour Revision Order. [43713]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 15 March 2002]:* The proposed Shoreham Harbour Revision Order has not yet been formally submitted to my Department. Officials received a copy of the latest draft of the proposed order on 7 March 2002 and will be responding to the authority within the next two weeks.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent discussions his Department has had regarding the proposed Harbour Revision Order for Shoreham Harbour with *(a)* Shoreham Port Authority and *(b)* representatives of (i) Adur council, (ii) Brighton and Hove council and (iii) West Sussex county council. [43711]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 15 March 2002]:* Officials received a copy of a draft of the proposed Harbour Revision Order on 7 March 2002, and have not yet discussed this draft with the Shoreham Port Authority. No discussions regarding the proposed order have taken place between the Department and the Adur council, Brighton and Hove council or West Sussex county council.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what his Department's policy is on the establishment of additional cross channel ferry services at Shoreham Harbour and other south coast ports. [43786]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 15 March 2002]:* The establishment of additional cross-channel ferry services is a matter for decision by individual ferry operators and port authorities.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions which Ministers have made official visits to Shoreham Harbour since May 1997. [43702]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 15 March 2002]:* There has been one official visit to the port of Shoreham by a Minister from my Department since May 1997. On 24 November 2000 Lord Whitty, the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State of the Department visited the port as part of a tour of West Sussex arranged by the West Sussex county council.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what financial contribution will be made by Shoreham Port Authority towards the road link study between Shoreham Harbour and the A27 proposed by SEEDA; [43708]

(2) what the funding arrangements are for the road link study between Shoreham Harbour and the A27 proposed by SEEDA; [43707]

(3) what the remit is of the road link study between Shoreham Harbour and the A27 proposed by SEEDA; who will prepare the study; and when it is due to report. [43709]

Ms Keeble *[holding answer 15 March 2002]:* A draft brief for a multiple mode transport study is currently being prepared by the Shoreham Maritime Steering Group. The remit, funding arrangements and time scales will be considered as part of the brief.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the extent is of his responsibilities for Shoreham Harbour; and on what connected subjects he is responsible to Parliament. [43785]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 15 March 2002]:* I have no direct responsibilities in respect of Shoreham Harbour, other than responsibility for making board appointments to the Shoreham Port Authority who are the statutory body responsible for the harbour.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 11 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 754W, ref. 42321, if he will list all funding made available to the Maritime Vision for Shoreham Harbour through English Partnerships through the former Partnership Investment Programme. [43795]

Ms Keeble *[holding answer 15 March 2002]:* Total expenditure by all partners, including English Partnerships, up to April 2001, was £305,000.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 11 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 755W, ref 42323, what proportion of land at Shoreham Harbour is considered *(a)* brownfield land and *(b)* land used for port-related activities. [43787]

Ms Keeble *[holding answer 15 March 2002]:* Taking Shoreham Harbour as the area bordering the River Adur, the Eastern Arm and The Canal and excluding all water areas and the beach foreshore, the whole of the site consists of brownfield land with approximately 40 per cent. of this land being used for port-related activities.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what consultation has taken place on the proposed Harbour Revision Order for Shoreham Harbour between Shoreham Port Authority and *(a)* Adur council, *(b)* Brighton and Hove council, *(c)* West Sussex county council and *(d)* local residents. [43712]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 15 March 2002]:* The proposed Harbour Revision Order is still in draft form and has not yet been subject to any formal consultation by the Shoreham Port Authority. The authority will be consulting with all stakeholders of the port in due course.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the businesses based at Shoreham Harbour as tenants of Shoreham Port Authority; and how many employees are employed by each. [43793]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 15 March 2002]:* My Department does not hold details of these businesses or their employees.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what criteria apply to the Chairman, Chief Executive and board members of the Shoreham port authority under Nolan Standards Commission requirements. [43697]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 15 March 2002]:* As the Shoreham port authority is not a public body, the authority, its board members and employees are not bound by the requirements of the Nolan Committee on Standards in Public Life. However, 'Modernising Trust Ports—A Guide to Good Governance' published by my Department in January 2000 recommended that all trust ports should seek to adopt the Nolan procedures when making appointments to their boards. My Department does follow the Nolan principles, as set out in the 'Code of Practice for Ministerial Appointments to Public Bodies' issued by the Commissioner for Public Appointments, when making direct appointments to the board.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what action is taken by his Department to monitor borrowing levels by Shoreham port authority. [43784]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 15 March 2002]:* Although we approve the overall borrowing limits of the authority which are set in Harbour Revision Orders approved by my Department, we do not monitor the level of borrowing at any particular time.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will name the members of the interviewing panel for new board members of the Shoreham port authority. [43698]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 15 March 2002]:* No interviews for the current vacancies on the board have taken place yet. The interview panel will consist of the Chairman of the Shoreham port authority, an independent member and a senior departmental official.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what guidance he has given to members of Shoreham port authority regarding remuneration figures for board members and executive employees. [43704]

Mr. Jamieson: None. The remuneration of the board members and executive employees of the Shoreham port authority is not a matter for my Department.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many applications were received for the two vacant places on the Shoreham port authority board; and how many candidates were interviewed. [43699]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 15 March 2002]:* 79 applications or expressions of interest were received. No candidates have been interviewed yet.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what criteria will be used for appointing future members of the Shoreham port authority board on the basis of the proposed Shoreham Harbour Revision Order. [43706]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 15 March 2002]:* The criteria for future appointments to the Shoreham port authority have not yet been formally approved.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what safety measures have been taken by Shoreham port authority to deal with hazardous waste since May 1997. [43790]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 15 March 2002]:* I am not aware of concerns over such safety measures. I would encourage the hon. Member to discuss his interest with the Health and Safety Executive or the Environment Agency.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the purpose was of the meeting between one of his officials and the vice-chairman and chief executive of Shoreham port authority on 1 February; who instigated the meeting; and if he will publish minutes. [43794]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 15 March 2002]:* The purpose of this meeting, arranged by officials from my Department, was to shortlist candidates for interview for board appointments to the Shoreham port authority. The content of this meeting remains confidential as we are still considering the shortlist of candidates proposed by this selection panel.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the terms of contract of the Chief Executive of Shoreham port authority; and what the procedure is for appointing a successor. [43701]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 15 March 2002]:* The recruitment and terms and conditions of employment of employees of the Shoreham port authority are not a matter for my Department.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the trust ports in the United Kingdom for which he is responsible and the members of their respective boards stating their appointing bodies where appropriate. [43700]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 15 March 2002]:* I have no direct responsibility for any trust ports. We do not hold a list of the board members for every port and this information could be obtained by this Department only at disproportionate costs. The appointment procedures for each of these ports is set out in their own local legislation which we do hold copies of. However, this information could be collated only at a disproportionate cost to my Department.

Objective 2 Funding

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will *(a)* list the areas which have made representations that they should be in receipt of Objective 2 funding and *(b)* set out where included in those representations their per capita GDP as a proportion of the UK average and the year to which these figures relate. [43827]

Ms Keeble *[holding answer 15 March 2002]:* The information requested can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Modular Housing

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if modular housing has the status of mobile homes; and if he will make a statement. [43902]

Ms Keeble: Mobile homes legislation defines mobile homes as any structure designed or adapted for human habitation which is capable of being moved from one place to another (whether by being towed, or by being transported on a motor vehicle or trailer) and any motor vehicle so designed or adapted. This may include a structure separately constructed and designed to be assembled on a site provided that, when assembled, it is physically capable of being moved.

Subject to the views of the courts, a flat-pack home may fall within this definition. However, what is installed on a site licensed under the mobile homes legislation is a matter for the owner of the site, subject to local planning considerations.

Planning Appeals

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many appeals have been referred to his Department under section 21 of the Planning (Hazardous Substances) Act 1990; what were the results of these appeals; how long it took his Department to make a decision from receipt of the inspector's report in each year since May 1997; and if he will make a statement. [44561]

Ms Keeble: All appeals under section 21 of the Planning (Hazardous Substances) Act 1990 are referred to the Secretary of State for decision. Since 1992 ten appeals have been made five of which were subsequently withdrawn by the appellant. Of the others, two were allowed, one was refused and two have yet to be determined.

Only one appeal has been determined since 1997. The decision, issued on 17 February 2000 was taken within 19 weeks of receipt of the Inspector's report.

Stolen Equipment

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 29 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 182–84W, on stolen equipment, what criminal proceedings have been undertaken for cases of theft against his Department, stating in each case *(a)* whether the proceedings (i) led to a criminal conviction and (ii) were unsuccessful, *(b)* the cost incurred by his Department in pursuing a conviction and *(c)* the value of items recovered; and if he will make a statement. [41500]

Dr. Whitehead: The information requested is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. It is the policy of the department that thefts of equipment should be reported to the police. It is for them in conjunction with the Crown Prosecution Service to determine whether there is sufficient evidence for a prosecution to take place.

Hedges

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what

regulations there are to control the size of garden hedges, with specific reference to permitting sufficient light for neighbours. [43043]

Ms Keeble: There are no regulations to control the size of garden hedges. Guidelines, which provide an objective method for assessing whether high hedges block out too much light to adjoining properties, were published on my Department's website in December 2001. We want to encourage people to apply the guidelines and use the results to settle disputes with their neighbours amicably. We are preparing a leaflet specially designed for this purpose, which we expect to launch in the spring. But the guidelines have no statutory force.

We recognise that, in some cases, guidance and voluntary action is no substitute for a legal remedy to the problems caused by high hedges. We remain committed, therefore, to bringing forward legislation to set up a statutory complaints system for dealing with high hedge problems as soon as there is space in the Parliamentary timetable.

National Air Traffic Services

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) whether the employee shareholders of NATS were invited to contribute to the recent re-financing; [44238]

(2) what form the Government's recent financial assistance to NATS takes. [44237]

Mr. Spellar: I refer the right hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 807W.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to the questions tabled by the hon. Member for Cotswold on 12 February refs 37055 and 37057 on NATS, when he will receive an answer. [39760]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the answers I gave on Monday 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 806W, and Tuesday 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 176W.

West Coast Mainline

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he will make an announcement on the next phase of the west coast main line upgrade. [44234]

Mr. Spellar: The SRA are currently working with Railtrack and other stakeholders on a review of the outputs from the west coast main line upgrade, and will make an announcement in due course.

Coast Protection

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the extent to which the proposed pontoon for the new Brixham lifeboat will affect the activities of the Brixham Sea Rangers, in deciding whether to grant a harbour revision order under the Coast Protection Act 1949; and when he plans to make a decision. [43837]

Mr. Jamieson: I can confirm that the Department has received an application from the RNLI under section 34 of the Coast Protection Act 1949 for consent for the construction of an alongside berth.

I am also aware that a particular consideration of this case is the Brixham Sea Rangers' concern that the proposed site of the new berth encroaches on a section of water granted for their own use.

This issue is currently being addressed by the applicant and we understand that a mutually agreeable compromise may be achievable.

Drivers' Hours

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the status is for the purpose of drivers' hours regulations of time spent by a driver out of his vehicle during a journey by car ferry. [44280]

Mr. Jamieson: Time spent on a ferryboat can be treated as a break or as part of the driver's daily rest period if it exceeds one hour in duration. But a driver is only allowed to interrupt his daily rest period once to enable him to embark or disembark a ferryboat, and in doing so, must add two hours to the total rest time.

Coalfields Regeneration Trust

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the work of the Coalfields Regeneration Trust, with particular reference to *(a)* St. Helens, South, *(b)* St. Helens metropolitan borough and *(c)* Merseyside. [42411]

Ms Keeble: The total grant made by the Coalfields Regeneration Trust within Merseyside, up to March 2001, was £1,538,133. Of that, £215,322 went to projects in St. Helens, North and £733,498 to St. Helens, South. A further £589,313 was allocated to projects which spanned the St. Helens metropolitan borough.

Playgrounds

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what regulations govern the materials which can be used to provide safety surfaces in children's playgrounds. [38698]

Mr. Caborn: I have been asked to reply

There are no statutory regulations governing the materials which can be used to provide safety surfaces in children's playgrounds.

DCMS funds research into children's play issues in England, including play safety. This work is currently carried out for us by the Children's Play Council, which has set up the Play Safety Forum to identify the key issues affecting play safety. DCMS officials attend this forum, which is working on a statement on play safety.

Research

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer

of 4 March, *Official Report*, column 91W, on research documentation, for what reason the Department does not hold this information centrally. [42305]

Mr. Jamieson: The information is not currently available centrally without disproportionate cost because responsibility for DTLR research is devolved to individual policy areas and programmes are not managed centrally. However, the Department is developing a central research database facility which is currently being populated with data. This should enable more information on research to be made available from a central source in future.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Commonwealth Games

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions she has had with the organisers of the Commonwealth Games about drug testing at the Games; and if she will make a statement. [43492]

Mr. Caborn: We continue to work with the Commonwealth Games Federation (who have formal responsibility for the development of the drug testing regime for the Commonwealth Games) as well as Games' organisers, Manchester 2002 Ltd., and UK Sport to ensure that a robust and reliable regime is in place for the Games; and which is consistent with internationally accepted standards of anti-doping

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans United Kingdom Sport has to conduct *(a)* blood and *(b)* urine tests at the Commonwealth Games; and if she will make a statement. [43493]

Mr. Caborn: We are committed to ensuring that a rigorous testing programme is in place for the Games and with the other Games funders have ensured that adequate funds are made available to the Games to allow for a full testing programme.

We understand that the tests, which will be carried out for the Games by UK Sport on behalf of the Games organisers, Manchester 2002 Ltd. and the Commonwealth Games Federation (CGF), may include both blood and urine tests. A decision on testing for EPO (Erythropoietin) using blood sampling is awaited from the CGF and will need to take account of any improvements identified by the International Olympic Committee from the protocols for the Salt Lake City Winter Olympic Games. The final decision on the number and type of drug tests rests with the CGF.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what efforts have been made to use this summer's Commonwealth Games as a vehicle to promote inbound tourism. [43206]

Mr. Caborn: The Commonwealth Games form a key part of the British Tourist Authority's (BTA) overseas marketing strategy.

Examples of promotion include a BTA stall at the Edmonton Games last year, a Commonwealth Games colour supplement for inclusion in marketing brochures and a special Commonwealth Games pack. BTA offices in both Canada and Australia have recently taken groups of journalists to Manchester to see preparations for the Games.

BTA is a member of the Regional Tourism Marketing Working Group created to maximise the tourism opportunities created by the Games and has seconded a marketing expert to Manchester.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what percentage of the tickets for this summer's Commonwealth Games have now been sold. [43205]

Mr. Caborn: More than 460,000 tickets have been sold here in the UK—this equates to 60 per cent. of the available tickets. A further 110,000 tickets have also been sold to Commonwealth Games Associations and other bodies.

Celebrations

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what arrangements her Department has made to celebrate *(a)* St. Patrick's day, *(b)* St. George's day, *(c)* St. Andrew's day and *(d)* Her Majesty the Queen's Golden Jubilee; and how her Department celebrated St. David's day. [42294]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* There are certain days of the year known as 'named days' when the Union flag must be flown from Government buildings. The days include St. David's day (in Wales), St. George's day (in England), St. Andrew's day (in Scotland) but not St. Patrick's day. In the Department for Culture, Media and Sport there are no celebrations other than raising the Union flag.

Consideration is being given to the Union flag flying protocol for the Jubilee. The Union flag will fly on Coronation Day (2 June) as this is a named day.

The Golden Jubilee Office in DCMS is supporting, facilitating and co-ordinating the overall planning for the Queen's Golden Jubilee celebrations. I would also refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) on 11 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 58–59W. In DCMS all staff will be given the additional public holiday on 4 June 2002 to celebrate Her Majesty the Queen's Golden Jubilee.

Stolen Equipment

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to the answer of 22 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 727W, on stolen equipment, what criminal proceedings have been undertaken for cases of theft against her Department, stating in each case *(a)* whether the proceedings (i) led to a criminal conviction and (ii) were unsuccessful, *(b)* the cost incurred by her Department in pursuing a conviction and *(c)* the value of items recovered; and if she will make a statement. [41503]

Dr. Howells: No criminal proceedings have been undertaken for cases of theft against the Department.

Ministerial Group on Sport

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the progress of the cross-departmental Ministerial Group on Sport. [43208]

Mr. Caborn: The Inter-Ministerial Group on Sport, which I chair, continues to meet monthly. It provides an opportunity for my Department, along with the Department for Education and Skills, the Department of Health, the Home Office, the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, Sport England and the New Opportunities Fund to get a cross-departmental perspective of the sport-related issues of the day, and to discuss options for addressing those that take into account the wishes and concerns of all involved. In addition, the group also receives feedback from the School Sport Alliance, which meets quarterly at official level to discuss the practicalities of putting the Government's Plan for Sport into practice.

Jubilee Medals

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if the Yeoman of the Guard at the Tower of London will receive Jubilee Medals. [43126]

Tessa Jowell: The medal is being issued to members of the armed forces and Royal Fleet Auxiliary, and to the emergency services. Yeoman Warders of the Tower of London do not fall within these categories and are therefore ineligible to receive the medal.

Charities

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to change Community Fund regulations to allow money to be made available to charities for more than six years at a time. [43437]

Mr. Caborn: Decisions about the time limits on funding are for the Community Fund. Its directions require it to set specific time limits on the periods for which grants are payable, although the precise periods are a matter for the fund alone and are not subject to regulation by the Government.

Sports Facilities (Doomsday Book)

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what progress has been made on the Doomsday Book of Sports Facilities. [43207]

Mr. Caborn: Information on sports facilities is currently held by a variety of organisations and a single database will enable more strategic Government investment in those areas and facilities which are most important. My Department is continuing discussions with Sport England on the scope, content, and cost of the proposed database and how the project will be taken forward.

Lottery Grants

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when she expects the first awards to be made by the National Lottery's joint Community Fund and New Opportunities Fund fair share project; what the final date is by which she expects all funds to have been distributed; and what measures are in place to ensure that all funds are distributed by this date. [44036]

Mr. Caborn: Fair Share will begin distributing funds from April this year. It will operate for three years until March 2005 and by then we estimate that £169 million of Lottery funding will have been distributed under Fair Share to benefit the areas selected. The Community Fund and NOF are developing a monitoring and evaluation strategy for ensuring that these funds go where they are most needed.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to her answer of 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 708W, if she will list the 50 areas which are likely to benefit from Lottery grants following the review; and if she will make a statement. [43788]

Mr. Caborn *[holding answer 15 March 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State on 28 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 1539–40W to my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, East (Tom Watson).

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many projects have *(a)* been supported by the National Lottery and *(b)* subsequently failed; what the average value is of grants made by the National Lottery; and what steps are being taken to ensure that projects are revenue-funded to ensure their long-term success. [43555]

Mr. Caborn: To date 103,586 projects have been supported by the National Lottery and the average value of the awards amounts to £98,017. Comprehensive information on the number of failed Lottery projects is not centrally held at the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. Revised policy Directions issued by my Department in June 1998 freed Lottery distributors from past restrictions on revenue funding. It is for the distributors to decide the maximum period of time for which they will provide funding. It remains an important principle of Lottery funding that individual projects are for a defined period, to avoid commitments which would reduce the availability of resources for new projects.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when her Department stopped recording information regarding *(a)* the number of applications made and *(b)* the amount of money asked for, by organisations per constituency; and if she will make a statement. [43789]

Mr. Caborn *[holding answer 15 March 2002]:* This Department has never held comprehensive information on applications for Lottery grants by constituency, either in terms of the number of applications made or the amount of money requested.

Privy Council Silverware

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what the bidding process for the Privy Council silverware will be when it is offered for sale to institutions willing to display the items to the UK public; whether preferred institutions will be selected; by whom; on what criteria; whether *(a)* public and *(b)* charitable funds will be used for a national museum to

secure the silverware; whether it is her policy that the four lots will be kept together in one institution; what her policy is on the acceptable level of public access to the silverware, and if there will be admission charges; and what recent discussions she has had with other departments on the retention of assets of cultural significance held by Government Departments; [44252]

(2) if he will make it his policy that the purchaser of the Privy Council silverware shall not impose admission charges for public access; [44251]

(3) if he will specify an acceptable level of public access to the Privy Council silverware after sale; [44250]

(4) if it is his policy that the Privy Council silverware should be kept together in one institution; [44249]

(5) what will be the process for offering the Privy Council silverware for sale; [44246]

(6) if it is his policy the purchaser of Privy Council silverware must be willing to display the items publicly. [44247]

Mr. Andrew Smith: I have been asked to reply.

Current plans are for the Government to identify institutions willing to display the items to the UK public. These institutions would then be invited to submit bids against specified criteria. These criteria would cover both the arrangements for display and the proposed price. Admission charges will not be a criterion; nor will the bidding institution's source of funding. The items would be sold as a single group.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Job Advertisements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the job advertisements placed by his Department in the last 12 months specifying where the advertisements were placed and the cost in each case. [39069]

Mr. Bradshaw: The following is a list of all job advertisements placed, by the FCO since 1 March 2001. All costs include VAT.

	£
Policy Entry June/July 2001	
Guardian	3,920.40
The Voice	1,317.40
Asian Times	1,645.00
Belfast Telegraph	2,055.16
Glasgow Herald	4,342.00
Scotsman	5,281.00
Cardiff Western Mail	3,347.90
Policy Entry Economics option June/July 2001	
Guardian	3,920.40
Totaljobs.com	275.00
The Voice	1,317.40
Asian Times	1,645.00
Belfast Telegraph	2,305.96
Glasgow Herald	4,345.96
Scotsman	5,281.00
Economist	5,625.00
Cardiff Western Mail	3,817.60
Policy Entry Economics option—second round November/December 2001	
Economist	5,720.00
Ethnic Media Group	2,520.00
Operational Entry September 2001	
Evening Standard	6,033.39
Guardian	5,631.35
Ethnic Media Group	3,311.15
The Voice	1,772.56
Muslim News	1,086.88
Glasgow Herald	6,391.06
Scotsman	6,465.79
Belfast Telegraph	2,930.38
Cardiff Western Mail	4,996.83
Centre point group website	293.75
Operational Entry January 2002	
Evening Standard	6,171.10
Guardian	5,631.35
Ethnic Media Group	3,311.15
The Voice	1,713.81
Muslim News	916.50
Glasgow Herald	6,391.06
Scotsman	6,465.79
Belfast Telegraph	2,856.90
Cardiff Western Mail	5,445.19
Centre point group website	293.75
Overseas Security Managers January 2002	
Police Review	3,479.20
Pathfinder	2,695.84
Executive Assistant option July 2001	
Evening Standard and Metro	6,157.94
Daily Mail	10,734.80
Ethnic Media Group	3,290.00
The Voice	1,772.56
Glasgow Herald	6,379.31
The Scotsman	6,465.79
Belfast Telegraph	2,812.88
Cardiff Western Mail	4,998.92
Daily News	810.75
Daily Jang	940.00
Executive Assistant October 2001	
Evening Standard and Metro	6,157.94
Daily Mail	10,734.80
Ethnic Media Group	3,290.00
The Voice	1,687.96
Glasgow Herald	6,379.31
The Scotsman	6,465.79
Belfast Telegraph	2,812.88
Cardiff Western Mail	4,998.92
Daily News	810.75
Executive Assistant February 2002	
Evening Standard and Metro	6,157.94
Daily Mail	10,734.80
Ethnic Media Group	3,290.00
The Voice	1,687.96
Glasgow Herald	6,379.31
The Scotsman	6,477.54
Belfast Telegraph	2,821.94
Cardiff Western Mail	5,432.26
Daily News	831.90
Administrative Assistants April 2001	
Evening Standard	17,371.20
Metro	2,538.00
North London Group	4,053.28
South London Press	4,876.60
Administrative Assistants June 2001	
Evening Standard	17,371.20

	£
Metro	3,619.00
South London Press	4,876.25
Administrative Assistants August 2001	
Evening Standard	17,371.20
Metro	3,619.00
South London Press	4,876.60
Administrative Assistants February 2002	
Evening Standard	17,371.20
Metro	3,980.90
South London Press	5,420.28
Milton Keynes Citizen	3,302.93
Milton Keynes on Sunday	1,710.80
Bedfordshire on Sunday	4,342.80
Northants Chronicle and Echo	3,006.85
Regional Medical Officer Moscow/Dhaka April 2001	
British Medical Journal	1,894.10
Ethnic Media Group	3,084.38
Belfast Telegraph	2,791.80
Scotsman/Scotland on Sunday	6,433.13
Glasgow/Sunday Herald	6,345.00
Cardiff Western Mail	5,913.19
Research Analyst, North Asia Pacific Group May 2001	
Guardian	3,789.38
Times Educational Supplement	1,805.98
Ethnic Media Group	3,084.38
Belfast Telegraph	2,791.80
Cardiff Western Mail	5,322.75
Scotsman/Scotsman on Sunday	6,433.13
Glasgow/Sunday Herald	5,922.00
Nurse, New Delhi May 2001	
Nursing Times	2,812.95
RCN Bulletin	1,917.60
Ethnic Media Group	3,125.50
Belfast Telegraph	2,680.18
Cardiff Western Mail	5,677.60
Scotsman	6,175.80
Glasgow Herald	5,414.40
Internet Editors May 2001	
Internet Business	1,745.00
Revolution	1,995.00
Guardian	4,432.50
Scotsman	6,637.50
Glasgow Herald	5,290.00
Belfast Telegraph	2,467.60
Cardiff Western Mail	5,347.00
Asian Times Group	2,700.00
Employment Law Officer June 2001	
Guardian	4,307.55
People Management	5,405.00
Cardiff Western Mail	6,387.30
Belfast Telegraph	2,904.60
Glasgow/Sunday Herald	6,598.80
Scotsman/Scotsman on Sunday	6,690.45
Ethnic Media Group	3,207.75
Research Officer—Drugs and International Crime July 2001	
Times/Sunday Times	9,605.63
Guardian	4,406.25
Glasgow/Sunday Herald	5,922.00
Scotsman/Scotsman on Sunday	6,433.13
Cardiff Western Mail	3,784.68
Ethnic Media Group	3,084.38
Economist	8,093.40
Head of Human Resources Statistics and Planning September 2001	
RSS News	500.00

	£
People Management	2,874.00
Guardian	2,550.00
Asian Times	1,750.00
Scotsman	5,410.00
Glasgow Herald	5,410.00
Cardiff Western Mail	2,848.50
Belfast Telegraph	2,517.60
Regional Medial Officer Abuja October 2001	
British Medical Journal	2,535.65
Ethnic Media Group	3,084.38
Belfast Telegraph	2,791.80
Glasgow/Sunday Herald	6,345.00
Scotsman/Scotland on Sunday	6,433.13
Western Mail/Mail on Sunday	3,360.50
Accountants October 2001	
Accountancy Age	2,900.00
Guardian	4,600.00
Milton Keynes Citizen	1,970.00
Scotsman	7,600.00
Glasgow Herald	7,500.00
Scottish AM	1,000.00
Belfast Telegraph	3,468.00
Cardiff Western Mail	7,095.00
Asian Times	2,550.00
Internal Auditors October 2001	
Internal Auditing and Business Risk	960.00
Ethnic Media Group	3,084.38
Belfast Telegraph	2,791.80
Glasgow/Sunday Herald	6,345.00
Scotsman/Scotland on Sunday	6,433.13
Western Mail/Wales on Sunday	9,070.41
Research Analysts—Americas Group and Research Assistant—Eastern Group November 2001	
Guardian	4,850.40
Times Higher Education Supplement	2,380.08
Ethnic Media Group	4,963.20
Western Mail/Wales on Sunday	8,602.13
Belfast Telegraph	3,573.50
Scotsman and Scotland on Sunday	8,234.40
Glasgow/Sunday Herald	5,768.00
Forward Planner—News Department November 2001	
Guardian	6,961.88
Ethnic Media Group	3,084.38
Belfast Telegraph	2,791.80
Western Mail/Wales on Sunday	6,720.41
Glasgow Herald	6,334.00
Scotsman/Scotland on Sunday	6,433.13
Nurse—Lagos January 2002	
RCN Bulletin	2,077.40
Nursing Times	2,627.30
Communication Support Worker February 2002	
Guardian	7,148.70
British Deaf News	793.13
Disability Now	1,649.70
Jobability with Totaljobs	293.75
Legal Researcher—Legal Adviser February 2002	
The Times	3,354.00
Assistant Legal Advisers February 2002	
The Lawyer	2,990.00
The Times	3,354.00
Journal of the Law Society of Scotland	1,371.00
Cardiff Western Mail	5,757.00
Belfast Telegraph	2,546.00
Glasgow/Sunday Herald	5,616.00
Scotsman/Scotland on Sunday	5,694.00

	£
Senior Editors and Research Assistant—Records and Historical Department February 2002	
Guardian	6,570.00
Ethnic Media Group	3,510.00
Cardiff Western Mail	6,642.00
Belfast Telegraph	2,937.00
Glasgow/Sunday Herald	6,480.00
Scotsman/Scotland on Sunday	6,570.00
Head of Internal Audit February 2002	
Internal Audit Magazine	996.00
Financial Times	6,230.00
Accountancy Age	3,000.00
Belfast Telegraph	2,350.80
Cardiff Western Mail	2,713.00
The Voice	1,507.00
White Paper	2,000.00
Scotsman	4,830.00
Glasgow Herald	5,380.00
Asian Times Group	2,790.00
Mail Room Assistant—Hanslope Park April 2002	
GWR Radio Services	5,536.60
Metro and News North-West	2,538.00
Finance Director—Hanslope Park April 2001	
Accountancy Age	2,900.00
Financial Times	6,020.00
Belfast Telegraph	2,467.60
Western Mail	5,197.00
Evening Herald	5,290.00
Scotsman	5,360.00
Asian Times	2,700.00
Modern Apprenticeships—Hanslope Park April 2001	
Premier Newspapers	6,288.41
Assistant Telecommunication Technical Officer—Hanslope Park April 2001	
Daily Mail	5,875.00
Path Finder	2,285.38
Investigating Officer June 2001	
Janes Information Group	2,667.25
Daily Mail	6,688.69
Diplomatic Service Language Centre Project Manager June 2001	
Guardian	7,191.00
Times Higher Educational Supplement	2,048.03
IT Project Manager June 2001	
Milton Keynes Citizen	4,051.87
IT Support Staff—Helpdesk July 2001	
Daily Mail	5,875.00
Evening Standard	3,595.50
IT Support Staff—Hanslope Park July 2001	
Daily Mail	5,875.00
Milton Keynes Citizen	4,300.00
Drivers, Freight Service—Hanslope Park August 2001	
GWR Radio	1,943.45
IT jobs London August 2001	
Daily Mail	5,875.00
Premier Newspapers	3,079.97
Architects Estate Group—Croydon October 2001 Engineers, Technicians, Architects, Health and Safety Adviser, Quantity Surveyor and Project Officer	
Daily/Sunday Telegraph	28,197.65
Building	13,776.88
Evening Standard	14,551.20
Belfast Telegraph	4,839.83
Scotsman/Scotland on Sunday	11,150.75
Glasgow/Sunday Herald	10,998.00
Cardiff Western Mail/Wales On Sunday	12,335.15
Ethnic Media Group	9,212.00
Architects Journal	9,973.40
Building Design	4,935.00
Building Services Journal	5,943.15
Building Service and Environmental Engineer	3,243.00
Safety and Health Practitioner	1,222.00
www.Building/BSJ Barbourexpert	2,350.00
www.Careersinconstruction	2,526.25
Costs to follow	
Assistant Telecommunication Technical Officer—Hanslope Park November 2001	
Path Finder	2,285.38
Milton Keynes Citizen	4,434.73
Daily/Sunday Express	5,875.00
Librarians November 2001	
Guardian	7,896.00

Lebanon

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations the British Government have made to the Government of Lebanon to ascertain the fate of three Israeli soldiers taken prisoner by Hezbollah on 7 October 2000, and to encourage the Lebanese Government to work for their release. [41400]

Mr. Straw: Her Majesty's Government has made a number of representations to Governments in the Middle East, including the Lebanese, about the fate of the soldiers and will continue to do so. We support all efforts to make progress, whether it be obtaining news of their situation, gaining access to them by ICRC and—most welcome—their release. Most recently, I met families of the soldiers during his visit to Israel in February.

Stolen Equipment

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 22 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 776W, on stolen equipment, what criminal proceedings have been undertaken for cases of theft against his Department, stating in each case *(a)* whether the proceedings (i) led to a criminal conviction and (ii) were unsuccessful, *(b)* the cost incurred by his Department in pursuing a conviction and *(c)* the value of items recovered; and if he will make a statement. [41504]

Mr. Straw: In every case where equipment was reported stolen, an internal investigation was carried out. Unfortunately in every case, the investigation proved inconclusive with no culprit identified. As a result there were no criminal proceedings, no convictions, no actual costs incurred and no items recovered.

Iraq

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with his counterparts in the European Union in respect of US policy towards Iraq. [40914]

Mr. Bradshaw: Both my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and I regularly discuss Iraq with our counterparts in the European Union. We share the concerns of the US Government, and all responsible Governments, about Iraq's support for terrorism and its development of weapons of mass destruction.

Nepal

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance the Government are giving to the Government of the Kingdom of Nepal in the struggle against Maoist rebels. [41382]

Mr. Bradshaw: The UK has provided training and logistics support to the Royal Nepalese Army through the Global Conflict Prevention Pool, which is jointly administered by the FCO, MOD and DFID. We will look carefully at any requests for further assistance from the Nepalese Government.

Biological Weapons

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made with regard to verification procedures relating to the 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention. [40923]

Mr. Bradshaw: Negotiations on a compliance Protocol to strengthen the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC) concluded unsuccessfully at the 24th Session of the Ad Hoc Group of States Parties in August 2001. And as no agreement could be reached at the subsequent Review Conference in December last year a decision was made to suspend the proceedings. The Conference will reconvene in Geneva on 11 November when we hope that it will be possible to make progress in reinforcing the norm against biological weapons. In preparation for the Conference the Government will shortly present a Government paper setting out its views on ways to counter the threat from biological weapons. This will be laid in the House in April.

Ian Stillman

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he raised the case of Ian Stillman with *(a)* President Narayanan and *(b)* Prime Minister Vajpayee in India during his visit on 27 February. [43908]

Mr. Bradshaw: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary did not raise Ian Stillman's case with Prime Minister Vajpayee or President Narayanan. However, he raised it on 27 February 2002 with the Indian Home Minister, L. K. Advani, and asked that Mr. Stillman's forthcoming appeal to the Supreme Court be heard as quickly as possible.

I also raised Mr. Stillman's case on 18 February 2002 with the Indian Minister of State for External Affairs, Omar Abdullah.

Our High Commissioner in New Delhi raised Mr. Stillman's case with the Indian Home Secretary, Kamal Pande, on 20 December 2001. He also discussed it with Mr. Advani on 2 January 2002.

Our High Commission is dong all it can to ensure that the Indian authorities are meeting Mr. Stillman's welfare requirements adequately and that his forthcoming appeal to the Supreme Court is heard as quickly as possible.

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Exeter raised the case of Ian Stillman with *(a)* President Narayanan and *(b)* Prime Minister Vajpayee on his visit on 18, 21 and 22 February. [43911]

Mr. Bradshaw: I did not meet Prime Minister Vajpayee or President Narayanan during my visit. However, I raised Mr. Stillman's case on 18 February 2002 with the Indian Minister of State for External Affairs, Omar Abdullah, and asked that his forthcoming appeal to the Supreme Court be heard as quickly as possible.

My right hon. Friend, the Foreign Secretary also raised Mr. Stillman's case on 27 February 2002 with the Indian Home Minister, L. K. Advani. Our High Commissioner in New Delhi raised it with the Indian Home Secretary, Kamal Pande, on 20 December 2001. He also discussed it with the Indian Home Minister, L.K. Advani, on 2 January 2002.

Our High Commission is doing all it can to ensure that the Indian authorities are meeting Mr. Stillman's welfare requirements adequately and that his forthcoming appeal to the Supreme Court is heard as quickly as possible.

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many times the UK high commissioner in India has raised the case of Ian Stillman with *(a)* President Narayanan and *(b)* Prime Minister Vajpayee in India. [43909]

Mr. Bradshaw: Our high commissioner in New Delhi has not raised Ian Stillman's case with President Narayanan or Prime Minister Vajpayee. However, he raised it with the Indian Home Secretary, Kamal Pande, on 20 December 2001. He also discussed it with the Indian Home Minister, L. K. Advani, on 2 January 2002.

I raised Mr. Stillman's case with the Indian Minister of State for External Affairs, Omar Abdullah, on 18 February 2002. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary also raised it with Mr. Advani on 27 February 2002.

Our high commission in New Delhi is doing all it can to ensure that the Indian authorities are meeting Mr. Stillman's welfare requirements adequately and that his forthcoming appeal to the Supreme Court is heard as quickly as possible.

India

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he has taken to advance proposals in the Delhi declaration, and in particular the recommendation that India take up a permanent seat on the UN Security Council. [39598]

Mr. Bradshaw *[pursuant to his reply, 12 March 2002, c. 864–65W]:* An incorrectly drafted answer was given to my hon. Friend on 12 March. The full correct answer is as follows:

In the last two months my right hon. Friend the Foreign secretary has visited India once and met twice with India's External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh. They discussed a number of areas of partnership including terrorism, peacekeeping, defence relations, and Afghanistan and other regional issues. The two Prime Ministers' Personal Envoys, David Manning and Brajesh Mishra, also met on 4 February.

The Secretary of State discussed Security Council reform with Jaswant Singh on 27 February. We looked forward to progress on this issue at the United Nations.

Angola

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish a list of arms exports to Angola for each of the last five years. [42522]

Nigel Griffiths: I have been asked to reply.

The Department of Trade and Industry's Export Control Organisation does not record actual exports. It records details of all export licences issued and refused, which are published in the Government's Annual Reports on Strategic Export Controls, copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House.

The granting of a licence does not necessarily translate into actual exports.

SCOTLAND

Stolen Equipment

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to the answer of 22 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 698W, on stolen equipment, what criminal proceedings have been undertaken for cases of theft against her Department, stating in each case *(a)* whether the proceedings (i) led to a criminal conviction and (ii) were unsuccessful, *(b)* the cost incurred by her Department in pursuing a conviction and *(c)* the value of items recovered; and if she will make a statement. [41585]

Mrs. Liddell: In the case of stolen equipment reported by my Department, I understand that no criminal proceedings have been undertaken.

DEFENCE

Army Strength

21. **Bob Russell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the *(a)* largest and *(b)* smallest shortfall was in the strength of the Army during the past five years; what the latest figure is; and when he expects all vacancies to be filled. [40918]

Mr. Ingram: In the last five years, the largest shortfall in personnel against the in-year requirement for UK Trained Army Personnel was 8,063 in August 2001. The smallest shortfall during the period, against the lower assessed requirement at that time, was 4,855 in September 1997. As at 1 February 2002, there was a shortfall of 7,477 personnel against the currently assessed in-year requirement for UK Trained Army Personnel. These figures should not be compared with whole army strength targets which also incorporate the full time reserve service and Gurkha trained manpower.

Army manpower requirements are kept under regular review. The exact size of the Army will depend on the outcome of ongoing studies into the best ways of delivering the military capabilities required of the Army.

Veterans

22. **Siobhain McDonagh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to review compensation for the veterans of the Christmas Island tests and, where they are deceased, their surviving spouses and families. [40919]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence has every confidence in the independent studies carried out by the National Radiological Protection Board and the Imperial Cancer Research Fund that showed veterans' participation in the nuclear test programme has not had a detectable effect on their expectation of life, or on their risk of developing cancer or other fatal diseases. Consequently grounds do not exist for compensation to be paid to British nuclear test veterans or their surviving spouses and families. There are no plans to review this position.

25. **Mr. Crausby:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he is taking to improve the handling of veterans' issues. [40922]

Dr. Moonie: Since the announcement of the Veterans Initiative, and my appointment as Minister for Veterans Affairs one year ago, we have built up a partnership with veterans' organisations and other Government Departments to develop an integrated policy for veterans. This is well advanced, and will address veterans' concerns across Government and identify means of improving the delivery of services to veterans, particularly the most vulnerable.

Working through a Veterans Forum and a Ministerial Task Force, we have agreed an action plan. As part of this we have commissioned nine working groups, made up jointly of representatives of the veterans community and of interested Government Departments, to identify ways of giving practical expression to the Initiative's core themes of partnership, identity, recognition and care. We expect to see the first results of this work later this year.

Dr. Vis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the progress achieved by the Government's veterans' initiative since it was launched. [44479]

Dr. Moonie: Since the announcement of the Veterans Initiative, and my appointment as Minister for Veterans Affairs one year ago, we have made substantial progress towards meeting the objective of the initiative: to build-up a partnership with veterans organisations and other Government Departments to develop an integrated response to veterans concerns, focused in particular on the most vulnerable.

I have been considering how we can improve the service offered to our veterans from within my own Department. Capitalising on the transfer of the War Pensions Agency to the Ministry of Defence in June of last year and on its excellent record for customer-service,

I have decided that the War Pensions Agency should provide a special focus for our support to veterans and that, accordingly, with effect from 2 April, it should be renamed the Veterans Agency. As a first step towards giving substance to this change of name, the Veterans Agency will, from the end of this month, provide an integrated website and freephone helpline that will be the first point of contact for veterans seeking advice and information. For the longer term, we will also be looking at the future development of the War pensioners Welfare Service, and in particular the possibility of expanding partnerships with the charitable sector to improve the support delivered in this area by offering a better co-ordinated service.

Working through the Veterans Forum and Ministerial Task Force, we have agreed an action plan and nine working groups, made up jointly of representatives of the veterans' community and of interested Government Departments to take work forward. These are now addressing the particular concerns identified within the initiative's core themes of partnership, identity, recognition and care. This work includes developing new resettlement training for the most vulnerable of our Service leavers who are at greatest risk of social exclusion, the development of material for the new Key Stage 3 and 4 scheme for citizenship to be part of the National Curriculum from September 2002; improving communication between Government and veterans, recognition of veterans' achievements in more recent years, and problems faced by the veterans charities' care homes. The Working Groups will be reporting their progress to me in time for the next meeting of the Veterans Forum and the Ministerial Task Force in April and May respectively.

We are also taking steps to address two of the particular concerns that veterans have raised about the War Pension Schemes. From this April, the provisions for war widowers will be equalised to bring them fully into line with those currently available to war widows. Further, we plan to introduce measures from August that will guarantee that a war pensioner can return to Unemployability Supplement within the first 12 months of starting work.

I place a particular premium on the partnership that we have been building with the representatives of the Veterans Organisations and am pleased to acknowledge the considerable part that their positive response has played in enabling us to take this initiative forward. I look forward to building on this partnership to develop and deliver a significant programme of further improvements for the future.

Defence Estates

23. **Jim Knight:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he is taking to improve the management of defence estates; and if he will make a statement. [40920]

Dr. Moonie: Building on the policy laid out in "In Trust and On Trust: the strategy for the Defence Estate", we are implementing the prime contracting initiative as part of Government's "Achieving Excellence" agenda for the construction industry, and putting in place a new management structure for the estate within the Ministry of Defence. The new organisation will come into operation on 1 April 2003.

We will establish a single new estate procurement organisation, comprising the existing Defence estates agency and specialist estate staff currently working elsewhere in the Department, and six customer estate organisations serving the Services and top level budget holders.

Afghanistan

24. **Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what future commitments he plans in relation to Afghanistan. [40921]

Mr. Hoon: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Faversham and Mid Kent (Mr. Robertson).

European Rapid Reaction Force

26. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on Britain's participation in the European Rapid Reaction Force. [40924]

Mr. Hoon: There is no standing European Rapid Reaction Force. Under the Helsinki Headline Goal, however, the United Kingdom has identified a pool of relevant forces and capabilities that it might contribute to an EU-led operation. This includes a maximum of 12,500 troops plus, if required, up to 18 warships and 72 combat aircraft.

European Defence Co-operation

27. **Mr. Hendrick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on progress in multinational defence co-operation in Europe. [40925]

Mr. Hoon: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Broxstowe (Dr. Palmer).

Iraq

29. **Phil Sawford:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent discussions he has had with the United States Government on the subject of terrorist activity in Iraq. [40927]

Mr. Hoon: I have regular discussions with the United States Government on a wide range of issues, including all aspects of policy towards Iraq and the campaign against international terrorism. We share the concerns of all responsible Governments about Iraq's support for terrorism and its development of weapons of mass destruction.

David Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many missions the Royal Air Force has undertaken over Iraqi airspace in the last 12 months. [41423]

Mr. Ingram: RAF aircraft undertake a range of missions as part of multinational no-fly-zone enforcement operations. A single no-fly-zone (NFZ) patrol involves multiple aircraft types performing individual missions in an integrated package.

Between 1 March 2001 and 28 February 2002 RAF aircraft entered Iraqi airspace as part of a coalition patrol package on 130 occasions in the northern NFZ and 220 occasions in the southern. During these patrols they undertook 1,274 missions.

International Terrorism

30. **Colin Burgon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what action he has taken to adjust defence capabilities to deal with international terrorism. [40928]

Mr. Hoon: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough and Whitby (Lawrie Quinn).

Porton Down

31. **Norman Baker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reasons the latest figures available indicate an increase in the numbers of animals involved in scientific procedures at Porton Down. [40929]

Dr. Moonie: The number of animal procedures (as defined by the Animals Scientific Procedures Act (1986)) conducted at Dstl Porton Down in 2001 was 12,955. This is an increase of 8 per cent. over the previous year and 12 per cent. over the last five years. The majority (92 per cent.) of the 2001 procedures were conducted on mice.

The main reason for the growth in numbers is the increased amount of research being undertaken to develop vaccines and other medical countermeasures against materials that may be used as biological weapons, either in warfare or by terrorists. Vaccines developed under these research programmes will also be useful for travellers and for those living in parts of the world where certain diseases are endemic.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what contribution has been made by the War Pensions Agency to the discussions towards the establishment of an epidemiological study into volunteers who took part in experiments at the Chemical Defence Establishment, Porton Down. [43440]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 19 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 11W. The War Pensions Agency has made no contribution to this work since that date.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 17 December 2001, *Official Report*, columns 72–73W, regarding Porton Down, if he will place the papers documenting the results of the searches in the Library; and if he will make a statement. [43498]

Dr. Moonie: Papers documenting the results of archival searches will be incorporated into the Historical Survey of the Service Volunteer programme at Porton Down. The survey is expected to report in the summer, and the findings will be published.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library copies of the minutes, agenda and papers of the meeting between his Department's staff and representatives of the Medical Research Council staff on 5 March 2001 regarding the epidemiological study for Porton Down volunteers. [43465]

Dr. Moonie: No such documents were produced following the meeting on 5 March 2001. This was an informal meeting, the purpose of which was to allow representatives of the Medical Research Council to visit Porton Down, meet members of staff, and view original reference material.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what dates officials from his Department and the Chemical Defence Establishment, Porton Down have held meetings with representatives of the Medical Research Council since 3 August 2001 regarding advice on the epidemiological study for Porton Down volunteers. [43443]

Dr. Moonie: Since 3 August 2001, the Medical Research Council (MRC) have met representatives of the Ministry of Defence on the following occasions to discuss epidemiological research into Porton Down volunteers: 9 October 2001, an MRC seminar; 16 January 2002, a meeting of the MRC's Physiological Medicine and Infections Board (PMIB); and 5 February 2002, a meeting of the MRC Liaison Group. Representatives from the MOD attended all of these meetings; Chemical Defence Establishment (now known as Defence Science and Technology Laboratory) Porton Down were only represented at the MRC seminar.

Aldermaston

32. **Mr. Rendel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to change the level of MOD police manpower at AWE Aldermaston. [40930]

Dr. Moonie: Ministry of Defence Police staffing levels at AWE Aldermaston, and at other MOD establishments, are kept under regular review. A complementing review of MOD police staffing levels at AWE Aldermaston was conducted at the end of 2001. The conclusions of the review, which took account of the events of 11 September, will shortly be circulated for consideration by interested parties within MOD. No decisions have yet been taken and there will be full consultation with the Defence Police Federation before any changes are implemented.

Coalition Against International Terrorism

33. **Mr. Carmichael:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for further armed forces commitments overseas as part of the international coalition against terrorism. [40931]

Mr. Hoon: We keep our plans under constant review.

European Security and Defence Policy

34. **Mr. Hendry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on European Security and Defence Policy. [40932]

Mr. Hoon: The European Security and Defence Policy seeks to strengthen European military capabilities and to improve EU nations' contributions to NATO.

28. **Mr. Francois:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent discussions he has had with the Foreign Office about the ESDP. [40926]

Mr. Hoon: I have regular discussions with my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary on a range of issues, including ESDP.

Armed Forces Family Taskforce

35. **Mr. Mudie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the armed forces family taskforce. [40933]

Mr. Ingram: The Service Families Taskforce was set up by the Government in 1999 to deal with service family issues that were outside the control of the Ministry of Defence. It is headed by a ministerial group which last met on 15 November last year. I also meet with representatives of service families twice a year to discuss areas of concern.

The Service Families Taskforce has been involved in a wide range of issues since its conception. The main areas of progress over the last year are:

(a) Consultation with the Department of Health in the drafting of new adoption legislation to ensure that service families will not be disadvantaged.

(b) Resolution of the problems that some service families had encountered in claiming working families tax credit on return to the UK from an overseas posting.

(c) Resolution of the problems that some service spouses had encountered in claiming Child Support Agency payments when on an overseas posting.

(d) Discussions with the Department for Education and Skills, and with local education authorities, to see what measures can be taken to improve the schools admissions process for the children of service families.

(e) Discussions with the NHS Waiting and Booking Team on the problems that service families face when transferring between NHS trust areas.

(f) Discussions with the Department for Work and Pensions to identify any problems that service families have faced in claiming benefits while on overseas postings.

(g) Since 1 April 2001 service spouses have been able to open stakeholder pensions while on an overseas posting.

Type 45 Destroyer

36. **David Cairns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the strategic employment implications are of the revised procurement strategy for Type 45 destroyers; and if he will make a statement. [40934]

Dr. Moonie: The revised procurement strategy for the Type 45 destroyer, which was announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence on 10 July 2001, shares work on the first batch of ships between BAE Systems Marine and Vosper Thornycroft. On 18 February 2002, my noble Friend the Minister for Defence Procurement announced that a contractual commitment had been made for a further three Type 45 platforms, bringing the total number of ships on contract to six. BAE Systems Marine has confirmed that, once the construction programme is fully up and running, work on Type 45 vessels will sustain a steady level of some 1,250 jobs on the Clyde and about a further 900 jobs at Barrow-in-Furness well into this decade. Vosper Thornycroft estimate that the planned Type 45 work should sustain a steady level of some 800 jobs on the south coast over a similar period.

Former Yugoslavia

37. **Mr. Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the contribution of the Ministry of Defence to conflict prevention in the former Yugoslavia. [40935]

Mr. Ingram: The Ministry of Defence has all extensive record of activity in the field of conflict prevention in the former Yugoslavia. In addition to our contribution to peacekeeping forces operating in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo and Macedonia, my Department runs a number of programmes in the region which are designed to dispel hostility, build and maintain trust, and assist in the development of democratically accountable armed forces, thereby making a significant contribution to conflict prevention. These include leadership and staff training for military officers; seminars, exchanges and visits directly concerned with security sector reform; and general underpinning outreach activities such as English language training for military personnel.

Courts Martial

38. **Mr. Robathan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on future changes to the court martial system and their implications for military discipline. [40936]

Mr. Ingram: Court martial procedures are kept under review. We are considering whether any changes will be required when the three service discipline Acts are replaced by a single piece of discipline legislation covering all the services. We are also assessing what modifications may be necessary as a result of the recent judgment of the European Court of Human Rights in the case of Morris *v.* the United Kingdom. Any changes will reflect the need for service discipline to underpin operational effectiveness.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many cases were brought before courts martial in each of HM armed services in the most recent year for which figures are available; if he will break down these cases by *(a)* the nature of charges brought and *(b)* verdicts delivered; and what estimate he has made of cases which could feasibly have been considered by a civilian court. [41100]

Mr. Ingram: The statistics requested are given in the following list for each of the services, and cover the year 2000.

Royal Navy (inc. Royal Marines)

53 court-martial trials involving 56 accused persons facing 114 alleged offences.

39 of the accused were convicted on one or more charges.

16 were acquitted of all charges brought against them.

The trial of one individual saw the court dissolved and the case returned for summary dealing.

The types of charges involved were:

29 cases of theft

23 cases of assault

11 cases of actual bodily harm

9 cases of falsification of documents

9 cases of drunkenness

6 cases of dishonestly obtaining

5 cases of conduct prejudicial

4 cases of disobedience to standing orders

4 cases of absence without leave

3 cases of indecent assault

2 cases of fighting

2 cases of possession of drugs

2 cases of damage to property

2 cases of negligent performance of duty

1 case of disobedience to lawful commands

1 case of sexual harassment

1 case of sleeping on watch.

Army

409 court-martial trials involving 455 accused persons facing 980 alleged offences.

373 of the accused were convicted on 817 offences.

82 were acquitted on 163 offences.

The type of charges involved were:

192 cases concerned with forms of violent crime

100 cases of absence without leave and/or desertion

66 cases of theft

34 cases concerned with forms of sexual crime

18 cases of drunkenness and/or driving under the influence of alcohol

7 cases of drugs possession

4 cases of drugs supply

3 cases of criminal damage

31 cases involving a range of offences.

Note: The Army record only the most serious of the alleged offences faced by an individual at a court martial trial. Therefore the breakdown of types of charges totals only 455, i.e. one charge per defendant.

Royal Air Force

62 court-martial trials involving 81 accused persons facing 102 alleged offences.

45 of the accused were convicted on 62 offences.

21 were acquitted on 23 offences.

15 individuals had their trials, concerning 17 offences, discontinued.

The types of charges involved were:

28 cases concerned with forms of violent crime

15 cases concerned with forgery, deception and false accounting

11 cases of disobeying orders

8 cases of theft

8 cases concerned with false information and statements

8 cases of conduct to prejudice of Air Force discipline

5 cases of absence without leave or failure to attend for duty

5 cases of indecent assault

4 cases of disorderly or disgraceful conduct

3 cases concerning damage to property

2 cases of negligent performance of duty

2 cases of drunkenness

2 cases concerned with drugs offences

1 case of causing death by drunken driving.

The ordinary courts do not have jurisdiction to try service disciplinary offences or, in most cases, offences committed outside the United Kingdom. Service courts are able to deal with all but the most serious criminal cases in the UK and are able to bring to bear a full appreciation of the impact of an offence committed in a service environment. The benefit of transferring the most serious criminal cases to the ordinary courts allows a balance to be maintained between the military and civilian judicial systems.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what research has been commissioned to look at alternative arrangements, compliant with the Human Rights Act 1998, for military discipline; and what estimate he has made of the limitations there are on the use of criminal courts. [41099]

Mr. Ingram: The arrangements for administering discipline in the armed forces are kept under review, including with a view to their remaining compatible with the European Convention on Human Rights. Changes are made where necessary, to reflect the requirements of the Convention and also to keep in step with appropriate developments in the civilian justice system.

This flexible approach to service discipline procedures is considered to be preferable to greater use of the civilian criminal courts. Generally, civilian courts are less likely that service courts to process a full appreciation of the importance of discipline to the operational effectiveness of the armed forces and of the possibility that an offence committed in a service environment may have even more serious implications that a similar offence in civilian life. Moreover, civilian courts do not have jurisdiction to try service disciplinary offences. Nor in most cases do civilian courts in the United Kingdom have jurisdiction in respect of offences alleged to have been committed overseas by service personnel or civilians accompanying them. The worldwide application of service law is particularly important for mobile forces that need to be able to maintain discipline, as a key to operational effectiveness, wherever they are deployed. The ability of service courts to try alleged offences committed outside the United Kingdom can also be a useful means of ensuring that the accused are dealt with in British courts and in accordance with a system of British law, rather than in foreign courts where the language, law and procedures may be unfamiliar to them.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will set out the changes that have been made to the provisions for courts martial contained within the Army Act 1955 to bring the framework for military discipline into line with Article 6 of the European Convention of Human Rights; and what the principal findings of the European Court on 26 February were. [41097]

Mr. Ingram: The Armed Forces Act 1996 made extensive changes to the court martial system in all three services, intended to reinforce the independence of the courts and those making decisions concerning court proceedings, and to make the procedures as a whole compatible with Article 6 of the European Convention on Human Rights, which concerns the right to a fair hearing.

The main changes were:

The replacement of the convening officer, who previously had the key role in deciding whether charges should be preferred against an individual, in appointing court martial members, and in confirming court martial findings and sentences. The convening officer's functions were divided between higher authorities, who take a preliminary view on whether court martial proceedings are appropriate for cases that are referred to them by commanding officers; prosecuting authorities independent of the service chain of command, who decide whether to prosecute and what charges should be brought; and court administration officers, whose responsibilities include the selection of court martial members, drawn from a different command to that of the accused.

The introduction of a requirement that the membership of every court martial should include a judge advocate appointed by the Judge Advocate General or the Chief Naval Judge Advocate. The judge advocate acquired an enhanced role, so that his advice on points of law is binding on the court and he has a vote on sentence.

The introduction of a simpler process of review of court martial findings and sentences (in the Army and RAF, replacing post-trial confirmation). Any changes resulting from review are intended not to worsen the position of the accused.

The extension of the right of appeal to include appeal against sentence as well as against finding.

The extension of the right for an accused to choose to be tried by court martial, rather than being dealt with summarily.

The judgment of the European Court of Human Rights on the case of Morris *v.* the United Kingdom, published on 26 February, included the observation that these changes had gone a long way to meeting its concerns about the structure of the court martial system. The court also found that there was no violation of Article 6 of the Convention arising from the relationship between the chain of command and those involved in court martial proceedings.

However, it found that there had been a violation of Article 6 as regards aspects of Mr. Morris's trial by court martial in 1997, namely the potential for undue external influence over certain members of the court martial panel; and the procedures involving non-judicial authorities in the review of court martial findings and sentences. We are assessing the implications of these aspects of the judgment.

Middle East

17. **Michael Fabricant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the state of readiness is of the armed forces for an engagement in the middle east; and if he will make a statement. [40913]

Mr. Hoon: The Strategic Defence Review recognised that our national interests were directly affected by events in the middle east. Most recently, the deployment of our armed forces to Oman for exercise Saif Sareea II illustrated both our commitment to the region and ability to project military power and sustain it there.

We have taken no decisions to heighten the readiness of our armed forces elsewhere in the region.

Procurement

15. **Mr. Gordon Marsden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the impact of Government procurement and support on the defence industry and employment among subcontractors in the north-west. [40911]

Dr. Moonie: In 1998–99, around £1.2 billion or some 14.5 per cent. of total defence equipment expenditure was placed with companies in the north-west, sustaining an estimated 11,000 jobs. This figure reflects jobs which arise directly from equipment contracts placed by the Ministry of Defence. In addition, work will have been placed with suppliers in the north-west on a sub-contract basis; but regional estimates for sub-contracting are not maintained.

Defence Procurement Agency

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of the savings made by the review of support arrangements in the Defence Procurement Agency. [44220]

Dr. Moonie: The Defence Procurement Agency's operating cost reduction target and achievement are recorded in its Annual Report (HC 243). The cost reduction in 2000–01 was 10.6 per cent., a saving of £29.7 million.

Marine Services Royal Maritime Auxiliary

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if STC W95 applies as the international standard for staff within the Marine Services Royal Maritime Auxiliary Service; and if he will make a statement. [43482]

Mr. Ingram: Although not a requirement in Marine Service Officers and Crews Terms and Conditions, the Ministry of Defence applies the industry standard, STCW 95, to the maritime operations conducted by the Royal Maritime Auxiliary Service. Trade unions have supported the retraining and qualification of their members to this industry standard since the mid-90s.

Bloody Sunday

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what instructions were issued to members of the Parachute Regiment concerning off duty activities on the weekend of the thirtieth anniversary of Bloody Sunday and the commemorative march on 27 January; and what instructions were given to the Parachute Regiment regarding military memorabilia. [43887]

Mr. Ingram: No instructions were issued to members of the Parachute Regiment concerning off duty activities on the weekend of the thirtieth anniversary of Bloody

Sunday or regarding military memorabilia. We are not aware of any commemorative march taking place on 27 January 2002.

Efficiency Measures

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what savings the Royal Air Force has achieved by reducing the number of postings that require a domestic move. [44222]

Mr. Ingram: During financial year 2001–02 the Royal Air Force has reduced the number of planned postings that require a domestic move by 500. This is estimated to have saved approximately £0.5 million.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what savings have accrued from the introduction of flexible working practices for dock workers. [44218]

Mr. Ingram: A scheme of "Annualised Hours" was introduced at HMNB Devonport in 1999 to establish a group of flexible, multi-skilled workers at the waterfront, who would fulfil an annual working hours requirement rather than the standard 37 hours per week, on a fixed schedule. Annual savings achieved are estimated to have been in the region of £200,000 to £300,000.

Territorial Army

Dr. Vis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans there are for the future of the Millbay Territorial Army Centre in Plymouth; and if he will make a statement. [44481]

Dr. Moonie: As part of the Strategic Defence Review Territorial Army restructuring process we decided to close the Millbay Territorial Army Centre (TAC) in Plymouth and relocate the units there to the other TAC in Plymouth at Derriford.

We have now reviewed those plans in the light of the estimated cost of the move and the impact that the closure of the Millbay TAC would have on the ability of the TA to recruit and retain personnel in Plymouth. I am pleased to say that, as a result of this review, I have decided that Millbay TAC should remain open. This is excellent news for the city of Plymouth and will allow it to retain a modern TAC. By keeping both TACs open we also aim to enhance the visibility of the TA with the general public and improve recruiting opportunities.

Press and Public Relations

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the annual budget for communications activities, including press, public relations, marketing and internal communications, was for his Department for each financial year from 1997–98 to 2001–02. [39920]

Dr. Moonie: Details on central Ministry of Defence expenditure on advertising and publicity, which incorporates press, public relations, marketing and internal communications are contained in the annual MOD performance reports. For 1997–98, the information is shown on page 49 Cm 4170; for 1999–2000 the information is shown on page 60 Cm 5000; for 2000–01 the information is shown on page 68 Cm 5290.

Copies of these reports are available in the House.

The figures for 1998–99 were not provided in the annual performance report. They are as follows:

£ million

Category	*Expenditure*
Recruitment	
Royal Navy/Royal Fleet Auxiliary	6.65
Army	11.77
Royal Air Force	10.17
Civilian	3.27
PR, marketing, and business support services	0.84
Chief of public relations expenditure	2.39
Sales promotion	1.06
Scholarships	0.38
National Employers Liaison Committee[1]	

[1] Territorial Army

The expenditure for advertising and publicity is spread among many different budgets, and budget holders. The Ministry of Defence thus does not have a central advertising and publicity budget, and forecast information—in this case for financial year 2001–02—can be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, as in recent years, information on the outturn figure is collated, and expected to be included in the 2001–02 performance report, when that document is published.

The figures relate to programme expenditure. Running cost data (e.g. staff salary costs) for the subject headings are not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, running cost data are available for the Chief of Public Relations expenditure heading—which covers the cost of Director General Corporate Communications and his staff. These figures are as follows:

£ million

Year	*Expenditure*
1997–98	n/a
1998–99	[1]3.77
1999–2000	[1]4.03
2000–01	5.92
2001–02	[2]6.30

[1] Allocation
[2] Forecast expenditure

Training

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on military training areas in the UK, with particular reference to *(a)* their uses and *(b)* their value for large training operations. [41316]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence has 172 training area and range sites in the UK, the tenure of which is either freehold, leasehold or licensed land. They are used for a wide variety of Army training but fall into one of the following three categories:

Dry training (training without the use of live ammunition although blank ammunition and pyrotechnics may be used);

Field firing (training with the use of live ammunition);

Fixed ranges (such as small arms ranges).

The UK training areas can accommodate training up to unit level (Battalion/Regiment—approximately 1,000 personnel and 200 vehicles) but formation (Brigade—approximately 5,000 personnel and 1,300 vehicles, or Divisional—approximately 25,000 personnel and 7,000

vehicles) level training has to be tailored to the respective area. In the case of mechanised and armoured formations (formations equipped with wheeled and tracked armoured vehicles), their training is usually conducted overseas. Light role formations can exercise in the UK with careful planning.

The RAF maintains five Air Weapons Ranges and an Electronic Air Weapons Range, which enable aircrew to practice weapons delivery techniques. These are not generally suitable for large numbers of aircraft. The Royal Navy has training areas used as offshore gunnery ranges. DERA also utilises ranges for test and evaluation purposes.

Competitive Procurement Policy

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the effect the creation of the Towers of Excellence programme has had on his Department's competitive procurement policy; and if he will make a statement. [43009]

Dr. Moonie: Competition remains the cornerstone of the Ministry of Defence's procurement policy. It will continue to be the primary means of securing value for money in the equipment programme. By generating technological capabilities within MOD's defence equipment supplier base, Towers of Excellence should enable industry to compete more effectively. This will not alter MOD's competition policy; in particular, deciding best overall value for money within competition has always included the consideration of wider factors, including the health of our defence technology base.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the effect the creation of the Towers of Excellence programme has had on the United Kingdom defence industries competitive position in relation to other international contractors; and if he will make a statement. [43008]

Dr. Moonie: Towers of Excellence (ToE) are an important aspect of the continuing close engagement between Ministry of Defence and industry. This strategy will focus our limited research programme funds on those areas where UK industry can excel, and where MOD requires high value technology to be available to feed into potential future equipment products. The ToE programme therefore has the potential to help reinforce UK industry's comparative advantage in these areas, and improve its competitive position both for future MOD projects and for the wider global export market.

The ToE concept is already at an advanced stage of preparation for launch, and it is expected the first batch of Towers will be launched on a formal basis in the near future.

Non-competitive Procurement Report

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he intends to reply to the National Audit Office report entitled 'Non-Competitive Procurement in the Ministry of Defence'. [43107]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence Accounting Officer and officials were examined by the Committee of Public Accounts on 14 November 2001, based on the National Audit Office report on 'Non-Competitive Procurement', which was published on 2 November 2001. When the Committee reports, we shall consider and reply to it in the normal way.

Public-Private Partnerships (Consultants)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the total external spending by his Department was on public private partnership consultants in each of the last four years; how many full-time equivalent consultants were employed over this period; how many billed consultancy days there were per year; what the implied average cost of each PPP consultant was; how many consultancy firms were used by his Department over this period; and if he will make a statement. [43188]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Ingram), on 6 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 999W.

Postings Abroad

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to implement a system of notifying housing staff of service personnel's postings abroad; and if he will make a statement. [42984]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence is currently investigating ways to simplify and streamline the relocation process for Service personnel when they are posted from one location to another; a key element of this is to improve the flow of posting information between the Service posting authorities, Service units and the housing organisations. As part of this work we are investigating the feasibility or providing relevant posting data directly to the housing organisations. Minor changes to the procedure in Great Britain (GB) for applying for family accommodation will enable the Defence Housing Executive to take a more proactive approach by contacting personnel up to six months prior to their anticipated end of tour date to ascertain their intentions and requirements. Other housing providers (outside GB) will consider their application and allocation procedures once the GB model has been refined.

Service personnel being posted abroad, and those returning from overseas postings, will benefit from these improvements.

Independent Housing Survey

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what percentage of service families are recorded as content with the standard of their family accommodation according to the Independent Housing Survey; and if he will make a statement; [42982]

(2) what is done with the results of the Independent Housing Survey; what plans he has to publish it; and if he will make a statement. [42983]

Dr. Moonie: The 2001 Customer Attitude Survey on family housing recorded 67 per cent. of service families being "content" with the general standard of family accommodation. The results of the survey are used to help ensure that resources are best directed to meet the needs of service families. There are currently no plans to publish it.

Gibraltar

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the *(a)* nature and *(b)* extent is of the British military presence in Gibraltar. [43503]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to the answers I gave on 26 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 669W, to the hon. Member for Hereford (Mr. Keetch) and on 11 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 740W to the hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray).

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent representations have been made by Spain to the Government in respect of future British military deployment in Gibraltar. [43502]

Mr. Ingram: Gibraltar is, and will remain, an important overseas base for the British armed forces. Talks with Spain under the Brussels Process are aimed at reaching a comprehensive agreement covering all outstanding issues related to Gibraltar.

Non-governmental Organisations

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 7 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 476W, on non-governmental organisations, what information he collates on the funding of non-governmental organisations by his Department, with particular reference to those operating on a regional level; and if he will make a statement. [43069]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence makes grants to a small number of non-governmental organisations. No information is routinely collated on their funding, nor is information held on the location of their operations.

Records

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what type of records are destroyed by his Department when they are considered to be of no further administrative use; [43543]

(2) who made the decision to destroy records relating to the sea disposal of chemical weapons in the Baltic sea after World War 2; [43545]

(3) who makes the decision to destroy MOD documents when they are considered to be of no further administrative use; [43544]

(4) for what reason the UK extended the period of the classification of documents relating to the dumping of Axis chemical weapons in the Baltic after World War 2 to 2017. [43546]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence and the services create a significant amount of material during the course of business. As a consequence records are initially reviewed locally by those responsible for their creation. Where records are perceived to have no more value they may be destroyed locally. Records thought to have continuing administrative or possible historical value are transferred to the MOD's main archives. They are in due course reviewed by the MOD's staff in a process reflecting the requirements of the Public Records Act, 1958 and 1967.

I am arranging for a copy of the MOD's historical report on CW sea dumping, details of which were submitted to the Helsinki Commission, to be placed in the Library of the House. The MOD is not familiar with any record, on this subject, closed until 2017. However if the hon. Member would care to provide further details I will look into the matter and write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the extent of dumping of Axis chemical weapons in the Baltic from 1945 to 1947; and what steps he is taking to address the issue. [43547]

Dr. Moonie: The United Kingdom, the United States of America, Russia and France undertook dumping of confiscated German chemical munitions into the Baltic and Skagerrak between 1945 and 1947. However, after World War Two, it was the administrative practice to destroy records of sea disposals of munitions, including chemical weapons, when such records were perceived to be of no further administrative use. As a result of this practice, a detailed inventory of all conventional and chemical munitions does not exist. Where relevant British records on this subject do survive, they have been declassified and transferred to the Public Record Office in accordance with the terms of the Public Records Act, 1958 and 1967. We do not have details of the quantity or content of munitions dumped by other nations.

The consensus of international scientific opinion is that munitions on the seabed present no risk to human health or the marine environment provided they are left undisturbed. While the United Kingdom has no plans to monitor or remove conventional or chemical munitions dumped on the seabed, I am aware that NATO was approached by the Russian Government in 1997 regarding possible cooperation in the monitoring and prevention of leakage of chemicals from the German chemical weapons stocks sunk in the Baltic and Skagerrak after World War Two. Liaison on this issue with the Russian Government is continuing through NATO's Committee on the Challenges of Modern Society (CCMS), but no decision has yet been reached as to whether NATO will participate in any monitoring or preventative action.

Colerne Airfield

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many redundant hangars at Colerne Airfield have been sold; and how much they raised; [43517]

(2) what discussions he has had with commercial interests about selling Colerne Airfield and Azinghur Barracks. [43519]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 15 March 2002]:* The Ministry of Defence has had no discussions with commercial interests about selling Colerne Airfield and Azinghur Barracks.

The two outlying sites at Colerne contained a total of five redundant hangars. Last year, however, we sold two surplus and outlying sites of hangars at Colerne. The sale achieved £675,000. Currently there are no further surplus hangars on the site.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many married quarters at Colerne have been sold in the last five years. [43518]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 15 March 2002]:* The only such disposals recorded in the last five years are twelve surplus family houses at Colerne handed back to Annington Homes Ltd.

Stolen Equipment

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 31 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 498W, on stolen equipment, what criminal proceedings have been undertaken for cases of theft against his Department, stating in each case *(a)* whether the proceedings (i) led to a criminal conviction and (ii) were unsuccessful, *(b)* the cost incurred by his Department in pursuing a conviction and *(c)* the value of items recovered; and if he will make a statement. [41501]

Mr. Ingram: Reported cases of theft are held centrally on a summary basis and relate to reported suspicions only. It cannot be assumed therefore that criminal proceedings for theft have or will apply in every case. Every year the Ministry of Defence investigates a significant number of suspected thefts, many of a minor nature. Inevitably, in many instances a suspected perpetrator is not identified or there is insufficient evidence to sustain a prosecution. Where a suspected perpetrator is identified prosecution or internal disciplinary action follows as appropriate. The provision of comprehensive details, including costs incurred and recoveries made, relating to the outcome of such proceedings could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Warships

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether each Royal Navy frigate and destroyer is operational or in refit; and what the period of the current or next refit is in respect of each ship. [44213]

Mr. Ingram: 26 of the total 32 RN frigates and destroyers are either operational or engaged in preparing for service, trials or training. The remaining six are undergoing a refit or docking period as follows:

	Period (weeks)
Vessel refits	
Manchester	89
Liverpool	82
Gloucester	79
Iron Duke	61
Monmouth	66
Docking periods	
Marlborough	27

I am withholding details of the next refits for the fleet's frigates and destroyers in accordance with Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, which relates to defence, security and international relations. However, in general terms, such refits occur between seven to nine years into a commission with a planned duration, including preparations and trials periods, of between 57 and 79 weeks.

Kosovo

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the outcome was of the local police investigation into the circumstances of the death of Fahir Bici and Avni Dudi on 4 July 1999; what the outcome of the RMP investigation was; how many rounds were discharged by British forces; what communication he has had with the families of the deceased; what compensation has been paid; what the result was of disciplinary hearings; and what notices of orders were issued to the Parachute Regiment relating to circumstances of the incident. [41095]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

World War Two Civilian Prisoners (Far East)

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many civilian prisoners of the Japanese in the far east who have received ex-gratia payments under his scheme were *(a)* diplomatic personnel and *(b)* dependants of diplomatic personnel. [41234]

Dr. Moonie: It is not possible to say how many of those who have received an ex-gratia payment under the scheme I announced on 7 November 2000, *Official Report*, columns 159–71, were diplomatic personnel or their dependants as this information is not specifically held.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Correspondence

Mr. Alan Duncan: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when he will respond substantively to the letters of 13 July 2001, 24 July 2001 and 29 January 2002 referring to case Ref No 117550, from the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan). [44082]

Mr. Wills: The Lord Chancellor has now replied. I am sorry the reply to the hon. Member's letter took some time but it raised a complex point of law on which Counsel's Opinion was sought.

Community Legal Services Partnerships (North-West)

Mr. Watts: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what action her Department is taking to promote community legal services partnerships in the north-west. [40939]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Over the last two years, Ministers have supported community legal service partnerships (CLSP) by attending numerous local events. Most recently I was in Rochdale to speak at the launch of the Rochdale CLSP strategic plan. In February, Baroness Scotland launched the Halton CLSP, bringing the total coverage of partnerships in the north-west to 100 per cent. While in the region, Baroness Scotland also opened a new housing service, being provided through Chester offices of Shelter, and awarded the quality mark to the Cheshire constabulary.

To promote the concept of partnerships generally, national partners are kept up to date on national developments and regional development activities. All community legal service partnerships (CLSPs) undertake promotional activities as part of their work.

Domestic Violence

Margaret Moran: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when she intends to report on the use of third party orders in respect of domestic violence under section 60 of the Family Law Act 1986. [43074]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Last November I announced that we would be commissioning a short research project to assess the implications and benefits of introducing third party orders, as provided under section 60 of the Family Law Act 1996.

The research project was awarded to Dr. Mandy Burton of the university of Leicester on 12 March 2002 and will run from 15 March to 22 September 2002. The research will consider the effectiveness of all civil remedies currently available to survivors of domestic violence. Where any gaps are identified, consideration will be given as to whether or not the implementation of section 60 would fill them.

The Lord Chancellor and I will consider the findings of the research and announce our response at the earliest opportunity.

Resident Magistrates

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many resident magistrates reside within five miles of the court in which they sit. [38293]

Ms Rosie Winterton: A resident magistrate may reside outside the district to which he or she is assigned, as the term means that the magistrate is attached to a petty sessions district. Of the 13 resident magistrates who are assigned to districts, one resides within five miles of the courthouse in the district and another, who is assigned to two adjoining districts, resides within five miles of the courthouse in one of the districts. The other 11 resident magistrates reside more than five miles from the courthouse in the district to which they are assigned. The six remaining resident magistrates operate on a peripatetic basis and are not assigned to a specific district or courthouse.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Flexible Working

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many and what proportion of the staff of his Department are *(a)* job sharing, *(b)* term working and *(c)* engaged in another form of flexible working. [42419]

Mr. Leslie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member on 11 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 780W. Information on numbers of staff who are term-time workers or engaged in another form of flexible working are not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Women's On-line Business Centre

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on progress with the development of the new website Women's On-Line Business Centre. [43109]

Nigel Griffiths: I have been asked to reply.

SBS are working with their supplier to deliver the Women's On-Line Business Centre during summer 2002.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Short-measure Drinks

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment has been made by her Department of *(a)* the retail and *(b)* wholesale cost of beer and cider not served to consumers owing to short measures in the last 12 months. [25883]

Ms Hewitt: I have today announced proposals to strengthen consumer protection against short-measure draught beer and cider. Under the proposals bar staff would have to serve a minimum of 95 per cent. liquid per pint. If consumers are dissatisfied with 95 per cent. they can request a top-up. The Government will work closely with the beer trade to ensure that consumers are fully aware of their rights, including pubs displaying signs that consumers can ask for a top-up at no extra cost if they are dissatisfied with their pint.

The Department estimates that the total wholesale cost of draft beer and cider not served to consumers owing to short measures amounts to some £130 million a year at 2001 wholesale prices. This is based on sales of 6.6 billion pints a year, taken together with the results of surveys by local authority trading standards departments which show that 20 per cent. of pints were 100 per cent. liquid or more, 60 per cent. were between 95 per cent. and 99 per cent. liquid and 20 per cent. of pints were below 95 per cent. liquid. The retail value of this under-supply will depend on retail prices in particular establishments but will exceed the wholesale value.

Specification Standards (Relaxation)

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what evidence she has collated on the relaxation of specification standards for the benefit of some importers. [36831]

Ms Hewitt: Most standards are developed under a voluntary process facilitated by the British Standards Institution (BSI) and the content of such standards are determined by business, consumers and other stakeholders. BSI itself is independent of Government, and questions about standards for particular products need to be taken up with BSI rather than my Department.

Records are not kept by my Department of how such voluntary standards are used.

LNM Holdings

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether her Department was consulted by the Prime Minister regarding the purchase by LNM Holdings of Sidex. [38392]

Ms Hewitt: No.

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions took place between her Department and other Government Departments on the British connections of LNM Holdings. [38854]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to my reply of 6 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 349W.

Universal Bank

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if sub-postmasters/mistresses or staff employed to operate the universal bank in sub-post offices who give advice on services or accounts will be required to register under the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000. [39107]

Mr. Alexander: This is essentially a commercial matter for Post Office Ltd. However, my understanding is that sub-postmasters will not be giving financial advice and will not therefore be required to register under the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000.

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions she had with the Post Office on the Universal Bank during the final year that her Department was responsible for the scheme. [43339]

Mr. Alexander: Ministers and officials at the Department of Trade and Industry have regular discussions with Consignee on a range of issues, including universal banking services.

Visual Impairment

Lembit Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what assessment her Department has made of the preparations manufacturers have made to include appropriate labelling for blind people on their packaging by 2004, in order to comply with the requirements of the Disabilities Discrimination Act 1999; and if she will make a statement; [39464]

(2) what plans her Department has to publicise the legal responsibility of companies to make sure their products have blind-friendly labelling by 2004 to comply with the requirements of the Disabilities Discrimination Act 1999; and if she will make a statement. [39462]

Ms Hewitt: The 2004 access duties in Part III of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 refer to the physical features of premises. The manufacture and design of goods and product labelling are not covered by the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.

World Economic Forum

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if she will list meetings held between her Department and HM Treasury concerning the preparations for the World Economic Forum; [40191]

(2) who is representing the UK at the World Economic Forum conference in New York; what their aims are; and if she will make a statement after their return; [40192]

(3) what representations she received from British businesses prior to the World Economic Forum conference; and if she will make a statement; [40189]

(4) if she will list meetings she has had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on preparation for the World Economic Forum; and if she will publish the minutes of these meetings. [40190]

Ms Hewitt: I am in regular contact with representatives from British business to discuss a variety of trade related issues. I am not aware of any specific representations received from British businesses prior to the World Economic Forum. I did however receive invitations from

a variety of organisations to meetings, dinners and receptions taking place during the course of the World Economic Forum conference.

Pay Rates

Barbara Follett: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the average gap is between men's and women's pay in the Stevenage constituency. [40479]

Ms Hewitt: Estimates for the Parliamentary Constituency of Stevenage are not available.

According to the 2001 New Earnings Survey conducted by the Office for National Statistics, average hourly pay for full-time employees, excluding overtime, in the county of Hertfordshire, was £13.41 for men and £10.96 for women, a pay gap of £2.45.

Jim Dobbin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the average gap is between men's and women's pay in the Heywood and Middleton constituency. [40419]

Ms Hewitt: Estimates for the Parliamentary Constituency of Heywood and Middleton are not available. According to the 2001 New Earnings Survey, conducted by the Office for National Statistics, average hourly pay for full-time employees, excluding overtime, in the Greater Manchester Metropolitan County, was £11.08 for men and £9.19 for women, a pay gap of £1.89 per hour.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the average gap between men's and women's pay was in the Leeds, West constituency in *(a)* 1991 and *(b)* 2001. [40710]

Ms Hewitt: There is no data on the pay gap for the parliamentary constituency of Leeds, West. Data are available for the local authority of Leeds, albeit only from 1996.

According to the New Earnings Survey (NES), conducted by the Office for National Statistics, average hourly earnings for full-time employees, excluding overtime, in the Leeds local authority in 1996 was £8.94 for men and £7.18 for women, a pay gap of £1.76.

In the 2001 NES, average hourly earnings for full-time employees, excluding overtime, in the Leeds local authority, was £11.11 for men and £9.60 for women, a pay gap of £1.51.

Litigation

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many cases *(a)* her Department and *(b)* its agencies have defended in (i) industrial tribunals and (ii) the courts in each year since 1997; how many were concluded in their favour; and what the total cost to his Department of litigation was in each year. [41106]

Alan Johnson: The information is not kept in a readily available form and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Congestion Charge (Consignia)

Richard Ottaway: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 28 February, Ref. 37817, on the London congestion charge, for what reason she has not made an assessment of the effect that the proposed change would have on Consignia. [41147]

Mr. Alexander: Any such assessment would be for Consignia plc.

Beer and Cider

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she will publish the conclusion of the Measures of Draught Beer and Cider: Consultation Paper on proposed legislative changes under the Weights and Measures Act 1985. [41336]

Ms Hewitt: Currently, one pint of draught beer in five contains less than 95 per cent. liquid. The licensed trade's own voluntary guidelines recommend that a pint should not be less than 95 per cent. liquid, and that top-ups should be given if requested. But under existing laws trading standards officers can only act if beer drinkers are short-measured by at least 10 per cent.

Under proposals published today by my Department, bar staff will have to serve beer drinkers a minimum of 95 per cent. liquid in a pint, which is equivalent to an extra 60 million pints a year. Landlords who ignore the new regulations would be liable to prosecution for short-measure and would face £1,000 fines. Persistent offenders would run the risk of losing their licence.

The Department has consulted widely with all the relevant bodies. It will now work closely with the beer trade to ensure that consumers are fully informed of their new rights. This will include pubs clearly displaying signs that consumers can ask for a top-up at no extra cost if they are not satisfied with their pint.

These proposals strike the right balance between delivering a better deal for consumers without damaging the brewing industry and hitting beer and cider drinkers with higher prices. The cost to the industry of serving 100 per cent. liquid would be £95 million, which would have severe cost implications for smaller pubs with low profit margins.

The Department will now consult on draft regulations prior to bringing forward legislation and hopes to lay the legislation before the summer recess.

Insolvency Service

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what targets have been set for the Insolvency Service's hotline for 2002–03. [42062]

Miss Melanie Johnson: There are no targets set for the hotline as regards the number of calls or cases it has to deal with, as it is not possible to predict the number of calls it receives.

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the level of staff turnover was in the *(a)* Insolvency Service and *(b)* Hotline team in each year since 1997 (i) including and (ii) excluding temporary staff. [42069]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The turnover of staff employed by the Insolvency Service in each of the calendar years 1997–2001 was as follows:

	Percentage
	All staff
1997	13.9
1998	11.9
1999	12.8
2000	11.6
2001	13.8

Since the inception of the Hotline in January 1998 only two people have left the team; one on promotion in 1999 and one on maternity leave in 2000.

Age Discrimination

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her Department's policy is towards age discrimination. [42574]

Ms Hewitt: As an equal opportunities employer, my Department aims to be fair to everyone and ensure that no eligible job applicant or employee receives less favourable treatment on the grounds of age. For example internal job applicants are not required to give details of their age nor does age appear on staff appraisal reports. The Department regularly monitors its personnel procedures, including by age, to identify any potential discrimination.

Departmental Objectives

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will review the objectives of her Department. [42502]

Ms Hewitt: I announced in November last year, on 22 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 397W, a series of reforms to focus my Department's objectives more sharply in driving up UK productivity and competitiveness. Those reforms are now being implemented, and the Department's objectives are also being reviewed in the context of the 2002 Spending Review.

My Department's current objectives, activities and expenditure can be found on website http://www.dti.gov.uk/about/index.htm.

Fishing

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to the answer of 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 152W, for what reason the limit for compensation is measured in imperial miles; and whether Working Man's Bank off Faroes is within 200 *(a)* imperial and *(b)* nautical miles. [42501]

Nigel Griffiths: The area within 200 imperial miles of the Icelandic coast was selected as a convenient and identifiable area that accorded with the policy aim of the scheme to compensate former Icelandic water trawlermen following consultation with their leaders. Working Man's Bank is both within 200 imperial miles and within 200 nautical miles of the Icelandic coast.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to the answer of 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 152W, on fishing, when this was *(a)* decided and *(b)* announced. [42500]

Nigel Griffiths: The limitation of eligibility under the scheme to former trawlermen who served on vessels that fished within 200 miles of the Icelandic coast was a feature of the rules of the scheme when they were first drawn up and consulted upon with the former trawlermen's leaders. It was always the intention that "miles" refer to imperial miles rather than nautical, so no specific announcement was made in that regard.

Mobile Telephone Masts

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will place in the Library a copy of the Mobile Phone Base Stations Audit 2001 carried out by the Radiocommunications Agency. [42921]

Mr. Alexander: Yes. I am arranging for this to be done.

Gender Issues

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) which women's organisations have been consulted on proposed legislation by her Department during the *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02 parliamentary Sessions; and if their responses have been published; [42902]

(2) if she will list the subject of each gender impact assessment drawn up by her Department since June 1997, indicating in each case whether the outcome has been *(a)* put out to consultation and *(b)* published; [42900]

(3) what new data series broken down by gender, race, disability and age have been commissioned by her Department since August 1997. [42901]

Ms Hewitt: The Department is undertaking a wide range of work looking at gender issues in particular sectors of the Department's business. We have commissioned research, consulted widely and published the outcomes on issues such as work and parents, flexible working, the national minimum wage, employment tribunals, women's employment and pay, work-life balance, fixed-term work, women entrepreneurs and issues surrounding women in science and IT.

My Department regularly consults with the Office for National Statistics and other government departments ensuring that data series provided by regular surveys such as the Labour Force Survey (LFS) provide us with opportunities for analyses by gender, race, disability and age. For example, we have recently published an analysis of women's scientific employment, also broken down by age (available on www2.set4women.gov.uk/set4women/return/feedback.htm). In addition, services such as Business Link routinely capture detailed client characteristics, including gender and ethnicity.

My Department's policy is to consult widely and appropriately on its proposed legislation, using a variety of methods targeted to reach different stakeholders and audiences, including women's organisations. For example, we involved the Equal Opportunities Commission and Parents at Work in the Work and Parents Taskforce (which reported last year) as well as business and the trades unions.

Yusufeli Dam

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment her Department has made of the social and environmental impact of the Yusufeli Dam project in Turkey on surrounding areas. [43241]

Ms Hewitt: ECGD has been reviewing the preliminary Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR) produced by the Turkish authorities for the Yusufeli Dam project. A number of questions relating to the social and environmental impact of the project have been raised by the export credit agencies involved. However AMEC—the UK contractor for the project—has recently announced that for purely commercial reasons they have decided to withdraw from the project. ECGD therefore has no longer any reason to continue its consideration.

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the public service agreement targets which have been revised and those which have been introduced since the publication of the 2001 departmental report. [43263]

Ms Hewitt: The 2001 Expenditure Plans Report (Cm 5112) includes two sets of public service agreement targets, comprising twelve targets each, to cover the Comprehensive Spending Review period (1999–02) and the Spending Review 2000 period (2001–04). No targets from either set have been revised since the publication of the report, nor have any new targets been introduced.

Public-private Partnerships (Consultants)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the total external spending by her Department was on public-private partnership consultants in each of the last four years; how many full-time equivalent consultants were employed over this period; how many billed consultancy days there were per year; what the implied average cost of each PPP consultant was; how many consultancy firms were used by her Department over this period; and if she will make a statement. [43200]

Ms Hewitt: The Department has spent the following sums on consultants in relation to the potential PPP for BNFL in the last four years.

	£	*Number of consultancy firms used in each year*
1998–99	100,000	1
1999–2000	3,500,000	7
2000–01	7,000,000	7
2001	5,000,000[1]	9

[1] Forecast

Other information on the number of full-time equivalent consultants used and other consultancy costs can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Regional Assistance Grant

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the total amount of regional assistance grant to industry in *(a)* the Buckingham constituency, *(b)* each constituency in the south-east of England and *(c)* the average per constituency in each year since 1992. [43295]

Alan Johnson: *(a)* Nil—the Buckingham constituency is not within an Assisted Area or Enterprise Grant Zone;

(b) Regional Selective Assistance Grant for each parliamentary constituency in the south-east of England in each year since 1992 is set out in the tables, and includes;

(c) the average per constituency:

Regional selective assistance grant awarded from 1992 to 2001

Constituency	*Number of grants*	*Total amount (£)*	*Average per constituency (£)*
1992	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
1993			
Faversham	2	36,500	18,250
1994			
Bexhill and Battle	1	40,000	40,000
Dover	3	80,570	26,856
Faversham	12	497,770	41,480
Folkestone and Hythe	3	140,000	46,666
Hastings and Rye	5	163,912	32,782
Isle of Wight	10	579,529	57,952
North Thanet	1	650,000	650,000
South Thanet	10	733,200	73,320
1995			
Bexhill and Battle	5	182,000	36,400
Dover	4	232,750	58,187
Faversham	15	831,000	55,400
Folkestone and Hythe	6	359,200	59,866
Gillingham	1	750,000	750,000
Hastings and Rye	14	449,000	32,071
Isle of Wight	12	861,100	71,758
North Thanet	15	1,367,200	91,146
South Thanet	15	921,612	61,440
1996			
Bexhill and Battle	7	1,033,900	147,700
Dover	9	1,779,000	197,666
Faversham	7	805,000	115,000
Folkestone and Hythe	6	1,106,590	184,431
Hastings and Rye	7	430,000	61,428
Isle of Wight	16	591,500	36,968
North Thanet	16	2,655,500	165,968
South Thanet	17	4,819,348	283,491
1997			
Bexhill and Battle	2	17,250	8,625
Dover	4	130,000	32,500
Faversham	7	513,000	73,285
Folkestone and Hythe	5	236,000	47,200
Hastings and Rye	6	282,000	47,000
Isle of Wight	10	257,750	25,775
North Thanet	8	405,600	50,700
South Thanet	14	3,642,000	260,142
1998			
Bexhill and Battle	1	7,000	7,000
Faversham	10	270,500	27,050
Folkestone and Hythe	4	327,500	81,875
Hastings and Rye	4	238,000	59,500
Isle of Wight	5	727,000	145,400
North Thanet	8	560,400	70,050
South Thanet	11	2,896,000	263,272
1999			
Bexhill and Battle	1	97,000	97,000
Canterbury	1	12,000	12,000
Dover	6	110,500	18,416
Faversham	12	592,100	49,341
Folkestone and Hythe	3	86,000	28,666
Hastings and Rye	4	226,500	56,625
Isle of Wight	8	1,350,000	168,750
North Thanet	4	391,000	97,750
South Thanet	10	598,500	59,850
2000			
Bexhill and Battle	3	93,000	31,000
Brighton Kemptown	1	660,000	660,000

Regional selective assistance grant awarded from 1992 to 2001

Constituency	Number of grants	Total amount (£)	Average per constituency (£)
Brighton Pavilion	1	95,000	95,000
Dover	3	1,051,160	350,386
Folkestone and Hythe	4	369,000	92,250
Hastings and Rye	4	150,500	37,625
Isle of Wight	5	1,171,700	234,340
North Thanet	4	325,000	81,250
South Thanet	7	308,200	44,028
2001			
Dover	1	100,000	100,000
Faversham	1	75,000	75,000
North Thanet	4	2,260,000	565,000
South Thanet	1	5,000,000	5,000,000

[1] No Grants awarded

Enterprise grants for each parliamentary constituency in the south-east of England in each year since 1992 are set out in the table:

Enterprise grants awarded from 1999 to 2001

Constituency	Number of Grants	Total amount (£)	Average per constituency (£)
1999	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
2000			
Faversham	3	100,250	33,416
Hastings and Rye	2	26,800	13,400
Isle of Wight	1	55,000	55,000
Lewes	2	100,900	50,450
North Thanet	3	105,950	35,316
South Thanet	3	116,900	38,966
2001			
Bexhill and Battle	2	98,500	49,250
Canterbury	2	89,250	44,625
Dartford	1	16,500	16,500
Dover	2	20,950	10,475
Faversham	10	330,850	33,085
Folkestone and Hythe	3	92,654	30,884
Gillingham	1	72,000	72,000
Hastings and Rye	3	175,350	58,450
Hove	3	104,700	34,900
Isle of Wight	14	239,675	17,119
Lewes	3	136,949	45,649
Maidstone	1	60,150	60,150
Medway	5	149,420	29,884
Mid Kent	1	28,800	28,800
North Thanet	1	36,000	36,000
Portsmouth North	3	24,150	8,050
Portsmouth South	2	35,437	17,718
South Thanet	1	27,000	27,000

[1] No grants awarded.

In the south-east region only the following constituencies are eligible for regional assistance:

Ashford, Bexhill and Battle, Brighton Kemptown, Brighton Pavilion, Canterbury, Dartford, Dover, Faversham, Folkestone and Hythe, Gillingham, Gravesham, Hastings and Rye, Hove, Isle of Wight, Lewes, Maidstone, Medway, Mid Kent, North Thanet, Portsmouth, North, Portsmouth, South, Shoreham, South Thanet, Tonbridge and Malling.

Figures have been supplied only for these constituencies and where a grant has been given.

The following constituencies have received no grant:

RSA: Medway, Tonbridge and Malling

Enterprise Grant: Ashford, Brighton Pavilion, Gravesham, Shoreham.

Average figures have been calculated on a simple arithmetic basis.

Departmental Functions

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the functions of her Department that have been *(a)* market tested and *(b)* out-sourced in each of the last five years, specifying the (i) money saving and (ii) percentage saving in each case. [42986]

Ms Hewitt: No departmental functions were market tested and out-sourced during the last five years.

However, in that period, a number of contracts let as a result of previous market tests have been re-tendered.

Research Council

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the outcome was of the Research Council held in Brussels on 11 March; what the Government's stance was on each issue discussed, including its voting record; and if she will make a statement. [43216]

Ms Hewitt: The Research Council of 11 March 2002:

1. Held an orientation debate on the rules of participation and the specific programmes for the Sixth EU Research Framework Programme 2002–06 and Sixth EURATOM Framework Programme 2002–06.

2. Received an oral presentation by the commission on its proposal for a negotiating mandate to discuss a framework agreement with the European Space Agency.

3. Received an oral presentation by the commission on its proposal to amend the negotiating mandate on the legal aspects of a possible ITER (International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor), in order to include possible site offers for ITER in Europe and cost sharing provisions.

4. Received a presentation by the commission of its proposed action plan for Biotechnology and Life Sciences in Europe.

5. Under other business, the commission gave a brief update on the work of the expert group on bioterrorism.

6. There were no votes at this council.

Transmission Grid

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the scope is of the new study into the transmission grid between Scotland and the rest of the UK; when it will report; and if its conclusions will form part of the Energy White Paper. [43047]

Mr. Wilson: I shall shortly be meeting representatives of the three UK transmission asset owners (The National Grid Company, Scottish Power and Scottish and Southern) as well as the Scottish Executive and Ofgem in order to discuss these issues. My expectation is that work will be taken forward quickly and that it will inform the Energy White Paper.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her policy is on building a meshed grid following the publication of the concept study on the Western Offshore Transmission Grid. [43049]

Mr. Wilson: The recently published PB POWER report endorsed the option of an offshore hvdc link either as means of the bulk transfer of renewable energy to a suitable point on the existing transmission system, or as a means of addressing existing transmission constraints.

The report also recommended that a more detailed investigation of the feasibility of such a link should be part of a more general review of transmission system needs. My Department is considering the best way to take this work forward in conjunction with the UK transmission asset owners (National Grid Company, Scottish Power and Scottish & Southern).

UK Compensation Monitoring Group

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on her recent meeting with the UK compensation monitoring group. [43050]

Mr. Wilson: I met the Ministerial Monitoring Group on 6 March. The main points covered were the significant increases since October 2001 in numbers of full and final offers made in relation to respiratory disease. It was also noted that the Department is working closely with the Claimants' Solicitors to ensure that offers are being translated quickly into settlements. The issue of ensuring priority for oldest and sickest claimants was discussed.

In relation to VWF, the cut-off date of 31 October for the scheme was noted, following an announcement by the Department earlier that week. I emphasised that this message should be circulated as widely as possible.

Perkins, Shrewsbury

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the assistance available through Advantage West Midlands to mitigate the effect of the 500 redundancies at Perkins in Shrewsbury. [43528]

Alan Johnson: The situation at Perkins is, potentially, very damaging for the company, its employees, Shrewsbury and the surrounding area, and the Government are treating it with the seriousness it deserves. As the hon. Member knows, I met with representatives of management and unions from the company on Monday March 11, to explore ways of mitigating the effects of any redundancies.

Perkins are now looking at ways of saving some jobs on the site and extending production beyond the end of 2002. For the time being, the number and type of jobs that will be lost is not clear. The type of activity the company hopes to continue and the type of support they will request is also not clear.

For that reason it is currently not possible to say what support can be offered to Perkins through Advantage West Midlands, or through other Government funded agencies in the locality.

However, a task force has been convened to look at the implications for the area and to offer as much coordinated advice and help as possible. Management and unions from the site are members, and the Government are represented through the Government Office for the West Midlands. Advantage West Midlands is a key member and other members include both Local Authorities covering the area, the Employment Service, the SBS and the local Learning and Skills Council. A key function of the task group, set out in their terms of reference, is to identify all the potential sources of funding available and to develop a coordinated response to the needs of the company, the town and the surrounding areas.

Quality Mark

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) how many inquiries have been made to the construction Quality Mark register telephone line since its launch; and how many hits have been made on the Quality Mark website since its launch; [43614]

(2) if an estimate has been made of the cost of expanding the construction Quality Mark scheme to cover the whole country; [43615]

(3) when her Department will publish the findings of the review of the construction Quality Mark Scheme; [43612]

(4) how many builders have gained the construction Quality Mark in the pilot projects in Birmingham and Somerset. [43613]

Mr. Wilson: I refer my hon. Friend to my answer on 12 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 891W. 154 companies have now achieved the Quality Mark.

TRIPS

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the outcome of the last TRIPS Council meeting on 5 March. [43533]

Ms Hewitt: The TRIPS Council began work on the issues remitted to it at the Doha WTO Ministerial Conference in November last year. These include TRIPS and its relationship with public health, patentability of

plants and animals, biodiversity, traditional knowledge, a review of the TRIPS Agreement and incentives for transfer of technology.

The TRIPS Council also began work on a multilateral registration system for geographical indications for wines and spirits for completion by the Fifth Ministerial Conference in 2003, as required by Ministers at Doha.

Employment Legislation

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures she proposes to take to reduce the administrative demands on employers of UK and EU employment legislation. [43625]

Alan Johnson: The Government want the UK to be the best place in the world to do business. To help achieve this we will eliminate unnecessary regulation and minimise the burdens imposed by regulation that is necessary. We have significantly strengthened the systems that control the regulatory burden. The Government have established the Better Regulation Task Force and the Ministerial Panel for Regulatory Accountability, appointed Ministers for Regulatory Reform in the main regulating Departments, and set up the Small Business Service to ensure that regulations do not impose unnecessary burdens.

In February we published the Regulatory Reform Action Plan—setting out proposals for better regulation and reform across Whitehall, local government and health authorities. The plan brings together in one document over 250 proposals for change—some already announced, some entirely new proposals—representing snapshot of reform plans at start of 2002. These will benefit businesses, charities and the voluntary sector. It represents a good beginning, but Government will continue working to identify and bring forward proposals to reduce the overall regulatory burden.

The Government are working to ensure that similar disciplines and procedures are in place at European Union level. In particular we want to see an early and full implementation by the commission of the recommendations of the Mandelkern Report on Better Regulation. This report was produced by a high level group of experts from all 15 EU member states and makes recommendations on alternatives to regulation, impact assessment, consultation, simplification, access to regulation, structures and implementation.

The Government are encouraging the European Commission, European Parliament and other member states to implement these recommendations. We look forward to the Commission's Action Plan for Better Regulation, which will be presented to the Seville European Council in June, being based on the Mandelkern report.

Broadband

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the growth in level of *(a)* internet use and *(b)* broadband connectivity among small and medium enterprises over the last 12 months for which figures are available. [43816]

Mr. Alexander: The Government's Business in the Information Age International Benchmarking Report 2001 (October 2001) assesses the extent to which UK businesses are using information and communications technologies in their operations. The report has been placed in the Libraries of the House. Oftel's report Business use of Internet small and medium business survey contains the broadband connectivity figures.

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what international comparators she has identified as an appropriate basis for measuring UK broad band infrastructure roll-out. [43815]

Mr. Alexander: The UK Online Annual Report (December 2001) sets out the market performance metrics by which we will measure the UK's standing in the G7 in terms of the competitiveness and extensiveness of the broad band market.

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what international comparators she has identified as an appropriate basis for measuring performance of the local-loop unbundling initiative in the UK. [43814]

Mr. Alexander: Oftel is working with other European telecoms regulators to collect data relating to local loop unbundling (LLU) across Europe on a consistent basis.

Post Offices

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many post offices there were in Wales in 1997; how many were classified as rural; and how many there are now that are classified as rural. [44043]

Mr. Alexander: 965 post offices in Wales were classified as rural according to the latest available figures to the end of December 2001.

I am informed by Post Office Ltd. that data by country are not available before 1998.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many rural network advisers there are for the Post Office. [43627]

Mr. Alexander: I am informed by Post Office Ltd. that there are currently 31 rural transfer advisers.

Pensions

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action she proposes to secure equivalence of treatment in respect of pensions on the transfer of an engagement from the public sector to an outside contractor. [43134]

Alan Johnson: It has been the policy of successive Governments to ensure that the occupational pension rights of public sector staff are protected on a "broadly comparable" basis on transfer within the public sector and

from the public sector to the private. The Government remain committed to that policy, which is set out in the Treasury note "Staff Transfers from Central Government: A Fair Deal for Staff Pensions".

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether pensions are treated by her Department as deferred pay in connection with industrial relations and the resolution of disputes. [43133]

Alan Johnson: Whether employment law would enable an employee to seek legal redress in respect of a dispute involving a pension will depend upon the nature of the dispute. If the pension forms part of the employee's contract of employment there may be redress through the employment tribunals or civil courts, for example in the form of a breach of contract claim.

Disabled People (Access)

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the number of premises at which the provision access for disabled people would be commercially unviable. [38385]

Maria Eagle: I have been asked to reply.

In order to comply with the physical access duties under Part III of the DDA that come into force in October 2004, service providers will only have to make changes to premises that are reasonable. Several factors are considered in determining reasonableness, including the cost of the adjustments, its practicality, and the service provider's resources. There is no question of unreasonable costs being imposed on businesses.

Disability Discrimination Act

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to extend the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 to apply to disabled youngsters on work placements. [8]

Maria Eagle: I have been asked to reply.

We are considering what amendments should be made to the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 in the light of the ongoing consultation on the Article 13 Employment Directive, including possible changes in relation to practical work experience.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Advertising

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the publicity and advertising campaigns run by his Department in each of the last four years, specifying the *(a)* purpose, *(b)* cost to public funds, *(c)* number of staff involved and *(d)* method of evaluation in each case. [39074]

Angela Eagle: The campaigns run by the Home Department in the last four years are as follows:

1997–98;

- Accelerated Promotion Scheme for Graduates Police Recruitment
- Electoral Registration
- Special Constables
- Fire Safety—Chip pan safety pilot

1998–99;

- Accelerated Promotion Scheme for Graduates (APSG) Police Recruitment
- Electoral Registration
- Special Constables
- Fire Safety—Smoke Alarms
- Crime Partnerships

1999–2000;

- APSG Police Recruitment
- Electoral Registration
- Special Constables
- Fire Safety—Escape pilot
- Fire Safety—Chip pan safety national
- European Parliamentary Elections
- Passport Agency

2000–01;

- Police recruitment
- Vehicle crime reduction
- Fire safety
- Human rights
- Rolling electoral registration and
- Postal voting.

In answer to sections *(a)*, *(b)* and *(d)* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) on 25 January 2001, *Official Report*, column 718W.

(C) Staff in the Department's Marketing Communications Unit (currently 20) work on the development and management of advertising campaigns and other publicity initiatives. The number of staff involved in each project varies as it progresses, often on a week by week basis.

Police Stations

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the design and construction quality of new police stations. [39541]

Mr. Denham: The Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) receives grant-in-aid from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) in order to fulfil its remit to promote high standards in the design of public buildings. The Home Office, along with other Government Departments, is fully committed to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's Better Public Buildings Initiative, and is working with CABE at a practical level in order to achieve excellence in design and construction in the built environment.

The design and construction of new police stations is the direct responsibility of individual police authorities and is subject to town planning control procedures. The Department is working with CABE and police authorities to support the achievement of better design and construction quality in new police stations.

Relocation Expenses

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his policy is on the payment of relocation expenses to staff in his Department. [41025]

Angela Eagle: Home Office policy is consistent with section 8 of the Civil Service Management Code which sets out the conditions under which Departments and agencies may provide for the reimbursement of relocation expenses to staff who are subject to permanent and compulsory transfers. Relocation terms must be cost effective compared with the alternatives and the level of reimbursement must reflect the reasonable additional costs necessarily incurred.

The details of the Department's policy are set out in the Transfer Manual and the Permanent Transfer Guide.

Islamophobia

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what further action he is taking to tackle instances of Islamophobia; and if he will make a statement. [40970]

Angela Eagle: The Government are committed to tackling Islamophobia, along with all other forms of religious discrimination.

The Government are committed to implementing the Article 13 EC Employment Directive outlawing discrimination in employment and training on the grounds of religion by 2 December 2003.

The Human Rights Act 1998 also provides protection against religious discrimination.

The Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 created new religiously aggravated offences including assaults, threatening behaviour and criminal damage, which carry higher maximum penalties where there is evidence of religious hostility.

A question on religious identity was included in the 2001 census reflecting the importance of recognising faith identity. When the census results are released they will provide Government with reliable data to help plan and deliver services sensitive to the needs of faith communities.

The Government favour a comprehensive approach in which education, training and a greater effort to teach more in schools about the diversity of faith will all play an important part.

The option of a state-supported faith-based education to those from minority faiths is being extended. This will build on the long-standing tradition of church schools and add to the inclusiveness and diversity of the school system, but will not involve the introduction of new policy or legislation.

In addition, education in citizenship is being introduced within secondary schools from September 2002 so that for the first time, students will be taught as part of the national curriculum about the diversity of identities and cultures in the United Kingdom and the need for mutual respect and understanding.

Many people of different faiths share common problems in our society today regardless of their religious beliefs and values. The Government support them in their pursuit to eliminate harmful and discriminatory practices.

Our relations with the Muslim community are extremely important and we will continue to strive to improve them. I hope they—like other faith communities—will always find in this Government not just a sympathetic ear, but a friend willing to do all it can to make Britain a safe and fulfilling place to live.

Drugs

Mr. John Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what research he has commissioned in the last five years on the role of cannabis as a gateway drug; what assessment he has made of the effect of the proposed reclassification of cannabis; what recent representations he has received on resources and manpower directed to the detection, arrest and charging of drug dealers; and what plans he has to seek to amend the sentencing powers relating to convicted drug dealers. [40852]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: On 23 October last year, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary asked the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs to review the scientific literature on cannabis, including the so-called "gateway effect". The Government have commissioned no separate research of their own.

In assessing the impact of the reclassification of cannabis, the Home Secretary has said that he intends to consider the independent evaluation of the Lambeth cannabis policing pilot and take account of the findings and recommendations of the current Home Affairs Select Committee Inquiry, which has taken a range of evidence on the issues.

A new sentencing option for the courts in respect of convicted drug traffickers, Travel Restriction Orders, will come into force on 1 April 2002. Travel Restriction Orders will give the courts the powers in some circumstances to prevent the overseas travel of a convicted drug trafficker following his or her release from prison.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions there have been under the Misuse of Drugs Regulations 1985 and 2001 for supplying anabolic steroids in each of the last 10 years. [41355]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The available statistics, held on the Home Office Court Proceedings database, show that there was one prosecution for supplying or offering to supply anabolic steroids in England and Wales in each of the years 1996, 1998, 1999 and 2000 and three in 1997.

The anabolic steroids were not controlled until September 1996.

Statistics for 2001 will be available in the autumn.

Prison Service

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether his Department has applied for additional funding from contingency reserves in

order to meet increased expenditure resulting from the Prison Service pay review; and if he will make a statement. [41154]

Beverley Hughes: No application has been made for additional funding from contingency reserves. It is intended that the cost of the Prison Service pay review be met from within existing departmental expenditure limits. Proposals to enable this are still under consideration.

Young Offenders Institution (Aylesbury)

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if sprinkler systems have been installed at HM YOI Aylesbury. [40844]

Beverley Hughes: In line with current policy sprinkler systems have not been installed in any part of Aylesbury young offenders institution. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has called for a review of fire safety precautions and the use of sprinklers in young offenders institutions, adult prisons and detention centres.

Probation Arrangements (Tenders)

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what requests he has received to tender for probation facilities arrangements from in-house applicants; and if he will make a statement. [41156]

Beverley Hughes: A report was received from London Probation Area (LPA) which included the proposal that LPA or a consortium of probation areas could run the estates and facilities management services for part of the probation estate. Following legal and procurement advice, it was determined that this request could not be considered as an in-house bid.

Yarl's Wood

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the terms of reference are for the investigations into the disturbances at Yarl's Wood; if the findings will be made public; and if he will make a statement. [41149]

Angela Eagle: The terms of reference for the inquiry being conducted by Stephen Moore are:

"To inquire into the events at Yarl's Wood Removal Centre on the night of 14–15 February 2002 and their causes and to make recommendations designed to minimise the risk of recurrence on the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) custodial estate in relation to contracts and agreements with service providers, the operation of removal centres, building design and construction, and any other matters considered relevant.

The inquiry will take full account of the inquiries being undertaken by Bedfordshire Police, Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service and Group 4, and will be conducted in a way which does not impede any criminal investigation. In addition, the inquiry will have available expert advice from Her Majesty's Prison Service on matters to do with the above matters."

The findings of the inquiry will be published.

Crime (Licensed Premises)

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has on *(a)* licensing and *(b)* policing for night clubs and other licensed premises which are identified as generating problems of crime and disorder. [41410]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: We have provided the police with strong new powers to deal with disorderly or excessively noisy licensed premises. Section 17 of the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001, which came into force on 1 December 2001, allows the police to close premises, instantly, for up to 24 hours where such problems are occurring. We expect the powers to have a deterrent effect and lead to a reduction in the incidence of violence and disorder on licensed premises, as well as providing the police with effective powers to deal with problems when they arise.

The White Paper "Time for Reform" (Cm 4696), published in April 2000, set out the Government's wider proposals for reforming and modernising licensing law. The proposals included a new graduated system of sanctions penalising licensees who failed to comply with licence conditions relating to crime and disorder and other matters. The Government intend to bring forward legislation to implement the White Paper proposals as soon as parliamentary time permits.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his policy is towards enabling police services to charge night clubs and bar proprietors for additional policing costs associated with their premises. [41401]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: We made it clear in the White Paper 'Policing A new Century: A Blueprint for Reform' that we are concerned about the costs incurred in policing entertainment venues, pubs and clubs, and sporting venues where policing demands impact on policing in the area. We are keen to explore how we might encourage and develop arrangements under which entertainment venues make a contribution to the policing and public order costs generated by their activities.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the need for new police powers to deal with the problems of crime and disorder associated with night clubs and other licensed premises. [41409]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: A package of measures to tackle alcohol-related crime and disorder were included in the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001. This includes new police powers to close disorderly or excessively noisy licensed premises, instantly, for up to 24 hours, and a toughening up of the law relating to drunkenness and disorder on licensed premises, and to under-age drinking. Working with the police and others, we shall keep the impact of these new measures, which came into force on 1 December 2001, under review as the basis for determining whether new or additional powers are required to assist the police and others in tackling crime and disorder on licensed premises.

Visas

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the fee payable by Polish citizens applying for British visas was introduced and for what purpose; how much of the fee goes to the Polish Government; and for what reason British citizens are unable to pay for the visa in Britain. [41868]

Angela Eagle: For many categories of entry to the United Kingdom, Polish nationals do not require a visa before travel i.e. they are non-visa nationals. However,

there are a number of categories for which prior entry clearance is mandatory for all nationals (apart from those exempt from immigration controls). A standard fee applicable world-wide is levied, according to entry category, by visa sections for each application for entry clearance. This is payable in local currency at the time the application is lodged. Administratively this is the most effective way of collecting and reconciling fee income. The entry clearance operation is self-financing and the fee therefore directly relates to the administration costs involved. None of the fee is received by the Polish Government.

Asylum Accommodation Centres

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) of 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 160W, on asylum seeker accommodation centres, what health facilities will be made available to asylum seekers; and what role *(a)* local hospitals and *(b)* other health institutions will be expected to take in the provision of such health care. [42728]

Angela Eagle: Asylum seekers will be provided with primary healthcare on site. Any secondary healthcare needs will be provided for at local hospitals or other health institutions.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when his Department contacted City of Edinburgh Council to inform them that RAF Turnhouse was being considered as a potential site for an asylum seeker accommodation centre; by what means the information was conveyed; and if he will place the correspondence in the Library. [42731]

Angela Eagle: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Beckenham (Mrs. Lait) on 11 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 719W. A copy of the original letter will be placed in the Library.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects the first asylum seeker accommodation centres to be opened. [42738]

Angela Eagle: The aim is that the first centre should open as soon as possible, but a date for this to happen has yet to be settled.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment his Department has made of the transport facilities available for asylum seekers housed in an accommodation centre at Turnhouse in Edinburgh. [42732]

Angela Eagle: Transport implications will form a part of the planning process for the trial accommodation centres. We will provide for transport for residents where necessary.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) of 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 160W, on asylum seeker accommodation centres, what purposeful activities he envisages asylum seekers will undertake through volunteering. [42726]

Angela Eagle: No final decisions have yet been taken so I have nothing to add to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 159W.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what freedom asylum seekers who are housed in the proposed new accommodation centres will have to leave the sites. [42725]

Angela Eagle: Asylum seekers who are housed in accommodation centres will be subject to residence and reporting requirements but will otherwise be able to come and go.

Immigration and Nationality Directorate, Croydon

Ross Cranston: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the performance of the 24-hour turnaround postal service for urgent straightforward cases announced in October 1997 for third party users of the IND office in Croydon. [42496]

Angela Eagle: The 24-hour turnaround postal service has been subject to regular quarterly reviews since its implementation in 1997. There have been regular user group meetings at which members of the Immigration and Legal Practitioners Association have attended along with a number of the existing users. Both postal recommendations from users and those raised at the user group meetings have been incorporated in subsequent reviews of the service. Any appropriate changes made are intended to reflect the views and wishes of the majority of the existing users.

Ross Cranston: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many third party users have taken advantage of the 24-hour turnaround postal service for urgent straightforward cases for third party users of the IND office in Croydon. [42497]

Angela Eagle: The 24-hour turnaround postal service operated by the Public Enquiry Office (PEO) of the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) based in Croydon currently has 235 registered users of the service.

Illegal Immigrants

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent discussions he has had with the French authorities about illegal immigrants invading Eurotunnel property; and if he will make a statement. [43032]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 14 March 2002]:* Illegal immigration through the channel tunnel is a problem shared by France and the United Kingdom (UK) and we are working closely to prevent unauthorised access both to the tunnel and its surrounding areas.

There have been no large-scale invasions into the Eurotunnel terminal at Coquelles since December 2001 but a number of incursions have recently been made into SNCF's adjoining rail freight yard at Frethun. The Government is extremely concerned about problems over security at the Frethun terminal and the effect this is having on freight traffic and UK businesses and trade.

My right hon. Friends the Prime Minister, the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions and the Home Secretary have all raised the problems at Frethun with their French opposite numbers. The French Government have now given a commitment rapidly to increase police presence at the Frethun site. For their part, the SNCF have embarked on a programme for improving security, representing an investment of £3 million, which includes new higher perimeter fencing with anti-intrusion devices, infra-red barriers, surveillance cameras, additional floodlights and a new surveillance post. These improvements aim to provide a similar level of security to that already put in place at the Eurotunnel site following earlier discussions. Joint work on the situation in Northern France and its underlying causes continues at both Ministerial and official level.

Public Figures (Protection)

Denzil Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate has been made of the total annual cost to the EU Budget of establishing a European network for the protection of public figures as proposed by the Kingdom of Spain in a draft decision (Brussels 29 January 2002) (S361/02). [42493]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The Spanish Presidency proposal for a council decision on a European Network for the Protection of Public Figures was not accompanied by a financial statement setting out the expected costs. Our own provisional assessment is that the proposal is unlikely to attract significant additional costs. Negotiations on the council decision are at an early stage and we do not expect the proposal to be discussed by Ministers before June 2002. The financial implications will be among the issues addressed by the United Kingdom delegation in the course of negotiations.

Internet (Racist Material)

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what further measures he is taking to prevent racist content on the internet. [42661]

Angela Eagle: The Government continue to apply the principle that the law should be applied to criminal material on-line as it is to material off-line. The Government condemn those who produce race hate material including those who seek to distribute this material via the internet. The Public Order Act 1986 already deals with a range of material, which is threatening, abusive or insulting and intended or likely to stir up racial hatred and can be applied to material on the internet that falls within our jurisdiction. The Government have strengthened the provisions of the 1986 Act in amendments made by the Anti-terrorism, Crime & Security Act 2001. This means the maximum penalty for those inciting racial hatred has risen from two to seven years' imprisonment. It is also now an offence to incite racial hatred against a racial group abroad. We have asked the police and the Crown Prosecution Service to work together to pool knowledge and experience in the investigation and prosecution of race hate material.

The Government are working in conjunction with the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) who provide a hotline for members of the public who wish to complain about racially inflammatory material they come across on the internet. If the material is potentially criminal the IWF will ask a British internet service provider to remove the material hosted by them.

The nature of the internet means that individual countries cannot counter this problem in isolation. That is why the United Kingdom is actively involved in discussions in the Council of Europe on a draft protocol to the Cybercrime Convention dealing with racist material on computer networks. The draft protocol, which is being considered by the Council of Europe states with the participation of the United States of America, Canada, Japan and South Africa, is designed to provide more effective judicial cooperation on racially inflammatory material between signatories to the protocol.

The United Kingdom is also involved in negotiations with our European Union partners on a draft framework decision on racism and xenophobia. The framework decision seeks to provide definitions of criminal racist offences and common penalties and includes draft provisions relating to racist material on the internet originating or hosted in an European Union country.

Anne Robinson

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the cost was to public funds of police protection for Ms Anne Robinson in Cirencester on 16 February; whether this cost was repayable by *(a)* Ms Robinson and *(b)* those who had invited her to Cirencester; and whether (i) Ms Robinson and (ii) those who invited her have offered to repay this cost. [40326]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* I understand from the Chief Constable of Gloucestershire that no specific request was made for police protection by Ms Anne Robinson or the organisers of the pro-hunting event that she attended in Cirencester on 16 February 2002. Gloucestershire police assigned a number of police officers to the event. Gloucestershire Police do not intend to claim costs from either Ms Robinson or the organisers of the event.

Capita

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list contracts awarded by his Department to Capita since 1997, including *(a)* start and finish date of contract, *(b)* value of contract, *(c)* description of work to be carried out, *(d)* evaluation mechanism for successful delivery of contract, *(e)* penalty charges for failure to deliver and *(f)* if penalty charges have been incurred; and if he will make a statement. [40487]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 5 March 2002]:* The Home Department has four contracts with Capita which are valued at £403 million. This includes a 10 year contract with the Criminal Records Bureau which is estimated to be worth £400 million over the term of the contract.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Civil Servants

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what was the *(a)* percentage and

number of rail journeys undertaken on first class tickets, *(b)* average cost of a first class journey by rail and *(c)* total cost of rail travel in each of the past four years broken down by grade of civil servant. [37497]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The percentage number and average cost of first class rail travel undertaken in my Department in each of the past four years is as follows:

	Percentage first class	*Number of rail journeys*	*Average cost per ticket £*
January to December 2001	80	25,156	135
January to December 2000	76	23,132	125
January to December 1999	74	27,211	95
August to December 1998	76	1,715	117

Information prior to contract start date 1 August 1998 is not available due to different systems in operation.

The total cost of rail travel broken down by grade of civil servant could be supplied only at disproportionate cost.

Departmental staff have a responsibility to give due consideration to cost when planning any official travel and extensive guidance is provided on how to get the best out of official travel. This guidance covers items such as method of travel, environmental impact and effective use of time.

Science/Engineering Students

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment she has made of the reasons for the change in acceptances of United Kingdom students to further education engineering courses over the past 10 years. [39529]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* Although there has been a decrease over the past 10 years in total acceptances to engineering courses, those for production engineering, for example, have been broadly maintained, and those for aeronautical engineering courses have increased. This reflects the pace of technological change. The Government have commissioned Sir Gareth Roberts to review the supply of high level science and engineering skills. A report is expected soon.

Pupil:Teacher Ratio

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the pupil to teacher ratio for maintained primary schools was each local education authority from 1979 to date. [42545]

Mr. Timms: The required information is readily available for 1979, 1984, 1989, 1994 and each year from 1996 to 2001, and is given in the following table.

Pupil:teacher ratio in maintained primary schools by local education authority area, position in January each year

	2001	*2000*	*1999*	*1998*	*1997*	*1996*	*1994*	*1989*	*1984*	*1979*
England	22.9	23.3	23.5	23.7	23.4	23.2	22.7	22.0	22.2	23.1
Avon[1]	—	—	—	—	—	23.3	23.1	23.6	23.9	24.2
Barking	23.6	22.9	23.2	23.1	22.7	22.4	22.1	21.2	21.7	22.3
Barnet	22.2	21.3	21.5	21.4	21.3	20.9	21.0	19.9	19.8	21.5
Barnsley	24.6	25.4	25.6	25.9	25.5	25.0	24.2	22.3	21.1	23.6
Bath and North East Somerset	22.4	22.7	23.3	23.0	22.4	—	—	—	—	—
Bedfordshire[1]	—	—	—	—	—	23.3	23.0	22.0	21.5	23.5
Bedfordshire[2]	22.9	23.5	23.8	23.8	—	—	—	—	—	—
Berkshire[1]	—	—	—	—	23.7	23.5	23.3	22.9	23.1	23.0
Bexley	24.5	24.6	24.5	25.3	24.8	24.8	23.5	22.2	24.5	25.1
Birmingham	22.5	22.7	22.7	22.8	22.7	22.7	23.3	23.5	22.9	24.0
Blackburn with Darwen	22.2	23.3	23.4	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Blackpool	23.7	24.7	25.1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Bolton	21.9	22.0	23.7	23.3	23.1	22.8	22.0	22.0	23.8	25.2
Bournemouth	23.3	24.7	24.9	25.7	—	—	—	—	—	—
Bracknell Forest	23.7	24.2	24.2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Bradford	21.9	23.1	23.1	23.9	23.0	22.3	21.3	19.6	20.5	20.9
Brent	22.3	22.0	21.9	21.5	21.9	21.7	22.0	21.3	18.3	18.7
Brighton and Hove	21.6	22.6	23.4	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Bristol, City of	22.5	23.4	23.9	23.3	23.0	—	—	—	—	—
Bromley	23.6	24.2	24.3	24.8	24.4	24.6	24.4	23.2	23.4	24.5
Buckinghamshire[1]	—	—	—	—	23.9	23.6	23.0	24.2	24.3	24.2
Buckinghamshire[2]	22.8	22.8	23.9	24.2	—	—	—	—	—	—
Bury	24.2	24.1	24.4	25.3	24.2	24.0	23.4	21.9	22.8	23.5
Calderdale	22.7	23.0	24.1	24.6	24.3	24.0	23.7	22.6	22.0	23.8
Cambridgeshire[1]	—	—	—	24.9	24.4	23.9	23.3	22.8	23.6	23.3
Cambridgeshire[2]	24.1	24.6	25.0	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Camden	20.9	21.0	20.5	20.2	20.0	20.3	20.5	—	—	—
Cheshire[1]	—	—	—	23.7	23.8	24.0	23.9	24.1	22.7	23.5
Cheshire[2]	22.9	23.3	23.9	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
City of London	14.7	14.3	14.1	14.3	13.9	13.9	15.0	—	—	—
Cleveland[1]	—	—	—	—	—	24.1	23.8	22.2	22.1	23.4
Cornwall	22.9	23.6	24.1	24.1	23.7	23.7	23.3	23.1	23.7	24.2
Coventry	22.7	23.1	23.0	23.9	23.6	23.3	22.7	22.4	22.1	22.7
Croydon	23.1	23.2	23.5	23.3	23.0	22.2	21.8	21.2	22.2	23.1
Cumbria	22.0	22.5	23.3	23.3	23.4	23.2	22.5	21.8	21.2	23.1
Darlington	24.5	24.4	25.4	25.2	—	—	—	—	—	—
Derby	23.7	24.2	23.8	25.3	—	—	—	—	—	—

Pupil:teacher ratio in maintained primary schools by local education authority area, position in January each year

	2001	2000	1999	1998	1997	1996	1994	1989	1984	1979
Derbyshire[1]	—	—	—	—	25.9	25.3	23.3	21.5	22.2	23.8
Derbyshire[2]	24.2	25.2	25.1	26.2	—	—	—	—	—	—
Devon[1]	—	—	—	24.6	24.1	24.0	22.9	23.2	23.6	24.3
Devon[2]	23.1	23.5	23.6	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Doncaster	23.8	24.2	24.7	24.5	24.4	24.3	23.5	21.3	20.7	22.2
Dorset[1]	—	—	—	—	24.6	23.9	23.4	23.1	23.5	23.7
Dorset[2]	22.7	23.2	23.7	24.2	—	—	—	—	—	—
Dudley	22.2	22.3	22.5	22.7	22.4	22.4	22.5	22.8	22.7	25.5
Durham[1]	—	—	—	—	24.1	24.0	22.9	22.1	22.7	21.5
Durham[2]	22.2	22.9	23.2	23.7	—	—	—	—	—	—
Ealing	23.1	22.8	22.9	22.8	22.5	22.7	21.3	19.5	19.2	20.4
East Riding of Yorkshire	24.7	24.9	25.7	25.5	—	—	—	—	—	—
East Sussex[1]	—	—	—	—	22.8	22.7	22.3	22.5	22.1	23.4
East Sussex[2]	22.7	22.4	23.8	23.3	—	—	—	—	—	—
Enfield	22.9	22.7	23.2	22.8	23.2	22.6	22.5	21.0	22.8	24.0
Essex[1]	—	—	—	23.5	23.0	22.6	22.8	22.5	24.1	24.8
Essex[2]	22.9	23.2	23.5	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Gateshead	21.4	22.2	22.6	22.5	22.3	22.3	21.6	20.6	18.8	21.2
Gloucestershire	22.3	23.4	23.6	23.7	23.6	23.4	22.5	22.3	22.9	23.4
Greenwich	21.4	21.4	21.9	21.4	21.1	20.9	21.0	—	—	—
Hackney	21.8	20.1	19.7	19.6	19.5	19.7	19.9	—	—	—
Halton	21.5	22.0	22.7	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Hammersmith and Fulham	21.1	21.1	21.4	21.0	20.5	20.3	18.9	—	—	—
Hampshire[1]	—	—	—	—	23.0	22.8	22.4	22.3	24.0	24.6
Hampshire[2]	23.0	23.6	23.6	23.6	—	—	—	—	—	—
Haringey	22.8	22.5	21.5	21.8	21.1	21.0	20.4	20.6	18.7	20.9
Harrow	21.9	22.3	21.6	21.5	20.7	20.8	20.5	21.9	20.9	22.1
Hartlepool	23.9	24.6	25.1	26.0	25.2	—	—	—	—	—
Havering	23.7	24.2	24.4	24.2	23.8	23.7	23.1	22.4	22.9	23.6
Hereford and Worcester[1]	—	—	—	23.9	23.2	23.2	22.2	23.4	25.1	24.2
Herefordshire[2]	22.5	22.8	23.0	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Hertfordshire	23.0	23.2	23.0	23.0	22.9	22.3	22.2	21.5	22.4	22.5
Hillingdon	24.0	23.1	23.2	23.4	22.6	22.3	22.1	22.0	22.2	23.0
Hounslow	22.2	21.9	22.0	21.8	21.5	21.6	21.1	19.8	19.7	21.9
Humberside[1]	—	—	—	—	—	24.7	24.3	22.2	20.9	22.1
Inner London Education Authority	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	18.3	17.3	18.7
Isle of Wight	21.6	22.1	22.4	22.9	22.6	23.2	22.3	22.9	23.6	23.9
Isles of Scilly	14.7	16.6	16.7	14.1	16.9	15.0	14.0	14.1	12.6	15.3
Islington	22.2	21.4	21.6	22.3	21.1	20.9	20.3	—	—	—
Kensington and Chelsea	20.6	19.4	19.1	18.4	17.7	17.8	17.7	—	—	—
Kent[1]	—	—	—	24.2	23.9	23.9	23.9	23.3	23.9	24.3
Kent[2]	23.4	23.7	24.1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Kingston Upon Hull, City of	23.8	24.4	25.6	26.1	25.5	—	—	—	—	—
Kingston-upon-Thames	22.6	24.1	24.3	24.1	23.9	23.8	23.5	21.8	22.3	22.1
Kirklees	22.4	22.9	23.3	24.2	23.8	23.3	22.1	20.9	22.5	23.6
Knowsley	23.4	23.8	24.0	24.4	23.8	23.5	23.5	21.0	21.6	23.4
Lambeth	20.8	20.4	20.5	20.4	19.8	18.6	19.1	—	—	—
Lancashire[1]	—	—	—	24.3	24.4	24.1	23.0	23.5	23.2	24.7
Lancashire[2]	23.6	24.1	24.1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Leeds	23.2	23.8	24.2	24.2	24.1	23.9	23.4	19.5	22.7	24.6
Leicester	22.7	22.7	22.6	23.6	—	—	—	—	—	—
Leicestershire[1]	—	—	—	—	23.5	23.3	22.5	22.8	22.5	23.3
Leicestershire[2]	23.2	23.4	23.6	23.8	—	—	—	—	—	—
Lewisham	21.3	21.5	20.9	20.7	20.6	20.1	21.5	—	—	—
Lincolnshire	23.9	24.7	24.6	24.1	23.9	23.6	23.3	23.1	24.1	23.7
Liverpool	22.3	22.7	23.1	23.5	23.6	23.5	23.4	20.9	20.9	21.1
Luton	22.9	22.3	22.6	22.7	—	—	—	—	—	—
Manchester	22.7	24.0	24.6	24.7	23.4	23.0	22.3	21.2	22.7	21.9
Medway	23.4	23.6	24.5	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Merton	21.9	22.1	22.6	22.0	21.7	21.5	20.2	21.0	22.1	22.2
Middlesbrough	23.4	24.0	24.6	23.7	—	—	—	—	—	—
Milton Keynes	23.3	23.7	24.4	24.3	—	—	—	—	—	—
Newcastle upon Tyne	22.9	23.5	23.2	24.1	23.9	23.8	22.9	20.7	18.4	18.7
Newham	24.5	24.7	25.4	24.4	24.3	23.9	24.3	21.4	20.6	21.4
Norfolk	22.1	22.7	22.7	22.5	22.3	22.3	21.9	22.2	22.3	22.8
North East Lincolnshire	23.4	23.9	24.9	25.9	25.0	—	—	—	—	—
North Lincolnshire	23.9	24.2	24.0	25.1	24.6	—	—	—	—	—
North Somerset	24.0	24.2	24.4	24.2	23.8	—	—	—	—	—
North Tyneside	22.9	23.4	24.1	23.9	23.9	23.9	23.1	20.3	19.2	21.1
North Yorkshire[1]	—	—	—	—	—	23.6	22.9	22.0	21.8	22.5
North Yorkshire[2]	22.5	23.4	24.0	24.1	23.5	—	—	—	—	—
Northamptonshire	22.9	23.6	24.1	24.0	23.5	23.4	22.6	22.9	22.1	24.4
Northumberland	22.8	23.5	24.1	24.8	24.5	24.6	24.3	22.5	23.3	23.4

Pupil:teacher ratio in maintained primary schools by local education authority area, position in January each year

	2001	2000	1999	1998	1997	1996	1994	1989	1984	1979
Nottingham	22.4	22.8	23.3	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Nottinghamshire[1]	—	—	—	24.9	24.8	24.3	22.9	21.0	21.1	24.7
Nottinghamshire[2]	24.0	24.5	25.0	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Oldham	23.7	23.8	24.4	24.7	24.4	23.7	22.9	22.0	23.1	25.2
Oxfordshire	22.3	23.3	23.8	24.0	23.6	23.3	21.5	22.7	23.9	24.2
Peterborough	23.0	23.2	24.2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Plymouth	23.4	23.8	23.9	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Poole	23.7	25.3	25.4	25.1	—	—	—	—	—	—
Portsmouth	22.7	23.1	23.5	23.6	—	—	—	—	—	—
Reading	23.2	23.1	23.6	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Redbridge	23.4	23.3	23.0	23.0	22.9	22.7	22.9	23.0	23.2	24.1
Redcar and Cleveland	24.2	23.7	23.7	24.4	24.3	—	—	—	—	—
Richmond upon Thames	21.9	22.5	22.4	22.2	21.7	21.3	20.6	20.6	20.7	22.2
Rochdale	23.7	24.0	24.7	24.6	24.7	24.4	24.3	21.9	22.4	22.9
Rotherham	22.5	23.2	23.8	24.1	24.0	23.2	21.3	21.1	22.0	24.0
Rutland	21.7	21.2	22.1	22.8	—	—	—	—	—	—
Salford	23.3	23.8	24.1	23.9	24.0	23.8	23.7	21.9	21.5	23.5
Sandwell	23.9	24.1	23.5	24.2	24.0	23.7	22.5	21.8	22.6	24.4
Sefton	22.4	23.2	23.4	23.6	23.2	23.2	23.2	23.0	22.6	23.6
Sheffield	23.2	23.2	22.9	23.2	23.3	22.9	22.4	20.9	20.2	21.8
Shropshire[1]	—	—	—	24.5	24.4	24.3	23.1	21.5	21.6	23.8
Shropshire[2]	22.8	23.4	24.1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Slough	23.0	22.0	22.9	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Solihull	23.0	23.5	23.6	24.7	24.0	24.1	23.3	22.7	23.0	23.5
Somerset	22.9	23.7	24.3	23.9	23.5	23.2	22.6	22.8	23.8	24.6
South Gloucestershire	23.4	24.0	24.2	24.5	24.2	—	—	—	—	—
South Tyneside	21.3	22.2	22.5	23.1	23.4	23.3	23.2	20.7	20.2	20.3
Southampton	22.4	22.7	22.7	23.1	—	—	—	—	—	—
Southend-on-Sea	23.5	23.4	24.0	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Southwark	22.5	22.5	22.0	22.0	21.8	21.7	22.4	—	—	—
St. Helens	22.9	23.2	23.6	23.2	23.3	22.9	22.0	22.4	22.6	23.8
Staffordshire[1]	—	—	—	—	24.9	24.9	25.1	23.0	22.3	23.2
Staffordshire[2]	23.7	24.3	24.5	25.1	—	—	—	—	—	—
Stockport	23.1	23.4	24.3	24.5	24.0	23.8	23.6	23.3	23.4	26.3
Stockton-on-Tees	23.1	23.3	24.1	24.6	24.2	—	—	—	—	—
Stoke-on-Trent	24.3	24.7	25.2	25.4	—	—	—	—	—	—
Suffolk	22.0	22.1	22.0	22.2	22.3	22.3	21.6	22.2	22.1	23.4
Sunderland	22.0	22.3	22.7	22.9	22.8	22.6	22.1	22.0	21.9	23.5
Surrey	22.8	23.2	23.0	22.8	22.3	22.0	21.8	21.0	22.5	21.9
Sutton	22.9	23.1	23.5	23.8	23.9	23.3	24.4	22.0	24.8	24.0
Swindon	24.0	24.2	25.0	25.1	—	—	—	—	—	—
Tameside	23.6	24.1	24.6	25.4	25.4	25.1	24.9	22.5	23.6	24.1
Telford and Wrekin	24.1	24.1	24.3	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Thurrock	22.8	22.8	23.9	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Torbay	23.7	24.5	24.9	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Tower Hamlets	21.7	21.0	21.7	20.8	20.7	19.5	18.0	—	—	—
Trafford	23.7	24.1	24.5	24.8	24.7	24.7	24.4	22.1	22.7	22.2
Wakefield	23.8	24.6	24.7	24.8	24.4	24.0	23.1	22.0	21.8	23.3
Walsall	24.1	24.1	24.0	24.5	23.7	23.4	22.4	20.9	20.8	22.6
Waltham Forest	23.0	22.5	22.8	22.4	21.7	21.4	21.9	21.8	20.9	22.4
Wandsworth	21.0	21.1	21.1	21.2	20.5	20.5	19.8	—	—	—
Warrington	23.1	23.8	24.2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Warwickshire	23.0	23.7	23.7	24.4	24.5	23.6	22.1	21.8	22.5	23.1
West Berkshire	22.5	22.4	23.1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
West Sussex	22.5	22.7	22.8	22.8	22.7	22.5	22.0	22.8	23.3	24.3
Westminster	20.5	18.9	18.6	19.0	18.6	18.4	17.6	—	—	—
Wigan	22.3	22.6	22.9	23.2	23.1	22.9	22.9	21.6	21.4	22.6
Wiltshire[1]	—	—	—	—	23.5	23.4	22.9	22.5	23.5	23.9
Wiltshire[2]	22.8	23.5	24.0	23.9	—	—	—	—	—	—
Windsor and Maidenhead	22.5	22.6	22.6	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Wirral	22.3	22.8	23.3	23.7	23.2	23.2	22.6	21.0	22.9	24.2
Wokingham	23.1	24.0	24.3	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Wolverhampton	22.4	22.7	23.2	23.0	22.4	22.5	21.3	19.8	19.3	21.1
Worcestershire[2]	22.9	23.9	24.2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
York	22.9	23.3	23.5	24.6	24.3	—	—	—	—	—

[1] Before local government reorganisation
[2] After local government reorganisation

Source:
Annual Schools' Census

Veterinary Science (Wales)

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many students from Wales study veterinary science in *(a)* England and *(b)* Scotland; and how many are Welsh speakers. [42656]

Margaret Hodge: The latest available data are shown in the table. Information on the number of these students who are Welsh speakers is not held centrally.

Welsh domiciled students on first degree veterinary science courses 2000–01

Location of study	*Number of students*
England	99
Scotland	24

Medical Schools

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many student places there have been at medical schools in the UK; and how many candidates applied for those places in each of the last five years. [42840]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 14 March 2002]:* The latest available information is shown in the table.

Students applying to pre-clinical medical courses in the UK

	Year of entry:				
	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Planned intake	5,020	5,062	5,165	5,595	5,928
Applicants[1]	12,076	11,807	10,972	10,226	10,231

[1] Home and overseas students applying via the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS).

University Students (Complaints System)

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what measures she is taking to introduce a UK-wide independent complaints system for university students. [43075]

Margaret Hodge: Universities UK have consulted the higher education sector on the establishment of an independent reviewer for student complaints once internal procedures have been exhausted. We are currently considering Universities UK's proposals. We wish to introduce an independent complaints system as soon as is practicable.

Educational Qualifications

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of working age people in the constituency of Buckingham hold a qualification at degree level or equivalent or above; and what the national average is. [43297]

Margaret Hodge: The latest available figures from the Local Area Labour Force Survey show that, in 2000–01, 29.8 per cent. of people of working age resident in the constituency of Buckingham held a qualification at degree level or equivalent or above, compared to 23.3 per cent. in Great Britain.

Schools Adjudicator

Mr. Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what powers she has to overturn a decision by the schools adjudicator where he has ruled that a school cannot increase its intake due to cost and proximity to another equivalent school. [43981]

Mr. Timms: Schools adjudicators are independent of the Secretary of State. She has no powers to overturn any decision made by them. Their decisions can be overturned only by the Courts.

Circulars

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the circular documents that have been sent by *(a)* the Office for Standards in Education, *(b)* the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority and *(c)* the Teacher Training Authority to (i) primary schools and (ii) secondary schools since 7 June 2001; and how many pages each document contained. [44080]

Mr. Timms: Information provided by Ofsted, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority and the Teacher Training Agency is as follows:

Ofsted

HMCI's Annual Report, 2000–01 (sent to all maintained schools in February 2002, 138 pages)

Key Stage 3 Strategy: Pilot Year 1 (sent to all secondary schools and special schools with secondary-age pupils in January 2002, 32 pages)

Good Teaching, Effective Departments (sent to all secondary schools in January 2002, 82 pages)

Improving Inspection, Improving Schools: Consultation Results (sent to all maintained schools in January 2002, 14 pages)

Providing for Gifted and Talented Children: An Evaluation of Excellence in Cities and other grant-funded programmes (sent to all maintained schools in December 2001, 52 pages)

Improving Inspection: Letter from HMCI (sent to all maintained schools in December 2001, 2 pages)

National Numeracy Strategy: Second Year (sent to all maintained schools in December 2001, 40 pages)

National Literacy Strategy: Third Year (sent to all maintained schools in December 2001, 52 pages)

Managing Support for the Attainment of Pupils from Ethnic Minority Groups (sent to all maintained schools in October 2001, 52 pages)

Improving Inspection, Improving Schools: Questionnaire (sent to all maintained schools in September 2001, 10 pages)

Improving Inspection, Improving Schools: Consultation on the Framework (sent to all maintained schools in September 2001, 20 pages)

Extending Work-related Learning at Key Stage 4 (sent to secondary schools in June 2001, 48 pages)

The Qualifications & Curriculum Authority

Advanced Extension award leaflets (sent to secondary schools in February 2002, 4 pages)

Schemes of work for citizenship at Key Stage 3 (sent to secondary schools in February 2002, 135 pages)

Circular 137, Arrangements to secure consistent standards across Key Stage 1 schools through the process of audit and verification of assessment results for statutory tasks and tests in 2002 (sent to relevant independent primary schools in February 2002, 1 page)

Circular 136, Key Stage 1, 2 and 3 Standards Reports and testbase 2001 CD (sent to all schools in January 2002, 1 page)

Circular 135, 2002 Key Stage 1 statutory tasks for English and mathematics (sent to schools with pupils in year 2 in December 2001, 95 pages)

Circular 121, National Curriculum in action: focus on pupils' work (sent to all maintained schools in December 2001, 1 page)

Circular 134, Implications for Teaching and Learning from the 2001 Key Stage 3 tests, in English, mathematics and science (sent to schools with year 9 pupils in November 2001, 7 pages)

Circular 133, Implications for Teaching and Learning from the 2001 Key Stage 1 tests in English and mathematics, and Key Stage 2 tests in English, mathematics and science (sent to schools with pupils in years 2 and/or 6 in November 2001, 11 pages)

Circular 132, 2002 Guidance on administering the years 7 and 8 tests (sent to schools with pupils in years 7 and 8 on 1 November 2001, 57 pages)

Circular 131, 2002 Key Stage 3 Assessment and reporting arrangements (sent to schools with pupils in year 9 in October 2001, 70 pages)

Circular 130, 2002 Key Stage 2 Assessment and reporting arrangements (sent to schools with pupils in year 6 in October 2001, 70 pages)

Circular 129, 2002 Key Stage 1 Assessment and reporting arrangements (sent to schools with pupils in year 2 in October 2001, 64 pages)

Circular 128, Schemes of work for citizenship at Key Stage 3 (sent to secondary schools in October 2001, 194 pages)

Circular 127, Data collection-monitoring of regulations allowing disapplication at Key Stage 4, 2001–02 (sent to maintained schools with pupils in years 10 and 11 in September 2001, 2 pages)

Circular 126, Managing curriculum 2000 for 16–19 students (sent to secondary schools in September 2001, 32 pages)

Circular 124, Statutory test dates for 2003 for Key Stages 2 and 3 (sent to schools with pupils in years 6 and/or 9 in July 2001, 2 pages)

Circular 123, KS3 and Y7 level thresholds, 2002 test dates (sent to schools with pupils in years 7 and 9 in July 2001, 11 pages)

Circular 122, KS2 and Y7 level thresholds, 2002 test dates (sent to schools with pupils in years 6 and 7 in July 2001, 18 pages)

Teacher Training Agency

Information about Special Educational Needs CD-ROM (sent to all schools in December 2001, 1 page).

Oxford Brookes University

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what consultations have taken place between her Department and Oxford Brookes university about the proposed closure of the university's courses in geology, civil engineering and geotechnics, mapping and cartography; and when she was informed of the proposed closures. [44081]

Margaret Hodge: No such consultation has taken place. The Secretary of State is aware of the proposed course closures, but these are matters for the university to determine, in discussion with the Higher Education Funding Council for England.

Learning and Skills Council

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the circular documents that have been sent by the Learning and Skills Council to *(a)* secondary schools and *(b)* colleges of further education; and how many pages each document contained. [44035]

Margaret Hodge: This is a matter for the Learning and Skills Council. I have therefore asked John Harwood, the Council's Chief Executive, to write to the hon. Member with the information requested and to place a copy of his reply in the Library.

Learning and Skills Councils

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the progress her Department has made in appointing basic skills specialists to local learning and skills councils. [38855]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* The Learning and Skills Act 2000 does not specify the detailed composition of either the national or the local councils. This was set out in "The Learning and Skills Council Prospectus" and included an expectation that LSC members would have experience of a wide range of issues.

The Secretary of State's grant letter to the LSC for 2002–03 set out the key priorities for the LSC in 2002–03, including taking responsibility for tackling the woeful legacy of poor basic skills. It asked the LSC to implement a strategy for raising the literacy and numeracy skills of 750,000 young people and adults by 2004.

There is at least one basic skills expert working for each local LSC but this does not imply expertise at council level.

Pupil Information

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) whether the group she identifies as young people at risk of becoming lost to the system includes children educated otherwise than at school; and whether she expects Pupil Level Annual Schools Census and the Connexions Service to capture all young people; [42133]

(2) what information is collected *(a)* through the Pupil Level Annual Schools Census and *(b)* through the Connexions service about children educated otherwise than at school; and by what statutory authority that information is collected. [42388]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* We do not consider all young people educated otherwise than at school to be at risk of dropping out of learning, although some may be vulnerable—for example those who have been excluded from school and are receiving home tuition.

We want to offer the Connexions Service to all young people, although they will not be compelled to use it.

The Learning and Skills Act 2000 enables LEAs to supply information to Connexions partnerships. Currently LEAs are the channel of communication between Connexions partnerships and those in home education. Information other than contact information is processed with the informed consent of the young person or parent where appropriate.

The Pupil Level Annual Schools Census currently covers pupils in maintained primary, secondary and special schools and city technology colleges only. It does not therefore cover all young people, and not children educated otherwise than at school.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether *(a)* maintained and *(b)* independent schools are required to collect information for the Pupil Level Annual Schools Census; and if she will list the information required. [42143]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* The Pupil Level Annual Schools Census (PLASC) became a statutory requirement for all maintained primary, secondary and special schools and city technology colleges from January 2002. Maintained and direct grant nursery schools, non-maintained special schools, general hospital schools, Pupil Referral Units and independent schools are required to submit a School Level Annual Schools Census (SLASC) return containing pupil information in the form of school totals only.

Under PLASC, the following information is collected for each pupil on the school's register on the Census day:

Unique pupil number (UPN)
Full name
Date of birth
Gender
Home postcode
Date of entry to this school
National curriculum year group
Full-time/part-time indicator
Boarder status
Nursery class/other class indicator
Ethnic group
Mother tongue
Free school meals eligibility
Special educational needs (i.e. stage on SEN Code of Practice scale)
Courses of study (for post-16 pupils only).

The following information is collected for each pupil permanently excluded from the school during the previous school year:

UPN
Date of birth
Gender
Date of exclusion
Ethnic group
Stage on SEN Code of Practice scale (at the time of exclusion).

Both PLASC and SLASC collect information in the form of school totals on teaching and non-teaching staff. PLASC also collects information on classes as taught at class level as a snapshot at a specified time on the Census day.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the schools which piloted PLASC under SI, 1999, No 989. [42334]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* The schools scheduled to pilot the Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC) under SI 1999 No. 989 were listed in schedule 1 to those regulations. A list of those schools has been placed in the Library.

Job Sharing

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) if she will make a statement on the extent of job sharing in her Department; [41046]

(2) how many and what proportion of the staff of her Department are *(a)* job sharing, *(b)* term working and *(c)* engaged in another form of flexible working. [42431]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) on 25 February 2002, *Official Report,* column 729W.

School Census

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what safeguards she will put in place to protect children whose names are collected in the School Census; [41813]

(2) for how long the School Census records will be kept with children's names on them. [41814]

Mr. Timms: Access to Pupil Level Annual Schools Census (PLASC) data including pupil names and unique pupil numbers (UPNs) is strictly limited to those technical staff for whom access is necessary in order to collate PLASC with data from other sources, as set out in my answer to the hon. Member on 5 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 237W.

Stringent safeguards are in place to prevent unauthorised access to pupil names or UPNs, which, once data collation is complete, will be held securely and separately from the data themselves. These safeguards will be kept continually under review in the light of guidance from the Information Commissioner.

Information about pupils remains of statistical value after they have left school—for example to analyse young people's progression from school into further education and training, higher education and the labour market. Pupil names will need to be retained in order to render such analyses possible. The Department will be using information on past pupils for statistical and research purposes only, and any disclosures will be for those purposes only. On this basis section 33 of the Data Protection Act allows personal data to be retained indefinitely.

Higher Education

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the purpose of higher education. [43644]

Margaret Hodge: The purposes of higher education are: to provide high quality teaching to a widening body of students; to undertake research and scholarship which competes with the best in the world; to transfer knowledge and understanding to the economy and the wider community for the benefit of all; and to sustain a culture which underpins our democracy and encourages critical thinking.

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment she has made of the proportion of children entering higher education whose

fathers are coal miners or former coal miners in the last 10 years; and what the average proportion is for the general population. [41798]

Margaret Hodge: The available information, showing participation by young people in higher education for each of the standard social class categories, is shown in the following table. Participation rates for individual occupations within these categories are not held centrally.

The Government are committed to raising the participation rates for people from less affluent family backgrounds, and has introduced Excellence Challenge, including the Aim Higher campaign, which is targeted at raising attainment and aspirations among young people who traditionally would not consider going to university.

Age participation index (API)[1] by social class
Great Britain 2000–01

Social class	*Percentage entering HE*
I Professional	76
II Intermediate	48
IIIN Skilled non manual	33
IIIM Skilled manual	19
IV Partly skilled	19
V Unskilled	14
All social classes	33

[1] The API is defined as the number of GB domiciled initial entrants to full-time and sandwich undergraduate HE aged under 21, expressed as a percentage of the average number of 18 and 19-year-olds in the population.

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what planned expenditure on higher education was in 1997 for the subsequent five financial years; and what the total outturn spending on higher education was in each of those years, including proceeds of tuition fees. [41832]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 8 March 2002]:* Publicly planned expenditure for higher education in England is set out in the annual grant letter issued to the Higher Education Funding Council for England.

£ million

	Publicly planned expenditure[1]	*Outturn*
1997–98	4,699	4,696
1998–99	4,884	4,894
1999–2000	5,203	5,133
2000–01	5,452	5,536
2001–02	5,853	[3] —

[1] Figures reflect grant letter announcements and include public and student contributions to tuition fees, ear-marked capital, allocations for access and widening participation paid via institutions, HE expenditure for the British Academy and directly funded DfES small programmes. They exclude funds paid to students for their maintenance support.
[2] Provisional.
[3] Figures not yet available.

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will state the proportion of those aged 18 to 30 participating in higher education *(a)* as calculated using the initial entry rate and *(b)* broken down to show the age participation rate for each year group. [43645]

Margaret Hodge: The initial entry rate (IER) for English domiciled 18 to 30-year-olds was 40 per cent. for 1999–2000, the latest year for which final student data are available. This is estimated to rise to 41.5 per cent. for 2001–02.

The individual year of age entry rates for 1999–2000 are shown in the table.

Age[1]	*Initial entry rate*[2] *Per cent.*
18[3]	20.0
19	9.5
20	2.5
21	1.5
22	1.0
23	1.0
24	1.0
25	0.5
26	0.5
27	0.5
28	0.5
29	0.5
30	0.5

[1] Age as at 31 August 1999.
[2] HE entrants in 1999–2000 as a percentage of separate age population; excludes entrants with previous HE experience and excludes courses of less than one year duration. Note that the individual rates are shown rounded to the nearest 0.5 per cent. and so do not add up to exactly 40 per cent. in the table.
[3] Includes a small number of entrants aged 17.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

City of London Corporation (Events)

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the functions, engagements and events which Ministers, her officials and advisers have attended which have been sponsored, funded, promoted and hosted by the City of London Corporation since 1997. [35706]

Mr. Morley: The information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Non-governmental Organisations

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list non-governmental organisations operating in the south-west region that receive public funds from her Department; and what amount of annual funding they received in the most recent year for which figures are available. [39188]

Mr. Morley: Records specifying the operational location of non-governmental organisations whose activities are supported by the Department are not held centrally. Constructing such information for the south-west region would involve disproportionate cost.

Special Urgency Provisions

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how often the Department has applied the special urgency provisions in paragraph 22 of Circular 18/84 (Development by Government Departments) to a development by the Department; and if she will make a statement. [38715]

Mr. Morley: The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs was only created in June 2001. This reply, therefore, covers the period from that date. This Department has never applied the special urgency provisions of Circular 18/84. This Department makes every effort to follow the usual local authority planning procedures when contemplating land or building developments. The special urgency provisions of Circular 18/84 would be invoked only as a last resort in the most urgent of cases.

Job Advertisements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the job advertisements placed by her Department in the last 12 months specifying where the advertisements were placed and the cost in each case. [39057]

Mr. Morley: The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs was created from the merger of other Departments (or parts of other Departments) in June 2001.

Recruitment is devolved to Personnel Points across the Department and the answer to the question could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Cartagena Biosafety Protocol

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to recommend that Britain ratify the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety; and when ratification will take place. [37526]

Margaret Beckett: Ratification of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety by the United Kingdom is partly dependent on legislative action at the European Community level. The European Commission has recently issued proposals for such legislation. The UK will press for early progress in negotiations on these proposals, so that we may be in a position to ratify the Protocol before the end of this year.

Countryside Alliance

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she next intends to meet representatives of the Countryside Alliance. [37924]

Mr. Morley: There are currently no confirmed meetings with the Countryside Alliance in my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's diary.

UK Waterways

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what percentage of the UK's waterways are owned by the landlords who own the surrounding land. [40705]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 5 March 2002]:* This information is not held by the Department. We do not keep records of land ownership alongside waterways, and the information is not readily available—some information might be held by navigation authorities but to obtain a complete picture it would be necessary to carry out land searches for up to 5,000 km of waterway.

Agricultural Products (Prices)

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the average *(a)* farmgate and *(b)* final consumer price of (i) beef, (ii) lamb, (iii) milk, (iv) cereal, (v) fruit and (vi) vegetable products in the United Kingdom in each year since 1990. [40818]

Mr. Morley: The following table shows estimated average prices paid by consumers for selected foods and the nearest equivalent average UK farmgate prices. The consumer prices reflect the price of imported foods as well as home-grown produce. They also reflect costs, value added and profit margins upstream from the farmgate.

All foods as purchased by consumers will differ to some extent from the ex-farm commodity. Milling wheat will be milled, mixed with other ingredients and further processed to produce bread; meat as retailed will have been de-boned, cut, trimmed of most fat and packaged; raw milk will be treated and fruit and vegetables will be graded and cleaned. These additional processes affect the validity of a direct comparison between the consumer and farmgate prices.

Consumer prices for selected foods and the farmgate price for the nearest equivalent agricultural commodity produced in the UK

Pence per kg. unless otherwise stated

Food (home-grown and imported) and Commodities (home-grown)	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
Beef and veal	432	448	445	476	476	488	485	497	487	491	483
Finished cattle (dcw)[1]	*190*	*191*	*196*	*229*	*218*	*220*	*189*	*173*	*154*	*165*	*160*
Lamb and mutton	349	343	378	410	419	415	441	473	429	450	469
Finished sheep (dcw)[1,2]	*175*	*148*	*182*	*219*	*237*	*236*	*283*	*239*	*193*	*180*	*196*
Liquid milk (pence per litre)	52	54	55	55	53	53	52	51	50	49	48
Raw milk (pence per litre)[3]	*18*	*20*	*21*	*22*	*22*	*25*	*25*	*22*	*19*	*18*	*17*
Bread	86	91	92	91	90	91	94	96	98	100	102
Milling wheat	*12*	*13*	*14*	*13*	*11*	*12*	*12*	*10*	*8*	*8*	*7*
Apples	99	114	109	91	100	103	111	112	111	111	112
Apples[4]	*39*	*42*	*25*	*27*	*32*	*34*	*39*	*42*	*39*	*31*	*30*

Consumer prices for selected foods and the farmgate price for the nearest equivalent agricultural commodity produced in the UK

Pence per kg. unless otherwise stated

Food (home-grown and imported) and Commodities (home-grown)	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
Potatoes	29	30	29	28	36	49	40	35	49	51	47
Potatoes	*10*	*9*	*8*	*6*	*13*	*19*	*10*	*7*	*12*	*12*	*9*
Cabbages	60	65	61	65	64	72	74	70	76	79	86
Cabbages[4]	*18*	*14*	*17*	*14*	*16*	*25*	*18*	*18*	*22*	*18*	*24*
Cauliflowers	73	95	85	97	97	113	105	103	102	101	98
Cauliflowers[4]	*24*	*25*	*20*	*22*	*22*	*28*	*24*	*23*	*22*	*22*	*24*
Leafy salads	155	155	156	165	160	171	183	204	223	236	244
Lettuce	*81*	*78*	*87*	*91*	*71*	*87*	*143*	*121*	*114*	*117*	*100*
Carrots	57	60	50	50	52	54	57	52	58	55	56
Carrots[4]	*22*	*12*	*11*	*12*	*15*	*20*	*12*	*12*	*16*	*12*	*15*
Cucumbers	137	126	128	129	114	139	130	125	128	125	129
Cucumbers	*55*	*49*	*54*	*57*	*60*	*77*	*62*	*57*	*51*	*46*	*54*
Mushrooms	260	264	274	269	269	278	278	270	278	266	269
Mushrooms	*147*	*153*	*147*	*148*	*152*	*160*	*161*	*158*	*160*	*155*	*170*
Tomatoes	140	144	131	130	134	131	141	134	148	162	173
Tomatoes	*67*	*58*	*52*	*59*	*68*	*58*	*74*	*54*	*59*	*57*	*69*

[1] Estimated price, dressed carcase weight equivalent.
[2] Excludes Northern Ireland.
[3] Including bonus payments.
[4] Crop year prices.

Notes:
1. Consumer prices are for Great Britain based upon expenditure and purchased volumes of home-grown and imported foods.
2. Prices in italics are farmgate prices for UK produce.

Sources:
1. National Food Survey annual reports.
2. Agriculture in the United kingdom 2000.
3. Basic Horticultural Statistics for the UK.

Accommodation Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the cost was of hotel accommodation for departmental staff working away from home in each of the last four years. [41056]

Mr. Morley: DEFRA was created in June 2001 so prior year figure work relates to the former Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food only. The cost of overnight accommodation for departmental staff working away from home in each of the last four years is indicated in the table.

Please note our system records the overall cost of overnight stays, which will include bed and breakfast establishments as well as hotels, and some other costs (e.g. breakfast) specifically associated with stays away from home.

Account description	*1998–99*[1]	*1999–2000*[1]	*2000–01*[1]	*April 2001– year to date*
UK night subsistence	1,178,360.93	1,167,163.29	2,088,876.19	20,703,332.13
Subsistence EC institution meeting	284,533.74	477,239.79	6,712.70	200,462.52
Subsistence other overseas visits	196,928.80	305,247.24	220,586.51	83,582.82
Total	1,659,823.47	1,949,650.32	2,316,175.40	20,987,377.47

[1] April to March

Note:
The rise in expenditure for 2001-year to date is a result of the costs incurred in respect of foot and mouth.

Rural Development Fund

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she is taking to press for a better deal from the EU Commission for the United Kingdom over the Rural Development Fund. [41357]

Alun Michael: Due to decisions taken by the last Government prior to 1997 and to the low historic spend in this sector, the UK's share of the rural development budget (3.5 per cent.) is disproportionately low when compared with its share of agricultural land in the EU (12 per cent.) and with the range of environmental and other problems currently faced by the UK. I am sure that the hon. Member will appreciate that decisions by the last

Government placed us in a weak position but that this Government's stronger position within Europe puts us in a position to raise these issues again.

CAP reform and increasing the financial resources going towards rural development are key aims for this Government. The mid-term review of the CAP provides us with the opportunity to press hard, not only for increased funds to be made available for rural development, but also to ensure the UK receives a fairer share of these funds.

Foliar Disease

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what information and guidance is issued by her Department to cereal growers on the *(a)* prevention and *(b)* control of foliar disease. [42249]

Mr. Morley: DEFRA continues to monitor and assess the risk from non-indigenous diseases and take action where they pose a serious threat to cereal crops.

DEFRA conducts annual surveys of indigenous cereal foliar diseases. These data are made available by DEFRA and help industry identify where control measures, particularly fungicides are justified. Research on major cereal diseases is funded by DEFRA to underpin improved crop management with reduced dependence on fungicides.

European Union Subsidies

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the future payment of European Union subsidies to farmers in euros. [42250]

Mr. Morley: The Government are committed to providing farmers with the option of receiving grant and subsidy payments in euro at the earliest practical opportunity, where they request this. We have considered the timing and practical requirements involved very carefully.

IT systems must be in place to deliver euro payments to farmers. A manual system, even to cope with a modest demand, would be extremely expensive and inefficient. In order to be able to make payments to farmers in euro as early as possible, the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) has included euro capability in the design for all of its system development. The devolved Administrations have programmed in similar work, as all CAP paying agencies must be able to deliver at the same time.

The euro payment service for farmers is expected to be in place by the end of 2004 when RPA and the devolved Administrations have developed the necessary systems.

Once a system for direct payments in euro is available, it is likely that farmers would be asked to commit three months in advance and to sign up for a minimum of a year. That would be in line with the system the RPA is currently running for paying traders in euro where they request it.

Supermarket Chains

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she has made to supermarket chains to encourage retailers to stock locally produced food; and if she will make a statement. [42251]

Mr. Morley: We are keen to see supermarkets stock more local produce. The issue of local sourcing has been discussed in meetings with individual supermarkets. Food from Britain, which we grant-aid, has also been encouraging the major supermarkets to introduce regional sourcing policies and most have done so.

Varroa Mite

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what action the Government have taken to tackle the varroa mite; and what estimate she has made of its prevalence in England. [42377]

Mr. Morley: The Government assist the UK beekeeping sector to deal with bee health issues, in particular varroa, through programmes costing around £1.6 million in 2001–02. Under these measures, the National Bee Unit (NBU), part of the Central Science Laboratory, provides a free diagnostic and inspection service to beekeepers in England as well as training and advice (including various publications, lectures, workshops and demonstrations) to help them become more self-reliant through improved bee husbandry. Training and guidance is regularly updated to reflect the latest research findings. The NBU also carries out routine screening for varroa resistant to authorised treatments.

Varroa is widely distributed in England. At least 5,000 infested apiaries have been confirmed since 1992, when the mite was first confirmed in the UK.

Sheep Exports

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many and what percentage of sheep exports from the UK to *(a)* France, *(b)* Germany and *(c)* the Netherlands have been refused entry since 1 October 2001. [42126]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* Commission Decision 2002/153/EC of 20 February 2002 has lifted the EU prohibition on live sheep exports from GB which has applied since 21 February 2001. As at 14 March 2002 no sheep have been exported from GB since 21 February 2001.

Northern Ireland has been able to export sheep since June 2001 during which time one consignment of 274 sheep, originating from Ireland but on a ship sailing from Belfast, has been refused entry to France. We are not aware of any sheep exports from Northern Ireland which have been refused entry to Germany or the Netherlands since 1 October 2001.

Ruminant Feed

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much ruminant feed was imported into the UK from *(a)* Belgium, *(b)* Germany, *(c)* Spain, *(d)* France, *(e)* Ireland, *(f)* Italy, *(g)* Luxembourg, *(h)* Portugal and *(i)* Finland in each of the last five years; and what proportion was found to be contaminated. [41918]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* Overseas trade statistics do not provide a specific category for ruminant feed. However, the table shows the level of UK imports of all animal feedingstuffs over the past five years:

Tonnes

Country	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Germany	146,838	103,785	190,198	230,633	221,313
Belgium-Luxembourg	223,981	164,620	159,800	117,670	81,065
Irish Republic	113,328	93,921	124,572	126,434	177,734
France	42,338	104,951	88,510	82,402	52,302
Spain	16,917	21,569	8,449	6,320	7,130
Portugal	10	2	—	10,851	21,440
Italy	6,062	4,689	2,180	1,063	4,612
Finland	745	65	69	108	683

Source:
HM Customs and Excise
Data prepared by Statistics (Commodities and Food) Accounts and Trade, ESD, DEFRA

Figures on the proportion of animal feed found to be contaminated over this period are not available, but, for example, no case of mammalian meat and bonemeal has been detected in ruminant feed under our national feed surveillance programme since August 1996.

New EU-wide measures (implemented domestically under the Processed Animal Protein Regulations from 1 August 2001) already control intra-Community trade and imports from third countries of a wide range of processed animal proteins, effectively preventing their inclusion in feed for farmed animals in order to stop the propagation of BSE.

In Great Britain, a national feed sampling programme has been in place since 1996 to monitor compliance with BSE-related feed controls. This programme, operated by the State Veterinary Service, typically takes around 20,000 samples per year from feed mills, on-farm mixers and other premises handling livestock feed. The results of the programme are very encouraging and indicate wide compliance with the feed controls, confirming that prohibited ingredients (from domestic or imported sources) are being effectively removed from the market, distribution channels and farms.

Of the 78,202 samples recorded to 6 March 2002 inclusive, 78,001 (99.74 per cent.) tested negative for prohibited proteins. The remaining 201 samples tested either positive or inconclusive. The SVS carry out a full on-site investigation to identify the cause of each positive or inconclusive result. A positive result does not necessarily indicate a breach of the feed ban as the testing mechanism detects the presence of some proteins in feed even where the presence of the protein product is lawful.

Plant and Meat Imports

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 229W, on plant and meat imports, what proportion of checks between November 2000 and October 2001 were for *(a)* commercial and *(b)* personal purposes; and if she will break down the illegally imported products since April 2001 by category. [41972]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* Of the 19,140 checks referred to undertaken at Border Inspection Posts, the majority related to checks on commercial consignments of meat and meat products which have to be declared to the port health authorities for clearance. We are aware that included within this figure will be a few checks which were undertaken on personal imports, but the data is not held in a way that the information on the personal imports can be extracted.

A breakdown of the 1,142 seizures taken from personal baggage could be provided only at disproportionate costs.

Sporting Rights (Grants)

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will provide a breakdown by district of revenue received by the Forestry Commission in the last 12 months, by way of grants for sporting rights. [42680]

Mr. Morley: The subject of the question relates to matters undertaken by Forest Enterprise. I have asked its Chief Executive, Dr. Bob McIntosh, to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Bob McIntosh to Mr. Simon Thomas, dated 18 March 2002:

I have been asked to reply to your question addressed to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs asking if she will provide a breakdown, by Forest District, of revenue received over the last 12 months from the leasing sporting rights.

The figures you have requested are as follows:

	£
East Anglia	55,000
Forest of Dean	24,500
Kielder	19,000
New Forest	13,000
North West England	6,000
North York Moors	40,000
Northants	25,000
Peninsula	57,000
Sherwood	18,500
South East Anglia	28,500
West Midlands	41,000
Total income	327,500

If you require any further information please let me know.

Public Appointments

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many appointments to public bodies have been made through her Department *(a)* from April 2000 to March 2001 and *(b)* since 31 March 2001; and how many of these were (i) men and (ii) women. [42159]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 12 March 2002]:* The numbers of men and women appointed, or reappointed, by Ministers in this Department to bodies sponsored by this Department during the periods in question are as follows:

	1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001	*1 April 2001 to 28 February 2002*
Men appointed	235	96
Women appointed	78	44

Agriculture Council

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether a Scottish Executive Minister will be a member of the UK delegation to the forthcoming Agriculture European Union Council of Ministers' meeting on 18 and 19 March; and what information is being provided by her Department to guarantee effective pre-council scrutiny by the European Committee of the Scottish Parliament. [42687]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 12 March 2002]:* There are no plans for any Scottish Executive Minister to attend the Agriculture Council in March. It is the responsibility of the European Committee of the Scottish Parliament to scrutinise the Scottish Executive's involvement in preparations for EU Council meetings. These arrangements are a matter for the Committee and the Scottish Executive. My Department provides information to Scottish Executive officials as part of that process.

Tail Docking

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to ensure that the docking of dogs' tails is regulated; and if she will make a statement. [42631]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 12 March 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) on 11 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 796W.

Electric Goods Disposal

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the availability of treatment systems to disassemble waste electrical and electronic equipment. [42597]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 12 March 2002]:* The European Community Directive on Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) is still in draft.

At present, the UK collects more WEEE than the forthcoming Directive is likely to require. There are adequate facilities for processing existing disposals of WEEE through a wide range of re-use facilities, treatment sites and shredder operations licensed or registered exempt through the Environment Agency. These include community based refurbishment initiatives for household electrical items, scrap metal processors who take in white goods and shredders which take a range of WEEE in addition to white goods.

There have been new facilities established recently to deal with specific types of WEEE, such as the reprocessing of fluorescent tubes, refurbishment of personal computers and mobile telephones. Several of these newer operations undertake the disassembly of any equipment which cannot be refurbished for re-use in order to re-use components or to minimize cross-contamination during the recycling of different types of material.

Ruddy Duck

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many ruddy ducks have been killed in Britain since the beginning of the campaign to eradicate them. [39534]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 12 March 2002]:* No decision has yet been taken on whether to undertake a campaign to eradicate the ruddy duck in the United Kingdom. However, as part of the Government's control trial to test the feasibility of eradicating the UK's population of ruddy duck within 10 years, a total of 2,558 ruddy ducks have been culled.

Regulatory Impact Unit

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many members her Department employs in its Regulatory Impact Unit; and if she will make a statement. [42931]

Mr. Morley: Four people work full time in the Better Regulation Unit. The Unit is supervised by a member of the Senior Civil Service who is also engaged on other duties.

It is the job of Departmental Regulatory Impact Units to establish and promote the principles of good regulation in their departments. The staff work closely with the officials responsible for developing policies within their Department, the Cabinet Office's Regulatory Impact Unit and the Small Business Service. They focus on those regulations that impact on business, charities, and the voluntary sector.

Complaints

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many complaints were registered against her Department and its predecessor Departments in *(a)* 1990 to 1996 and *(b)* 1997 to 2002; how many are current; and what proportion were (i) taken up and (ii) upheld by the Parliamentary Ombudsman in this period. [42903]

Mr. Morley: The table shows up-to-date information from records in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for the number of citizens charter complaints received since 1995.

Citizens charter complaints received by MAFF and DEFRA[1]

	1995–96[2]	*1997–2002*	*Total*
Number of citizens charter complaints[3]	23	141	164
Current citizens charter complaints	0	3	3
Number of citizens charter complaints referred to PCA[4]	1	4	5
Number of citizens charter complaints upheld by PCA	0	0	0

[1] Prior to the creation of DEFRA, the Department for the Environment, Transport and the Regions did not maintain a record of complaints that were referred to its central office for citizens charter issues. A manual count of DETR's complaints cannot be conducted without disproportionate effort. Before it became part of DEFRA, the Hunting Policy Unit of the Home Office did not receive any complaints.

[2] Before the establishment of the citizens charters for Government Departments, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food did not have a central unit for co-ordinating responses to complaints. As a result, DEFRA cannot co-ordinate statistics for complaints prior to 1995 without disproportionate effort.

[3] DEFRA's central unit for citizens charter complaints deals with all complaints addressed to DEFRA's complaints adjudicator. Centralised records do not exist for complaints addressed directly to individual divisions, and so DEFRA cannot co-ordinate figures for these without disproportionate effort.

[4] These figures do not include complaints made directly to the PCA. The total number of complaints that the Parliamentary Ombudsman investigated are in his annual reports.

Litter (Fines)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 5 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 901W, on littering, how many people in the UK were prosecuted in each of the last five years; and in how many cases they were convicted. [43324]

Mr. Meacher: In 1996 there were 626 people prosecuted and 468 of those were convicted for littering offences, in 1997 there were 505 prosecutions with 352 convictions, in 1998 there were 494 prosecutions with 377 convictions and in 1999 there were 501 prosecutions with 390 convictions. There are no central data held prior to 1996.

Dog Fouling

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 5 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 902W, on dog fouling, how many complaints were received by *(a)* Buckinghamshire county council and *(b)* Aylesbury Vale district council regarding fouling; and how many fines were imposed nationally. [43322]

Mr. Meacher: Data on the number of complaints received by individual councils are not collected centrally by DEFRA. The number of fines imposed nationally for dog fouling during 2000–01 was 1,961.

Livestock Markets

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what financial support is being provided to assist owners of livestock markets to re-open. [43016]

Mr. Morley: There are no plans to offer financial support from the public purse to livestock markets, which are commercial operations.

Fluoride

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what investigation she has made of the cost of corrosion damage to water providers in *(a)* fluoridated and *(b)* unfluoridated areas. [42973]

Mr. Meacher: The maximum permitted concentration of all fluoride in public water supplies is 1.5 mg per litre of water. The effects of public water supplies on water companies' pipes are normally measured by the water's pH although there are other factors. In general, the lower the pH value, the higher the level of corrosion. Legislation specifies two compounds of fluorine which water companies may add to public supplies at the request of area health authorities. The compound that companies would normally add is hexafluorosilic acid. This is a corrosive substance and care must be exercised when it is delivered, in bulk, to water treatment works. There is, however, no measurable change in the pH of fluoridated or unfluoridated water, on leaving the treatment works, and therefore no reason to suspect that fluoridated water is more or less corrosive in the distribution system.

Forestry

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps her Department is taking to meet the Government's Forestry Strategy commitments to sustainably managed woods. [43603]

Mr. Morley: Our approach and commitment to sustainable woodland management is set out in the 1998 UK Forestry Standard. The England Forestry Strategy describes our priorities and programmes for forestry in England. Our aim is to ensure that all of England's woodlands are sustainably managed. We give advice to private woodland owners to encourage them to manage their woodlands sustainably and support for this is given through the Woodland Grant Scheme. All applications for assistance under this scheme must meet the criteria set out in the UK Forestry Standard.

The Forestry Commission has been awarded the World Wide Fund for Nature's Gift to the Earth Award in recognition of the key role they played in progressing independent certification of sustainable forest management in the UK through development and delivery of the UK Woodland Assurance Standard. The UK is the only country where the entire state forest area has achieved credible certification to an independent standard recognised by the Forestry Stewardship Council.

We recognise the need to monitor UK woodland and to take corrective action when necessary. The UK Forestry Standard explains how we will achieve this through a combination of scientific study and national surveys. We are committed to publishing results and to continue developing the Standard in the light of experience.

Veal Crates

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the occasions since 1997 when Ministers or officials have made representations to the EU Commission and other member states on the abolition of veal crates. [43833]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 15 March 2002]*: No such representations have been made. Council Directive 97/2/EC of 20 January 1997 imposed an EU wide ban on veal crates which will come into full effect from 31 December 2006.

Ian Stillman

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions she had concerning Ian Stillman during her visit to India of 11 February. [43907]

Mr. Morley: None.

Hedges

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures there are to encourage farmers to use hedges as boundaries on their land. [43044]

Mr. Meacher: Our Countryside Stewardship and Environmentally Sensitive Areas schemes provide financial incentives for planting, restoration and management of hedgerows on farmland. DEFRA also

funds free initial conservation advice for farmers, provided on our behalf by the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group and ADAS, including on the management of hedgerows for their wildlife, landscape, amenity and historical value.

Air Conditioning

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures were taken by her Department to ensure that the consultant advising on the installation of air conditioning during the recent equipping of the new departmental building in Temple Quay, Bristol was aware of the Government's policy on the use of hydrofluorocarbon refrigerants in air conditioning; and if she will make a statement on the measures taken by the consultant to source practical and safe alternatives to hydrofluorocarbon-based air conditioning. [41179]

Dr. Whitehead: I have been asked to reply.

Temple Quay is a developer led project. Their consulting engineers applied their own sustainability policies to the project and were apprised of the Government's policy on the use of HFC refrigerants.

In addition, one of the key elements of the Department's original brief to the developer and architect was that Temple Quay House must have a BREEAM rating of 'excellent'. One of the items that helped to achieve this rating was subsequently to specify refrigerants with an ozone depletion potential of zero.

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the Public Service Agreement targets which have been revised and those which have been introduced since the publication of the 2001 departmental report. [43262]

Mr. Morley: When the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) was created in June 2001 an interim Public Service Agreement with a total of 14 targets was drawn up. These 14 targets comprised all eight of the MAFF PSA targets together with six targets covering environmental issues from the DETR PSA. The DEFRA interim PSA will remain extant until the end of this spending period.

The interim PSA targets are listed on our website at www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/busplan/01psa.htm.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the Public Service Agreement target to reverse the long-term decline in populations of farmland birds by 2020. [43117]

Mr. Morley: This Department has a number of existing policy measures which will help to achieve the PSA target, not least the continuing expansion of our agri-environment schemes under the England Rural Development Programme. We are hopeful that this year's national rollout of arable Countryside Stewardship options, based on a successful pilot scheme, will prove particularly beneficial for farmland birds. An assessment carried out last year of the underlying trend showed that the decline was slowing down and we are expecting an updated assessment shortly. However, the reasons for the decline in farmland bird numbers are complex and we have commissioned research from the British Trust for Ornithology, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and Oxford University to help us identify more precisely what needs to be done to ensure delivery of the PSA target.

Shellfish Industry

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in what circumstances compensation is available to workers in the shellfish industry if they are unable to pursue their livelihoods. [42699]

Mr. Morley: This Department does not operate any schemes of compensation for workers in the shellfish industry.

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment her Department has made of the economic and employment consequences of the outbreaks of atypical diarrhetic shell fish poisoning in *(a)* the Thames Estuary, *(b)* the Wash, *(c)* Whitstable, *(d)* the Menai Straits and Anglesey, *(e)* the Bury Inlet and *(f)* Strangford Lough. [42698]

Mr. Morley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to him on 14 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 647W.

Farmed Fish

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent representations she has received regarding farmed fish; and if she will make a statement. [41693]

Mr. Morley: We have received representations recently on matters relating to the management, marketing and welfare of farmed fish.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to seek to reform the law in respect of farmed fish; and if she will make a statement. [41692]

Mr. Morley: The Diseases of Fish (Control) (Amendments) (England and Wales) Regulations 2002 (SI 2002 No.284), which came into force on 10 March 2002, provide for revised control measures to be taken on any farm in England and Wales where there is suspicion or confirmation of certain fish diseases. The regulations implement in England and Wales the provisions of Council Directive 2000/27/EEC of 2 May 2000.

We are planning to amend the Fish Health Regulations 1997 (SI 1997 No.1881) to reflect restoration of the Great Britain approved zone in respect of the fish diseases infectious haematopoietic necrosis and viral haemorrhagic septicaemia following adoption of Commission Decision 2000/188/EC of 17 February 2000, and to make changes in the way fish farmers should maintain fish movement records.

Welfare of Laying Hens Directive

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many meetings her Department had with *(a)* scientists and *(b)* vets prior to agreement of the Welfare of Laying Hens Directive 1999/74/EC. [41232]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* Interested parties, including scientists and vets were consulted during the course of the negotiations on the directive.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will ensure that in implementing the Welfare of Laying Hens Directive 1999/74/EC the requirements in the United Kingdom are the minimum laid down in the Directive. [41413]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* It is intended that the Welfare of Laying Hens Directive will be implemented in England without being added to in any way. Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland will follow suit. If changes are proposed there will be a full public consultation.

Freshwater Fisheries

Dr. Jack Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the objectives are of the Environment Agency BRITE proposals; what effect she estimates they will have on the resources devoted to all aspects of freshwater fisheries; and if she will make a statement. [41231]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* BRITE (Better Regulation to Improve the Environment) is an internal Environment Agency reorganisation with the broad objectives of improving effectiveness of delivery, achieve regulatory consistency and integrated management of the environment. The agency expects these changes to improve the environmental outcomes from existing stakeholders by reallocating existing resources. The water resource aspects of BRITE, which include fisheries, have yet to be considered by Ministers.

Dr. Jack Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will set out the Government's response to Recommendations of the Freshwater Fisheries Review; how far the Government's position is informed by the BRITE proposals of the Environment Agency; and if she will make a statement. [41233]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* I refer my right hon. Friend to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, South (Mr. Jones) on 20 December 2000, *Official Report*, columns 205–08, in which I outlined the Government's response to the independent report of the Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries Review Group. A copy of the Government's formal response can be found in the Library.

The Government require the Environment Agency to use its resources in a cost-effective manner. Although the potential impacts of the BRITE (Better Regulation to Improve the Environment) proposals as they affect fisheries have yet to be considered by Ministers they are expected to be consistent with that overall aim.

Eggs

Mr. Curry: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she will make of the impact on the competitiveness of the UK industry in relation to other EU egg producers in deciding whether to permit the enriched cage system of production under EU Welfare of Laying Hens Directive 1999/74/EC. [41491]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 8 March 2002]:* English implementing legislation will permit all the systems of production detailed in the Welfare of Laying Hens Directive 99/74/EC. If changes are proposed there will be a full public consultation.

Mr. Curry: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what information she has collated on which EU countries have indicated that they will *(a)* permit and *(b)* not permit the enriched cages system of egg production when the EU Welfare of Laying Hens Directive 1999/74/EC is introduced. [41492]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 8 March 2002]:* No country is proposing an immediate ban on "enriched" cages. Germany proposes to ban them from 2012. Belgium and the Netherlands are considering following suit. As far as we are aware all other member states will permit "enriched" cages subject to a review of the directive in 2005.

Mari Geni

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether the fishing vessel, Mari Geni, has been decommissioned. [42389]

Mr. Morley: The Department has received confirmation that the Mari Geni has now been decommissioned.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to whom the track record of the fishing vessel, Mari Geni, has been transferred. [42375]

Mr. Morley: The arrangements for the transfer of track record under the 2001 fishing vessel decommissioning scheme for England were set out in the answer given to the hon. Member on 27 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1358W. Information on individual transfers is confidential to the parties concerned.

Foot and Mouth

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answers of 7 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 481W, on foot and mouth, when the record of local authority prosecutions will be made available; and if she will make a statement. [43129]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 14 March 2002]:* The Department makes an annual Return of Prosecutions made under the Animal Health Act 1981. This is due to be laid before Parliament by 27 March. However, the return does not specify the nature of each prosecution but provides a statistical report on the number of prosecutions taken under the Act. Prosecutions taken during the foot and mouth outbreak could have been taken under a number of different Orders (i.e. the Foot and Mouth Order 1983 or the Animal By-Products Order 1999) or under the Act. Due to difficulties encountered this year in collecting this information, the return for October 2000 to September 2001 may not be complete.

The results of the exercise we are conducting with the Local Authority Co-ordinating Body on Food and Trading Standards (LACOTS) to compile a complete record of prosecutions (mentioned in my previous answer) may be presented in a future Return of Prosecutions. Alternative methods of making this information publicly available are under consideration. Given the number of local authorities from which information is required, I cannot say when this information will finally be available. We will, however, seek to complete the exercise as soon as possible.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answers of 7 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 481W, on foot and mouth, if the farm premises where obstruction of Government inspection took place was found subsequently to have been infected with foot-and-mouth disease. [43130]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 14 March 2002]:* The farm concerned was not confirmed as an infected premises.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the cost has been of the programme of laboratory testing of samples taken from animals suspected of carrying foot and mouth disease since 19 February 2001; and if she will make a statement. [42372]

Mr. Morley: The laboratory testing programme for Foot and Mouth Disease is estimated to have cost approximately £22 million.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she published an itemised cost list of the Epynt carcase and ash burial and incineration site in Powys opened for animals slaughtered under the foot and mouth disease control measures; how many animals have been interred at the Epynt burial site *(a)* in the form of carcases and *(b)* following incineration; and if she will make a statement. [42373]

Mr. Morley: We are unable to give final cost figures for Epynt mass burial site at this time. Invoices submitted by contractors for work carried out on the site are currently the subject of verification and substantiation by forensic accountants and claims surveyors retained by this Department.

(a) 18,000 carcases were originally buried at the site but all have since been exhumed and burned on the pyre site.

(b) Ash resulting from carcase burning at the Epynt pyre site has been removed for disposal in landfill.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the cost has been of the operation to *(a)* recover the carcases and ashes of animals buried at the Epynt foot and mouth disease disposal site, *(b)* restore the immediate environment following reclamation and *(c)* monitor the wider environment for pollution and contamination. [42374]

Mr. Morley: We are unable to give cost figures for Epynt mass burial site at this time. Invoices submitted by contractors are currently the subject of verification and substantiation by forensic accountants and claims surveyors retained by this Department.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what was the cost incurred in Wales by the use of vets in relation to the recent foot and mouth outbreak. [41313]

Mr. Morley: The cost of employing Local Veterinary Inspectors and Temporary Veterinary Inspectors to deal with the foot and mouth outbreak cannot be broken down in the way requested by the hon. Member.

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if he will make a statement on the mechanisms used to publicise the Make Your Views Known consultation which will be fed into the foot and mouth inquiry. [41333]

Mr. Morley: This is a matter for the Lessons Learned Inquiry. I understand that the Framework Document, setting out the details of this consultation, was published on the Inquiry web site on 14 December 2001 and circulated to a wide range of stakeholders. The deadline for written submissions was Friday 15 March 2002.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many inquiries are being undertaken by her Department into suspected cases of fraud in relation to the handling of the foot and mouth epidemic; and if she will make a statement. [41217]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 7 March 2002]:* There are currently eight cases in England, related to the Foot-and-Mouth epidemic and involving allegations of financial irregularities in relation to claims for compensation and/or invoices for services, which are subject to criminal investigation by my Department. Additionally, three completed investigations are under consideration by lawyers to determine if prosecution is appropriate, and criminal proceedings have been initiated in one case.

Substantive allegations of fraud will be fully investigated, but it would be inappropriate for me to comment further in respect of current investigations.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on her Department's decision to issue a press release 75/02 on 26 February on the suspected case of foot and mouth at a farm near Hawnby, North Yorkshire; what information was issued by her Department to the local authorities controlling the situation at the local level concerning the Department's intentions; and if she will make a statement. [41686]

Mr. Morley: Press release 75/02 was issued in line with the Department's commitment to openness. It was important that we informed interested parties, via the media, that the 8 km animal movement restrictions had been imposed around the farm at Hawnby, the first time this had happened since 30 September.

I understand that the media had become aware of the incident shortly before the release was issued and were in contact with the Leeds COI press office requesting information. It is important that the Department does what it can to assist factual reporting and informing the public by issuing information in the public interest.

We co-operated fully with North Yorkshire county council on the imposition of movement restrictions and the revocation of any movement licences. We did not formally discuss our intention to issue a press release with the council although council officials were aware that a press release would be issued.

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether she and her Ministers will give evidence to the European Parliament's Committee of Inquiry on Foot and Mouth. [41359]

Mr. Morley: Ministers and officials are ready to meet the Temporary Committee if this would be helpful. We have not yet received formal invitations.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list those studies she has undertaken to investigate the impact on agricultural ancillary industries when a case of suspected foot and mouth is under investigation by her Department; what assessment she has made of the effect on ancillary industries of the nature of media reporting of suspected cases of foot and mouth disease; and if she will make a statement. [41687]

Alun Michael: DEFRA commissioned a survey of 2,445 businesses in six mainly rural districts of England (Carlisle, Eden, West Devon, East Devon, North Norfolk and Mid-Suffolk) to investigate the economic impacts of foot and mouth disease (FMD). It was undertaken during September 2001. The survey investigated the economic impacts of FMD on selected rural economies in regions which have been affected to varying degrees by FMD.

The key findings of this report were included in the report of the Rural Task Force, published in October 2001 and entitled "Tackling the Impact of Foot and Mouth Disease on the Rural Economy".

The Government responded in December 2001 when I published "England's Rural Future". It is difficult to see how studies could be carried out in the way suggested by the hon. Lady.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what reports she has *(a)* requested and *(b)* received from other public bodies regarding the handling of the foot and mouth epidemic; and if she will place copies of the reports in the Library. [40581]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 5 March 2002]:* It is for the independent Lessons Learned inquiry to make recommendations as to the way in which the Government should handle any future major animal disease outbreak. However, I have received a number of reports from organisations, including Devon county council, Shropshire county council and Northumberland county council. These reports have been placed in the public domain by these organisations.

Honey

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what action the Government have taken to tackle European foul brood disease; and what estimate she has made of its prevalence in England. [42378]

Mr. Morley: The Government assist the UK beekeeping sector by funding a range of measures to protect bee health, costing around £1.6 million in 2001–02. In England, the bee health programme costs some £1.3 million annually, and is administered by the National Bee Unit (NBU), part of the Central Science Laboratory.

European foul brood (EFB) is a notifiable disease under the Bee Diseases Control Order 1982. All new suspected cases have to be reported. In 2001, 816 colonies in 350 apiaries in England were found to be infected with EFB. Colonies too heavily infected to respond to treatment are destroyed. Lightly infected colonies are treated with antibiotic by field inspectors of the NBU.

In addition, NBU has been conducting trials for the long-term control of the disease without the need for destruction of bees. The results to date are encouraging. The Department is also funding research under its Horticulture LINK programme to develop a method of biological control of EFB. The NBU also provides regional and national training in good husbandry, disease recognition and control for all beekeepers in England.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what action she is taking *(a)* to promote British honey and *(b)* to publicise the safety and quality of the British product; [42382]

(2) what action she plans to promote the sale of locally produced British honey direct from beekeepers. [42383]

Mr. Morley: The promotion of locally produced British honey is a matter for the industry itself. However, honey producers are able to benefit form the trade development and marketing services provided by the regional food groups which the Department supports through Food from Britain. Honey producers may also be eligible for grants under the England Rural Development Programme (ERDP). Two measures are of particular relevance to them. These are the Rural Enterprise Scheme measure on the marketing of quality agricultural products, which provides largely non-capital grants for marketing initiatives, and the Processing and Marketing Grant which provides capital grants for processing and marketing facilities. These grants are run competitively on a regional basis.

The safety and quality of British honey is a matter for the Food Standards Agency.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what proportion of honey sold in the UK is imported; and what proportion comes from China. [42381]

Mr. Morley: The table shows UK supply and imports of honey between 1999 and 2001. It also shows the proportion of total UK imports that came from China during this period.

Tonnes

	1999	*2000*	*2001*
UK supply	26,299	25,514	27,603
Total imports	23,181	24,108	25,279
Total imports as a percentage of UK supply	88	94	92
Imports from China	10,900	11,044	10,640
Imports from China as a percentage of total imports	45	46	42

Source:
HM Customs and Excise and DEFRA Supply Balance Sheets

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what steps her Department has taken in the last five years to destroy honey that has been found to have a significant risk of being contaminated by antibiotics and other dangerous substances; [42380]

(2) what checks are made on imported honey to ensure it is free of contaminations. [42379]

Mr. Morley: All consignments of products of animal origin, including honey, currently imported from third countries into the UK are subjected to a documentary check of the veterinary certification and an identity check to match the goods to the certification. A percentage of consignments are also subjected to a physical check, which may include organoleptic checks, temperature checks and laboratory tests for pathogens or contaminants. In the case of honey 50 per cent. of consignments are so checked.

Where import checks reveal that any product of animal origin does not comply with Community import conditions it is rejected or destroyed. Figures relating to products destroyed are not kept centrally.

The Veterinary Medicines Directorate has been sampling honey on sale since 1995. No samples contained residues of antibiotics or other substances which posed a significant risk to consumers. Therefore, no honey was required to be destroyed. All results have been reported in the VMD Annual Report on Residue Surveillance and its quarterly newsletter, MAVIS.

Following a recent European Commission inspection visit to China, which revealed concerns about antibiotic residues, the EU has banned the importation of all animal products from China with effect from 13 March 2002. As a result the FSA carried out tests on a number of samples of Chinese and blended honey on sale in the UK. They found that most contained antibiotic residues, but at a level which scientific experts do not consider poses a risk to public health.

Refrigerants

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures her Department has taken to encourage *(a)* producers and *(b)* distributors of not-in-kind refrigerants to tender for contracts for the refurbishment of Government buildings; and what (i) communications and (ii) meetings officials of her Department have had with prospective not-in-kind suppliers. [41183]

Mr. Meacher: The Department's Greening Government website provides advice to both civil servants and suppliers on a whole range of environmental issues including the use of refrigerants. The Green Guide for Buyers for example calls for the specification of systems free of refrigerants that deplete the ozone layer and, where it is safe, cost effective and technically feasible to do so, also free of substances that have a high global warming potential. The website has been widely promoted at conferences and in journals. It's URL is "http://defraweb/environment/greening/gghome.htm". Our estate managers do not hold meetings with prospective "not-in-kind" suppliers, preferring to leave this to our consultants and contractors who possess the necessary expertise. However, policy officials did meet several suppliers of 'not-in-kind' refrigerants during 2001.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will indicate what her understanding is of whether sections of Article 1 of EC Regulation 2037/2000 as agreed on 29 June 2000, apply to ozone-depleting substances used in refrigerator door insulation material. [39995]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 18 March 2002]:* The UK Government's interpretation of Article 1 of EC Regulation 2037–2000 is that it sets out the scope of the legislation and lists the substances that it controls, as well as making clear that it applies to the production, importation, exportation, placing on the market, use, recovery, recycling and reclamation and destruction of these substances. This includes those used for the blowing of insulating foam for refrigeration equipment and to certain activities relating to products and equipment containing those substances.

Dioxin Formation and Emission

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what guidance is given to operators of waste incinerators on ways of reducing dioxin formation and emission; [34520]

(2) if she will make a statement on the controls on waste incinerators which are intended to reduce dioxin formation and emission. [34521]

Mr. Meacher: Design and operational techniques for minimisation of dioxin formation and emission at waste incinerators are detailed in the Integrated Pollution Control Waste Incineration Guidance Note S2 5.01 issued by the Environment Agency in 1996.

Important factors in these techniques include temperature, combustion gas turbulence conditions and the time the waste materials spend in the combustion process.

The Agency is currently updating this guidance note and I understand that an early consultation draft has been placed on the Agency's website.

Correspondence

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) when she will given a substantive answer to the question from the hon. Member for the Isle of Wight, ref. 12919, tabled on 6 November, relating to HF Holidays; [17803]

(2) when a substantive reply will be made *(a)* to HF Holidays' letters to her of 20 June and 27 July 2001, *(b)* to the letter to her from the hon. Member for the Isle of Wight dated 15 August 2001 and *(c)* to questions on these letters by the hon. Member for the Isle of Wight tabled on 6 and 23 November 2001; when he will correct the answer to the hon. Member for the Isle of Wight dated 17 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 147W, which referred to a different constituent and a different subject; and if she will make a statement on the cause of her delay in responding. [33713]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 5 February 2002]:* My right hon. Friend the Minister of State for Rural Affairs responded on 26 February to the letters of 20 June and 27 July 2001 from HF Holidays and the hon. Member's letter of 15 August 2001.

I apologise for the time taken to respond to these letters.

Flooding

David Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what proposals the Environment Agency has to alleviate flooding in the Ironbridge Gorge. [41428]

Mr. Morley: Operational responsibility for flood management measures rests with the local operating authorities, normally the Environment Agency (EA) and local councils, who decide which projects to promote and their timing. I understand that the EA has just completed a pre-feasibility study into 'traditional' flood alleviation options for Ironbridge Gorge but has not identified one that would be economically worthwhile. I understand that the EA is continuing to consider 'innovative' options which may offer some alleviation from the impact of small flooding events.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she plans to publish the report on flood funding arrangements. [33899]

Mr. Morley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 13 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 512W.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what financial assistance is made available by the European Union to assist member states in the provision of coastal and inland flood defences. [43599]

Mr. Morley: No significant financial assistance is made available by the European Union to assist member states in the provision of flood and coastal defences.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to secure provision of flood risk cover for residential properties after February 2003. [42959]

Mr. Morley: The Government are maintaining close links with the insurance industry to help achieve the mutual aim of ensuring the continued availability of affordable flood cover as widely as possible after the end of the year. Ministers and officials in the Treasury and DEFRA have already held several meetings with the Association of British Insurers and further discussions are planned.

Together with the flood defence operating authorities, we are reducing the risk of flooding and are communicating this to the insurance industry. We are reducing the risk through substantial increases in investment in flood and coastal defences (which now totals over £400 million a year). Flood defences are being repaired, renewed, maintained and improved. Flood warning arrangements are continually being improved. The Government have issued strengthened guidance to local planning authorities on control of development in flood risk areas, and are reviewing the financial and institutional arrangements under which the flood defence service is delivered.

We are working with the Environment Agency in helping develop a shared understanding with the insurance industry of the true risks of flooding in particular areas, taking account not only of the indicative flood plain but also the current and future provision of flood defences.

Farming and Food

Tony Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what funds will be provided for the implementation of the Farming and Food report. [41354]

Mr. Morley: We are currently assessing the financial implications of taking forward the Policy Commission's recommendations. Decisions on the funding to be made available to implement the recommendations that fall to Government will, in the main, be made as part of the 2002 Spending Review. It would not be appropriate to prejudge the Spending Review settlement, which is expected in July, but the Department will want to target resources to achieve the best most cost effective outcome.

Tony Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the timescale will be for implementing the recommendations of the Farming and Food report. [41353]

Mr. Morley: The Commission's report will make a substantial contribution to a new strategy for sustainable food and farming, which we aim to launch in the autumn. We will work with a wide range of stakeholders to determine how best to take forward the Commission's ideas and deliver positive changes on the ground. As responsibility for addressing the Commission's recommendations rests with industry and other organisations as well as Government, we will be looking for their active involvement. Before Easter we will publish a steering document which will inform and guide this and launch the stakeholder engagement process.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the interests registered by the *(a)* chairman and *(b)* members of the Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Foods. [42252]

Mr. Morley: Registered interests of the chairman and members of the Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food are as listed. They can also be found on the website www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/farming. The list registers interests relevant to the work of the Commission.

Sir Donald Curry CBE

Remunerated work and directorships

Vice-chairman (non-executive), NFU Mutual Insurance Co Ltd.

Commissioner, Crown Estate

Chairman (non-executive), North Country Primestock

Director (non-executive), Scottish Agricultural College

Director (non-executive), Chitty Food Groups

Land, property and shareholdings

Owner, residential properties in Newcastle and Rothbury, Northumberland

Shareholder, BT

Shareholder, Friends Provident

Shareholder, Tyne Grain

Shareholder, North Country Primestock

Shareholder, Hexham Auction Market

Other interests

Chair (non-executive), At Home in the Community

Council Member,

Royal Agricultural Society of England

Member, National Farmers' Union

Member, Farmers' Club

Helen Browning OBE

Remunerated work and directorships

Director, Eastbrook Farms Organic Pigs Ltd.

Director, Eastbrook Farms Organic Meat Ltd.

Director, Food Ethics Council

Consultancy, Meat and Livestock Commission

Consultancy, Agriculture and Environment Biotechnology Commission

Consultancy, Sustainable Development Commission

Speaking fees from various organisations principally on organic farming and marketing.

Land, property and shareholdings

33 per cent. of Manor Farm, East Grafton, Wiltshire

Shareholder, Dairy Crest

Shareholder, Genus Ltd.

Shareholder, Organic Milk Suppliers' Co-operative

Shareholder, Friends Provident

Eligible producer, Residuary Milk Marketing Board.

Other interests

Chair, Soil Association

Chair, Food Ethics Council

Member, Royal Agricultural Society of England

Member, Country Land and Business Association

Member, Tenant Farmers' Association

Member, Farm and Wildlife Advisory Group

Member, the Farmers' Club

Member, Rare Breeds Survival Trust

Member, Schumacher Society

Member, Institute of Directors

Member, National Federation for the Self-Employed.

Sir Peter Davis

Remunerated work

Chief executive, J Sainsbury plc

Board Director, Union Bank of Switzerland

Land, property and shareholdings

(with Lady Davis) properties in Hertfordshire, London and France

(with Lady Davis) trustees of a family trust that owns a property in North Wales

Shareholder and share option-holder, J Sainsbury plc.

Other interests

Chairman, Business in the Community

Member and trustee, Trearddur Bay Sailing Club

Vice president, Marketing Council

Vice president, Chartered Institute of Marketing

Fellow, Marketing Society

Member, Agricultural Forum

Member, Policy Issues Group, Institute of Grocery Distribution

Member, Garrick Club

Iain Ferguson QC

Remunerated interests

Senior vice-president, Corporate Development, Unilever plc/NV

Land, property and shareholdings

Owner, property in Guildford, Surrey

Shareholder, BT

Shareholder, BG

Shareholder, Lattice

Shareholder, BAE Systems

Shareholder, Marconi

Shareholder, GlaxoSmithKline

Shareholder, Cable & Wireless

Shareholder, Lloyds TSB

Shareholder, ATL plc

Shareholder, HBOS plc

Shareholder, Unilever plc

Shareholder, Unilever NV

Other interests

Director, British Nutrition Foundation

Director, Food and Drink Federation

Director, Rothamsted Research Station

Member, the Farmers' Club

Member, the Caledonian Club

Deirdre Hutton CBE

Remunerated work

Chair, National Consumer Council

Vice-chair, Scottish Environmental Protection Agency

Non-executive director, Financial Services Authority

Commissioner, Sustainable Development Commission

Land, property and shareholdings

Shares in Sainsburys

Shares in Tesco

Shares in Unilever

Other interests

Member, Better Regulation Task Force

DeAnne Julius

Remunerated work

Non-executive director, Bank of England

Non-executive director, Lloyd's TSB (from 1 October 2001)

Member, National Learning and Skills Council

Land, property and shareholdings

Owner, house in Surrey and apartment in Verbier (Switzerland)

Shareholdings (through mutual funds and directly) in the following companies:

BTG; British Airways; Shell; Pearson; United Business Media

Other interests

Visiting Professor, University of Durham

Member, Royal Institute of International Affairs

Member, Institute of Development Studies

Member, Royal Economic Society

Member, Advisory Board, Centre for the study of Globalisation and Regionalisation, Warwick University

Fiona Reynolds CBE

Remunerated work and directorships

Director-General, National Trust

Other interests

Trustee, Green Alliance

Trustee, Institute for European Environmental Policy

Vice-President, Council for National Parks

Governor, Canterbury Primary School

Mark Tinsley

Remunerated work and directorships

Managing director of P.C. Tinsley Ltd.

Chairman, Elgro Ltd.

Chairman, Nene Potatoes Ltd.

Non-executive director, Greens of Soham Ltd.

Non-executive director, Freshtime UK Ltd.

Non-executive director, Winters Lane Storage Ltd.

Land, property and shareholdings

Shareholder of P. C. Tinsley Ltd., farming 500ha in Lincolnshire Shareholder of Spearhead International Ltd.

Shareholder (through P. C. Tinsley Ltd.) in the following companies:

Elgro Ltd.; Holbeach Marsh Co-operative Ltd.; Nene Potatoes Ltd.; Agricultural Central Trading Ltd.

Other interests

Member, Boston Tennis Club

Member (through P. C. Tinsley Ltd.) of the following organisations:

LEAF Assured Produce; Assured Combinable Crops; National Farmers' Union

Political interests

Member, Conservative party

Member, Commercial Farmers' Group

David Varney

Remunerated work and directorships

Chairman, mmO, plc

Lattice pension

Land, property and shareholdings

Owner, residential property in Bourne End, Bucks.

Shareholder, Anglo American plc

Shareholder, Astra Zeneca plc

Shareholder, Barclays plc

Shareholder, British Land Company plc

Shareholder, BOC group

Shareholder, CGNU plc

Shareholder, Compass Group plc

Shareholder, Cable & Wireless plc

Shareholder, Diageo plc

Shareholder, Granada Compass plc

Shareholder, GlaxoSmithKline plc

Shareholder, Hays plc

Shareholder, 3I group plc

Shareholder, Marks & Spencer plc

Shareholder, Nycomed Amersham plc

Shareholder, Provident Financial plc

Shareholder, Royal Bank of Scotland plc

Shareholder, Railtrack plc

Shareholder, Tesco plc

Shareholder, Vodafone plc

Shareholder, Lattice Group plc

Shareholder, Shell Transport

Other interests

Vice chairman, Council of Surrey University

Vice president, Oil Industry Club

Trustee, Bright Red Dot Foundation

Member, Royal Automobile Club

Member, Institute of Directors

Member, Chairman's Club

Member, Institute of Energy

Member, Institute of Petroleum

Member, Institute of Gas Engineers

Member, Institute of Management

Member, Institute of Personnel & Development

Member, Advisory Committee, DEMOS

Graham Wynne

Remunerated interests

Chief Executive, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds

Other interests

Member, Sustainable Development Commission

Trustee, BirdLife International.

Cattle and Sheep (Devon)

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will remove the interim measures on the movement and sale of cattle and sheep in Devon. [43509]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 15 March 2002]:* The Interim rules for livestock movements, which my noble Friend, the Lord Whitty announced on 5 February 2002, allow greater flexibility for farmers to move their animals. However, there is a low but very real risk that there are still hidden pockets of live virus on a few premises or circulating at a low level in a handful of sheep flocks. This could be reactivated if animals are under stress, for example during lambing, so precautionary controls need to be kept in place.

A copy of the Veterinary Basis for the Interim measures has been placed in the Libraries of the House and is available on the DEFRA website. The measures are expected to remain in operation until November 2002. However, we expect to be able to relax some aspects of the regime during the course of the year if there is no further outbreak.

Sheep Transportation

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the maximum time period sheep can be held on board a ship during a live transport is. [42128]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* Ships used to transport live sheep must comply with Directive 91/628/EEC, as amended, on the protection of animals during transport. The vessel must be fitted to carry livestock, with access to feed and water and meet required space allowances. If these conditions are met the statutory maximum journey times do not apply. There is therefore no maximum time period that sheep may be held on board a ship during transport, provided they are not caused injury or unnecessary suffering. Time spent by a livestock vehicle on a roll-on roll-off ferry counts towards the statutory maximum journey time.

Energy Efficiency

Linda Gilroy: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answers of 26 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 409W, and 3 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 97W, on energy efficiency, when she will publish the overall percentage improvements in energy efficiency to 31 March 2001 as reported to her Department by energy conservation authorities in England. [39007]

Mr. Meacher: I hope to publish this information before the Whitsun recess.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the number of households in *(a)* Birmingham, *(b)* the west midlands and *(c)* England which meet the criteria for assistance under the home energy efficiency scheme. [38303]

Mr. Meacher: At the time of the announcement, it was estimated that some 4 million households in England would be eligible for the new home energy efficiency scheme (HEES)—households with children in receipt of an income-related benefit and people receiving a disability benefit. Around 3.7 million households were estimated to be eligible for New HEES Plus—for people aged 60 or over who receive an income-related benefit.

Data are not available centrally on eligible households in Birmingham and the west midlands.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Theft and Fraud

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his estimate is of the cost of theft and fraud to *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies in each of the last four years. [27987]

Malcolm Wicks: We are taking determined steps to combat internal fraud. We have published an internal fraud policy that sets out staff responsibilities, and appointed a senior accountable officer and a supporting central probity team. There are also security specialists and staff to investigate suspected internal fraud vigorously when it arises. We know that the overwhelming majority of staff are completely honest and trustworthy, and instances of internal fraud are not common, but we remain vigilant. We employ our 100,000 staff so these cases represent a small fraction of our work force.

The Department for Work and Pensions was formed in the current financial year.

The available information on the former DSS is in the table.

	1997–98		*1998–99*		*1999–2000*		*2000–01*	
	Number of cases	*Loss £*	*Number of cases*	*Loss £*	*Number of cases*	*Loss £*	*Number of cases*	*Loss £*
Benefits Agency	[1]—	918,790.47	112	430,780.04	139	389,874.73	65	44,309.65
Departmental Directorates	[1]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	11	—
War Pensions Agency	[1]—	0	—	0	1	1,500.00	2	3,583.67
Child Support Agency	[1]—	57.27	9	417.99	12	8,950.38	6	9,200.00
Contributions Agency	[1]—	2,572.00	6	1,824.00	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—
DSS HQ	[1]—	0	—	0	1	8,317.00	[4]—	[4]—
IT Services Agency	[1]—	20,959.00	15	10,942.00	8	8,325.00	[5]—	[5]—
Total for DSS	189	942,378.74	142	443,964.03	161	416,967.11	84	71,112.34

[1] Not available.
[2] Departmental Directorates were formed in 2000.
[3] Contributions Agency transferred to the Inland Revenue with effect from 1 April 1999.
[4] DSS HQ was subsumed into Departmental Directorates in 2000.
[5] ITSA is now ITSG and no frauds were returned for 2000–01.

The available information on the Employment Service, as recorded by the former Department for Education and Employment, is in the table.

	Number of cases	*Loss £*
1997–98	12	97,242.00
1998–99	36	54,107.01
1999–2000	16	45,621.83
2000–01		3,023.20

Benefit Systems

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what changes he proposes to introduce before the introduction of pensioner credit in regulations affecting the assessment of entitlement to housing benefit, council tax benefit and income disregards; and if he will give example calculations of the effect of these changes. [28379]

Malcolm Wicks: We are proposing to make a number of changes to housing benefit and council tax benefit as a result of the new pension credit. I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Pound) on 7 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1124W.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the total external spend by his Department was on Private Finance Initiative consultants in each of the last four years; how many full-time equivalent consultants were employed over this period; how many billed consultancy days there were per year; what the implied average cost of each PFI consultant

was; how many consultancy firms were used by his Department over this period; and if he will make a statement. [31045]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Department does not record information about the use of PFI consultants in the form requested and an answer could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Pensioners

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women have neither paid national insurance contributions nor received credits for pension purposes, in each year since 1979. [32614]

Mr. McCartney: The available information is set out in the table:

Number of people, of working age, who have neither paid National Insurance contributions nor received credits for pension purposes in each year since 1979—United Kingdom

Thousand

	Men	*Women*	*Total*
1979	245	6,668	6,913
1980	305	6,466	6,771
1981	351	6,363	6,715
1982	388	6,210	6,598
1983	421	6,058	6,479
1984	468	5,849	6,317
1985	510	5,622	6,133
1986	548	5,418	5,966
1987	626	5,264	5,889
1988	696	5,119	5,815
1989	808	4,981	5,789
1990	926	4,911	5,837
1991	1,028	4,998	6,025
1992	1,125	4,982	6,107
1993	1,213	4,947	6,160
1994	1,288	4,779	6,067
1995	1,390	4,674	6,064
1996	1,652	4,679	6,331

Notes:

1. Figures are taken from a 1 per cent. sample so are subject to rounding error and are rounded to the nearest thousand.
2. Figures exclude those not registered on NIRS in each year (particularly affecting women in the early years of this analysis and those aged 18–21).
3. In defining credits autocredits, invalid care allowance credits, local office credits, unemployment credits and starting credits have been included.
4. The numbers of women is thought to have decreased over this period due to the increased involvement of women in the labour market. The numbers of men may have increased because of an increase in the number of older men inactive within the labour market.
5. Figures are not available after 1996 because of the change in the NIRs system—national insurance recording system.

Source:

Figures are taken from the Lifetime Labour Market Database (LLMDB), extracted from the national insurance recording system (NIRS).

Hywel Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the estimated weekly income was of *(a)* a single pensioner and *(b)* a pensioner couple who are on 60 per cent. of median income in the last year for which figures are available. [41880]

Maria Eagle: The information requested is in the table.

Money values of 60 per cent. of median household income threshold for pensioners for the financial year 1999–2000 (in December 2000 prices)

£

	Net disposable weekly household income	
	Before housing costs	*After housing costs*
Single pensioner	104	81
Pensioner couple	171	147

Notes:

1. All figures are estimates and are taken from the Households Below Average Income (HBAI) data set which is derived from the Family Resources Survey (FRS). The FRS does not include Northern Ireland. 1999–2000 is the latest year for which data is available.
2. The estimates are presented on both a Before Housing Costs (BHC) and an After Housing Costs (AHC) basis in line with HBAI conventions.

Hywel Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what percentage of *(a)* single pensioners and *(b)* pensioner couples are expected to have incomes of less than 60 per cent. of median income for each year between 2002 and 2010. [41882]

Maria Eagle: The information is not available.

Hywel Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what percentage of *(a)* single pensioners and *(b)* pensioner couples had incomes of less than 60 per cent. of the median income in the last year for which figures are available. [41881]

Maria Eagle: The information requested can be found in the publication "Households Below Average Income 1994/95–1999/2000", a copy of which is held in the Library.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the proportion of *(a)* men and *(b)* women who will reach state pension age in 2002 with entitlement to a full basic state pension based on their own contributions and if he will provide corresponding estimates for (i) 1992, (ii) 1982 and (iii) 1972. [32617]

Mr. McCartney: At 31 March 2001, 85.6 per cent. of 65-year-old men in receipt of a state retirement pension were getting a full basic state pension based on their own contribution record. The corresponding figure for 60-year-old women was 22 per cent. We would expect these proportions to remain broadly similar in 2002.

Historic data are not available in the required format to estimate the corresponding proportions for 1992, 1982 and 1972.

Mr. Mudie: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pensioners there are in East Leeds; how many are in receipt of the minimum pension guarantee; and what average amount is paid to pensioners in East Leeds. [40850]

Maria Eagle: As at 30 September 2001 there were 14,700[1] retirement pension recipients in the parliamentary constituency of Leeds, East. At November 2001, there were 3,400[2] minimum income guarantee claimants in the parliamentary constituency of Leeds, East. The average amount of minimum income guarantee paid to these claimants is £50.81.

Source:

[1] Pension Strategy Computer System, 30 September 2001

[2] Income Support Quarterly Statistical Enquiry, November 2001

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions under what circumstances two *(a)* married and *(b)* cohabiting pensioners could separately claim the proposed pension credit. [42956]

Malcolm Wicks: Two married pensioners will be able to receive pension credit separately if they are no longer living together as husband and wife. In practice, if one or both are living permanently in a residential care or nursing home they will be able to receive pension credit separately.

Two single pensioners will only be treated as a couple if they are living together as husband and wife. In these circumstances they will be treated in the same way as a married couple.

State Pension

Mr. MacDougall: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans his Department has to review the state pension system. [42398]

Maria Eagle: We have consulted extensively on both the state and private pension systems since we launched our pensions review in 1997. Our proposals for reform were set out in the Green Paper Partnership in Pensions published in December 1998 and this was followed by further consultations on specific issues, including our proposals for the new pension credit.

Our pensions strategy is to combat poverty among today's pensioners, and to help future pensioners build up a good second pension to ensure a decent income in retirement.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many *(a)* male and *(b)* female UK residents experienced a reduction in basic state pension on reaching retirement age on account of insufficient contributions in each of the last five years. [42634]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 13 March 2002]:* The information is not available in the format requested.

Recently retired pensioners receiving less than full basic pension in Great Britain—September 2001.

Males—38,300

Females—120,600

Notes:

1. The figures are rounded to the nearest hundred.

2. All data from 5 per cent. samples are subject to sampling error.

3. Recently retired have been taken as men aged 65 and women aged 60.

4. Category A pensions only have been used for this analysis.

Source:

5 per cent. sample from the pension strategy computer system at 30 September 2001.

Stakeholder Pensions

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Newark (Patrick Mercer) of 4 March 2000, *Official Report*, columns 22–23W, on stakeholder pensions, what plans he has to ensure the remaining 20 per cent. of employers who have not complied with the requirement to offer a stakeholder scheme, do so. [41694]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 8 March 2002]:* 5,090 employers were recorded as designating a stakeholder scheme in January. The latest available figures show that up to the end of January 2002 a total of 316,811 employers had designated a stakeholder pension scheme for their workforces. This is over 85 per cent. of the number estimated to be obliged to do so.

The regulation of compliance with the stakeholder pension scheme workplace access requirement is a matter for the Occupational Pensions Regulatory Authority (Opra).

Opra will take proactive action to identify non-compliant employers later in the year having given employers a reasonable time to become familiar with their new responsibilities.

Benefits

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people are in receipt of *(a)* disability living allowance, *(b)* attendance allowance and *(c)* incapacity benefit in (i) Gloucestershire and (ii) the Stroud constituency. [34421]

Maria Eagle: The information is in the table.

Numbers of disability living allowance, attendance allowance and incapacity benefit recipients at 31 May 2001.

Number of people in receipt of:	*Gloucestersh ire*	*Stroud Constituency*
Disability living allowance	14,500	2,100
Attendance allowance	12,800	2,400
Incapacity benefit	8,600	1,400

Note:
Incapacity benefit figures do not include "credits only" cases where benefit is not in payment.
Source:
ASD information centre: 5 per cent. data. Figures are rounded to the nearest hundred.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many claimants for incapacity benefit appealed against the determination of their claim in each of the last three years for which figures are available; and what percentage of the appeals were successful *(a)* in whole and *(b)* in part. [40786]

Maria Eagle: It is not possible to split the number of appeals into those which are wholly or partially successful. The available information is in the table.

	Caseload (000)	*Appeals lodged*	*Cleared at hearing*	*Found in favour*	*Percentage found in favour*
1 January 1999–31 December 19999	2,275.3	60,505	68,130	27,605	40.5
1 January 2000–31 December 2000	2,286.2	51,320	41,445	16,740	40.4
1 January 2001–30 November 2001	2,337.8	46,485	31,900	13,330	41.8

Note:
Figures for 1 January 2001–30 November 2001 are provisional.
Figures were only available until 30 November 2001.
All figures are subject to changes as more up to date data becomes available.
Lodged and found in favour figures are rounded to the nearest five.
IB figures are taken from a 5 per cent. sample and exclude a small number of cases held clerically.
IB caseload figures are expressed as 1,000s are rounded to the nearest 100.
Source:
100 per cent. download of the Generic Appeals Processing System
Incapacity Benefit and Severe Disablement Allowance Quarterly Summary Statistics, August 2001.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer of 8 January 2000, to my hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison), *Official Report*, column 681W, on the "Do Not Redirect" scheme, how many local authorities have implemented the Royal Mail "Do Not Redirect" scheme; and what the Government's definition is of unsatisfactory take-up. [35314]

Malcolm Wicks: 367 of the 409 local authorities administering housing benefit use the official "Do Not Redirect" scheme representing 90 per cent. of the total. Some other authorities have established similar schemes locally with Royal Mail. We are keen to see all authorities using "Do Not Redirect" and both the Department and the benefits fraud inspectorate will continue to encourage the remaining authorities to do so.

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans the Government have to initiate reform of the housing benefit system, with particular reference to the single room payment. [33009]

Malcolm Wicks: We have a strategy for reforming housing benefit (HB) and dealing with the legacy of neglect we have inherited.

To help promote work incentives, we have broadened the definition of the single room rent from 2 July 2001 to reflect better the type of accommodation available in the market to young single people. Our aim is both to ease the problems faced by young people in getting and maintaining accommodation, and encourage landlords to rent to young adults.

Benefits Agency (Fraud and Error)

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much expenditure has been lost through fraud and error in each of the Benefits Agency's 13 area directorates and 118 districts that handle income support claims in each year since 1997. [42513]

Malcolm Wicks: The information requested is not available.

Invalid Care Allowance

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to review a person's loss of invalid care allowance when they become of pensionable age. [34425]

Maria Eagle: Invalid care allowance and retirement pension are both benefits intended to maintain income. Rules exist to prevent the duplicate payment of more than one benefit intended for the same basic purpose. Where a person already entitled to invalid care allowance reaches pension age and becomes entitled to retirement pension, the payment of retirement pension, a contributory benefit, takes precedence and either extinguishes or reduces the payment of invalid care allowance. Underlying entitlement to ICA is retained, which provides low income carers with access to the carer premium paid with the minimum income guarantee.

Invalid care allowance has always been subject to these rules. We have no plans at present to change this. However, in light of the National Carers Strategy, the Government have introduced a draft order proposing to remove the ICA age restriction, thus allowing carers aged 65 and over access to ICA and therefore the carer premium. The proposal will provide the opportunity for low income carers in this group to boost their income on top of the minimum income guarantee.

Benefits Offices (Security)

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what recent representations he has had on the issue of security at the new Jobcentre Plus offices. [42526]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 12 March 2002]:* Health and safety arrangements in the new offices have been the subject of over 60 hours of discussions between officials and the Public and Commercial Services Union. Members of the public and staff have also written to Ministers and officials in the Department to express their views.

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions which Benefits Agency offices have experienced the most incidents of violence in the UK in the last three years. [42533]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 12 March 2002]:* Data are not held centrally broken down by individual office and the information requested could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many *(a)* deaths, *(b)* serious injuries and *(c)* recorded incidence of verbal abuse there have been in the Jobcentre Plus pilot projects. [42532]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 12 March 2002]:* There have been no deaths or serious injuries in the Jobcentre Plus pathfinder offices since their launch. Since the launch of the first Pathfinder offices in October 2001 there have been four incidents involving actual but minor physical contact, six incidents involving attempted physical contact, and 198 incidents of verbal abuse. During that period it is estimated that around a million people have visited the pathfinder offices.

Recruit

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proportion of leavers from the

employment option of the New Deal in the pilot areas for Recruit found jobs *(a)* following the introduction of Recruit and *(b)* in each of the two years prior to the introduction of Recruit. [35162]

Mr. Nicholas Brown. The main objective of the pilots is to help small businesses use the Employment Option, and changes in the proportion of leavers into jobs will be influenced by a range of factors, not just Recruit.

A full evaluation of the pilot, will begin in April, and will provide a better picture of the impact of Recruit on employers and New Deal clients in the pilot areas. The pilot started in 19 areas in April 2001 and will continue until June 2002. Up to the end of December 2001, Recruit had helped 1,667 clients into work.

The information requested on the initiative is in the table.

	Proportion of New Deal employment option clients leaving to known destinations who entered jobs (Percentage)
April 1999—March 2000	71
April 2000—March 2001	69
April 2001—December 2001	69

Source:
New Deal Evaluation Database

In addition, we know from research that over 50 per cent. of those leaving New Deal for unknown destinations take up work.

Advertising

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what the expenditure was per campaign for the five most expensive media advertising campaigns his Department undertook in the past five parliamentary Sessions including the current parliamentary Session in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* England, *(c)* Wales and *(d)* Northern Ireland; and for the last two parliamentary Sessions and the current Session, when each advertising campaign (i) began and (ii) ended in (A) Scotland, (B) England, (C) Wales and (D) Northern Ireland; [37401]

(2) what the cost was of media advertising in each of the past five parliamentary Sessions including the current Session, for his Department in *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales and *(c)* Northern Ireland; and for the last two parliamentary Sessions and the current parliamentary Session, what the media advertising expenditure was per month in (i) England, (ii) Wales and (iii) Northern Ireland. [37413]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The information is not held in the form requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Departmental Development

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how often the Department has applied the special urgency provisions in paragraph 22 of Circular 18/84 (Development by Government Departments) to a development by the department; and if he will make a statement. [38714]

Mr. Darling: According to available records the special urgency provisions in paragraph 22 of Circular 18/84 (Development by Government Departments) have never been invoked by this department.

House of Lords' Judgment

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what action he *(a)* has taken and *(b)* intends to take following the judgment in the case of Chief Adjudication Officer (Respondent) *v.* Stafford and another (Banks) (Appellant) given in the House of Lords on 29 June 2001. [39460]

Malcolm Wicks: We have been considering carefully the terms of the judgment, which confirmed that term-time workers are not eligible for Jobseeker's Allowance. A change in the law to extend eligibility to term-time workers would not necessarily be appropriate, given that Jobseeker's Allowance is intended to support those who are out of work and looking for a job rather than those in employment. We shall nevertheless continue to consider this matter, in the light of the judgment and other possible means of support.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr. Roy: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many part-time employment agency workers registered for jobseeker's allowance in the last 12 months; [39426]

(2) how many employment agency clients claim jobseeker's allowance for part of the working week in *(a)* Motherwell and Whishaw, *(b)* Lanarkshire, *(c)* Scotland and *(d)* the United Kingdom; [39427]

(3) what the average time taken is to process a new claim for jobseeker's allowance from part-time employment agency clients. [39425]

Malcolm Wicks: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is as follows. The national average time taken to clear a new claim to jobseeker's allowance (JSA), as at January 2002, is 9.7 days. The national target is to clear JSA claims within 12 days.

Winter Fuel Payment

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people *(a)* received and *(b)* were eligible to receive the winter fuel payment in (i) 1999, (ii) 2000 and (iii) 2001 broken down by (A) gender and (B) constituency. [38336]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* Information is available only on the number of people who received winter fuel payments. Details of the number of recipients in winters 1999–2000 and 2000–01, broken down by sex and constituency, have been placed in the Library. Numbers relating to this winter are not yet available.

The figures for 1999–2000 exclude men aged 60–64 (and a small number of others) who became eligible for winter fuel payments from 2000–01 onwards. These people are entitled to claim retrospectively for previous years and the majority have already done so. Unfortunately it is not possible to relate these claims to specific years.

Jobcentre Plus

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the Jobcentre Plus offices which *(a)* have and *(b)* have not closed circuit television in operation. [40274]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The information requested is as listed. Whether an office has CCTV depends on whether this was recommended in the risk assessment for that office.

Pathfinder offices with CCTV

Aberdeen Ebury House
Aberdeen Chapel street
Birmingham Ravenshurst
Birmingham south-west
Blackburn
Blackburn Cardwell place
Bridgend Crown Buildings
Bridgend Market street
Brighouse Owler Ings road
Chelmsford
Chelmsford Gemini centre
Derby 1–5 The Wardwick
Derby Beckett street
Derby 229–231 Normanton road
Derby Forester House
Gateshead Shildon House
Greenock
Halifax
Halifax Dean Clough
Halifax Horton street
Harlesden 161 High street
Hoylake Town Hall Chambers
Huddersfield Crown House
Huddersfield Castle House
Kilburn Coventry close
Livingston Almondvale South
Madeley Church street
Maesteg Commercial street
Neasden
Openshaw Cornwall street
Port Glasgow
Porthcawl Dock street
Rayleigh 10 London Hill
Southend Dencora Court
Streatham
Telford New Town House
Telford, Telford House
Todmorden Adelaide Street
Wallasey
Wellington 67 New street
Wembley 8 St. Johns road
Winchester

Pathfinders offices without CCTV

Aberdeen Greyfriars
Axminster Chard street
Birmingham Northfield
Birtley Pinetree centre
Blaydon St. Cuthberts way
Darwen Green street
Exmouth 4–6 Rolle street
Felling 37 High street
Gateshead
Honiton 128 High street
Openshaw
Pyle Ffald road
Sidmouth 1–2 Mill street
Tiverton Coggans Well House.

Risk assessments have been carried out for each of the new Jobcentre Plus offices. Following consultation with the local union health and safety representatives, all of the recommendations of each risk assessment have been implemented in full.

Carers

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many claimants of carers allowance have lost it on reaching pensionable age in each year since 1997; and what assistance he gives to pensioner carers. [40566]

Malcolm Wicks: The number of cases where payment of invalid care allowance has ceased to customers who have attained pensionable age is as follows:

Year	*Number*
1997	6,070
1998	6,143
To 30 September 1999[1]	4,877

[1] The figures are not available for periods after September 1999 due to a change in recording statistics.

Proposals are before the Parliamentary Deregulation Committees, which, if accepted, will allow carers, aged 65 or over to claim invalid care allowance for the first time. This will allow some carers to receive invalid care allowance and many more to have access to the carer premium, payable with the minimum income guarantee, which is currently worth £24.40 a week.

Accommodation Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the cost was of hotel accommodation for departmental staff working away from home in each of the last four years. [41069]

Maria Eagle: The following table gives the expenditure on directly booked hotel rooms and bed and breakfast for former DSS and Employment Service staff.

Figures prior to 1999–2000 are not available.

Year	*Total (£)*
1999–2000	6,896,155
2000–01	6,433,135
2001–02[1]	8,276,366

[1] Up to and including February 2002

Gender Pay Gap

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the extent of the gender pay gap among staff in his Department. [40998]

Malcolm Wicks: The former Department of Social Security and the Employment Services agreed in 2001 to undertake equal pay reviews to determine whether our current pay policies directly or indirectly discriminate against any groups of employees and provide risks in relation to equal pay.

Draft reports have recently been produced, which we are currently reviewing with trade unions.

Early key findings indicate that pay policies highlight the importance of equality and there is no evidence of discrimination because of gender.

Minimum Income Guarantee

David Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pensioners in Telford are in receipt of the minimum income guarantee. [41427]

Malcolm Wicks: As at November 2001, there were 2,300 minimum income guarantee claimants in the parliamentary constituency of Telford.

Source:

Income Support Quarterly Statistical Enquiry November 2001

Helen Southworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his estimate is of the number of pensioners eligible to receive the minimum income guarantee; how many pensioners are in receipt of the minimum income guarantee; and what is the average amount received in Warrington, South. [42671]

Malcolm Wicks: Estimates of the number of people eligible for the minimum income guarantee are not available below national level. As at November 2001 there were 2,800 minimum income guarantee claimants in parliamentary constituency of Warrington, South, receiving an average weekly amount of £51.65.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pensioners he estimates are claiming the minimum income guarantee in each parliamentary constituency in Dorset. [41766]

Maria Eagle *[Holding answer 8 March 2002]:* The information is provided in the table.

Constituency	*November 2001*
Christchurch	2,300
Mid-Dorset and North Poole	1,400
North Dorset	1,600
Poole	2,600
South Dorset	2,300
West Dorset	2,300

Source:

Income Support Statistics Quarterly Enquiries November 2001

Departmental Employees

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many employees there were in his Department at *(a)* 1 June 1997, *(b)* 31 December 1998, *(c)* 31 December 1999, *(d)* 31 December 2000 and *(e)* 31 December 2001; and if he will make a statement. [42598]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 12 March 2002]:* The Department for Work and Pensions is a new Department therefore figures have been supplied from Employment Services and DSS legacy systems. Information is readily available for the last four years, data prior to this could be supplied only at disproportional cost.

Staff employed	*Date*
139,820	31 December 1998
131,539	31 December 1999
130,799	31 December 2000
134,489	31 December 2001

Public Appointments

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many appointments to public bodies have been made through his Department *(a)* from April 2000 to March 2001 and *(b)* since 31 March 2001; and how many of these were (i) men and (ii) women. [42147]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 12 March 2002]:* The number of men and women appointed, or re-appointed, by Ministers in this Department to bodies sponsored by this Department during the periods in question is as follows:

Period	*Men*	*Women*
1 April 2000–31 March 2001	7	10
1 April 2001–28 February 2002	17	13

Note:

Appointment and re-appointments to the Appeals Service are not included as these are the responsibility of the Lord Chancellor.

Stolen Equipment

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer of 23 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 851–52W, on stolen equipment, what criminal proceedings have been undertaken for cases of theft against his Department, stating in each case *(a)* whether the proceedings (i) led to a criminal conviction and (ii) were unsuccessful, *(b)* the cost incurred by his Department in pursuing a conviction and *(c)* the value of items recovered; and if he will make a statement. [41513]

Malcolm Wicks: The Department does not hold centrally information regarding criminal proceedings, or any follow-up actions, which have been undertaken in cases of theft against the Department. Any incident of break-in is always referred to the police for investigation. Some information may be recorded locally, on a case by case basis; but meaningful retrieval would be impractical within timeframes and costs.

The Department takes its responsibilities with regard to theft and fraud very seriously and has put in place a wide range of security measures to deter and detect such events.

One of these measures is teams of internal investigators who investigate cases of suspected internal theft and fraud when they do arise.

The investigations result in a wide range of disciplinary outcomes including referral for criminal proceedings.

During a four year period from 1 May 1997 to 31 March 2001 the Department have referred 52 cases of internal fraud for consideration of criminal proceedings. Of these 52, 50 cases were successfully brought to prosecution. Although the theft of official equipment is taken very seriously, there are no records during this period of cases of internal theft of official equipment where prosecution was deemed appropriate.

However within the current Treasury year 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002, there has been one successful investigation for theft of official equipment. Following referral for consideration of formal criminal proceedings, the outcome was successful in achieving a conviction. The offender being found guilty and a sentence of 60 hours community service imposed and a compensation order of £250.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many disabled adults have been affected by *(a)* the rules under which disability living allowance is withdrawn after a person has been in hospital for four weeks and *(b)* the cumulative effect of short periods of hospitalisation in each of the last three years. [43982]

Maria Eagle: The information is not available in the format requested.

Carers

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many carers have had invalid care allowance removed as result of the adult for whom they care having *(a)* their disability living allowance removed and *(b)* having their attendance allowance removed, as a consequence of hospitalisation in each of the last three years; [43985]

(2) how many parents caring for a disabled child had invalid care allowance terminated following their child's stay in hospital for longer than the rules allow for payment of disability living allowance in each of the last three years. [43986]

Maria Eagle: The information requested is not available.

Pensioners (Hospital Care)

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pensioners have been affected by *(a)* the rules under which attendance allowance is withdrawn after a person has been in hospital for four weeks and *(b)* the cumulative effect of short stays in hospital in each of the last three years. [43983]

Maria Eagle: The information is not available in the format requested.

Pensions

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what mechanisms he proposes to prevent companies from winding up, closing down and fundamentally changing pension schemes without the approval of members; [43315]

(2) if he will amend the accounting rules and minimum funding requirement for company pension schemes with a view to preventing unilateral changes; [43316]

(3) if he will examine incentives and initiatives which might be introduced to support the continuation of final salary schemes; [43317]

(4) if he will introduce legislation to create an obligation on companies to consult fund members and their unions about proposed changes in pension arrangements and to provide full financial information. [43318]

Malcolm Wicks: Occupational pension schemes are provided voluntarily by employers, and they are therefore free to decide whether to continue to provide such pensions in the future. The legislation that is in place is to ensure that the pension rights that individuals have already built up in schemes are protected.

Accounting rules are the responsibility of the Accounting Standards Board which is independent of Government. The Government have already announced proposals to replace the minimum funding requirement (MFR) with a long-term scheme specific funding standard in the context of a regime of transparency and disclosure, with additional measures to strengthen security. This will be taken forward as soon as parliamentary time is available. Meanwhile the Government announced a package of changes on 26 February to improve the way the MFR operates in the period leading up to its replacement, and increase protection for pension scheme members where an employer decides to wind a scheme up voluntarily.

We have asked Alan Pickering and Ron Sandler, in two separate studies to review the regulation and operation of the pensions, and the wider market of savings products, including final salary schemes. Alan Pickering will report, with recommendations for reform, in June and Ron Sandler will also report around that time.

The Government will then set out its proposals, which will build on the reforms put in place since 1998, and on which it will consult, to simplify the regulatory system, to look at how the Government and employers encourage and support pension savings, and to make sure that the most appropriate incentives for savings in retirement are in place.

We have already announced last month an interim package of measures to improve the way the minimum funding requirement works, which will reduce compliance costs for employers with defined benefit pension schemes.

HEALTH

Mental Health

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he has collated on the relative mental health status of young *(a)* men and *(b)* women. [38096]

Jacqui Smith: The Office for National Statistics (ONS) is responsible for compiling, analysing and disseminating information relating to United Kingdom economic, social and demographic statistics. Their report "Psychiatric morbidity among adults living in private households, 2000" is available on the website at www.statistics.gov.uk. The report contains valuable information about the prevalence of mental disorders

among young adults over the age of 16 in private households. Guidelines are attached to the PQ reference guide.

Cancer Awareness

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans the Government have to increase cancer awareness in schools; and if he will make a statement. [38082]

Yvette Cooper: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton), on 11 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 125W.

Relatives and Residents Association

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will list the organisations undertaking functions similar to those provided by the Relatives and Residents Association which are supported by his Department; [37728]

(2) for what reason his Department has not granted further funding to the Relatives and Residents Association. [37760]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 27 February 2002]:* Of the organisations that take a particular interest in the care of older people in residential care or nursing homes, three were successful in bidding for funding through the 2001–02 round of the Department's section 64 General Scheme of Grants. They are Action on Elder Abuse, Counsel and Care and Help the Aged.

The Department has not refused the Relatives and Residents Association further section 64 funding for 2002–03 as applications from the association are currently being considered.

Since 1996–97, the association has received over £500,000 of section 64 funding. The association's application for section 64 funding in 2001–02 was unsuccessful principally because of competition from other high quality applications.

Care Standards Act

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what protection residents of care homes will have against rises in charges following the implementation of the Care Standards Act 2000. [38638]

Jacqui Smith: Publicly funded residents' resources will continue to be assessed under the National Assistance (Assessment of Resources) Regulations 1992. These regulations are unaffected by the Care Standards Act. Differences between residents' assessed contributions and the fees set by homes should be met by the council.

In addition on 11 March, I announced a package of measures to stop some care home providers taking advantage of the Government's national health service funded nursing care initiative to artificially raise fees for residents. Amendments to the care home regulations will be made, subject to consultation, to oblige homes to provide a breakdown of their fees. This will make it clear to residents which aspect of their fees relate to nursing care and which to residential care. A central core contract has been issued that NHS bodies should use as a basis for spelling out how any nursing contribution received by a care home is accounted for by them. I have also asked the National Care Standards Commission that standard two of the national minimum standards for care homes for older people should be enforced. The standard states that any contribution to fees by the NHS or a local authority is recorded separately from other contributions from the service user, a relative or other third party.

Bed Blocking

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will place a copy of the delayed discharge figures for Q3 2001–02 in the Library; [39166]

(2) pursuant to the answer of 26 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 549, to the hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Ruffley), regarding bed blocking, if he will place in the Library the figures referred to for each trust and health authority. [40510]

Jacqui Smith: All the available information on delayed discharge in December 2001 has been placed in the Library. This covers:

(a) the number and proportion of patients of all ages occupying an acute hospital bed whose discharge was delayed;

(b) the number and proportion of patients aged 75 and over occupying an acute hospital bed whose discharge was delayed;

(c) the main reasons for delay and the numbers and proportion of patients of all ages who are delayed for each of the reasons;

(d) the numbers and proportions of patients who have been delayed (i) one to eight days, (ii) eight to 14 days, (iii) 14 to 28 days (iv) over 28 days.

Each set of figures is provided on a national, regional and health authority basis.

No other information (or breakdown of information) is collected centrally on delayed discharges.

Hospital Discharges

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) of 27 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1418W, on hospital discharges, if he will provide information on the same basis for the Isle of Wight. [43368]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 14 March 2002]:* The information provided in my previous answer of 27 February was provided on the basis of health authority, including Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and South-East Hampshire health authority. No other breakdown of information is available centrally.

Breast Cancer Screening

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the percentage take-up is of breast cancer screening among the relevant population in the Redbridge and Waltham Forest area; how this compares to the national average; what activities and extra resources are being allocated to increase take-up; and if he will make a statement. [39002]

Yvette Cooper: Breast cancer screening services are provided by Epping Primary Care Trust for Redbridge and Whipps Cross hospital for Waltham Forest. The national target for women accepting their invitations for screening is 70 per cent. In 2000–01 nationally, 75.3 per cent. of

women aged 50 to 64 invited for screening were screened. The figure for Epping was 70.5 per cent. The figure for Whipps Cross hospital was 66.7 per cent. Both figures for Epping and Whipps Cross hospital are higher than the regional average of 62.4 per cent.

Whipps Cross hospital recognises that health education remains a high priority. The service regularly visits general practitioners' practices to promote screening and has given talks to women's groups in the community. Epping PCT is considering an advertising campaign among younger Asian women to encourage older family members to be screened.

Social Services

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what consideration he has given to the judgment in the case of R *v.* London borough of Lambeth ex parte A EWCA Civ 1624; and what assessment he has made of the effects of the judgment on *(a)* families with children who are being supported by social services departments and *(b)* children being cared for by social services departments. [38472]

Jacqui Smith: Since the issue was first brought to the attention of the Department a considerable amount of work has been undertaken to assess the nature of the impact of the judgment in A *v.* London borough of Lambeth and the best way to respond to it. Consideration of these issues has taken place across Government and in consultation with key stakeholders.

The decision of the Court of Appeal in the recent case of A *v.* London borough of Lambeth, which considered the provision of accommodation under section 17 of the Children Act 1989, casts doubt upon the ability of councils with social services responsibilities to provide accommodation to children in need and their families. This judgment does not affect local authorities' powers to provide other services under section 17 of the Children Act 1989 that they deem appropriate in order to meet a child's needs, for example day care, nor does it have any impact on children being looked after by local authorities. It is, and has long been, our policy that councils with social services responsibilities should have the power to provide accommodation under section 17 of the Children Act 1989 where they feel that this is the appropriate way to meet the child's needs and where no other support is available. We therefore wish to restore the position so that this important safety net is available for all families. I announced on 17 January 2002 during the special standing committee on the Adoption and Children Bill that we intend to introduce amendments to the Children Act 1989 by way of the Adoption and Children Bill to make clear that accommodation may be provided by councils with social services responsibilities under section 17. In the meantime, another recent case (J *v.* London borough of Enfield) has made clear that local authorities are able to provide assistance, including assistance towards the securing of accommodation, to children and their families utilising the powers contained within section 2 of the Local Government Act 2000.

European Union Directives

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the European Union directives and regulations relating to his Department that have been implemented in each of the last four years, specifying *(a)* the title and purpose of each, *(b)* the cost to public funds of each and *(c)* the cost to businesses of each. [39117]

Yvette Cooper: The information on the European Union directives and regulations relating to this Department and any costs to public funds of these regulations is not held centrally and can be assembled only at disproportionate cost. The Department has however produced regulatory impact assessments (RIAs) for proposals, including those originating in European legislation, likely to impose significant costs to business, charities or voluntary organisations. Copies of these have been placed in the House Libraries.

Myeloid Leukaemia

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on trials for the drug Glivec for chronic myeloid leukaemia being conducted in the UK; how many patients are included in the trials; what the total cost of the trials will be; and if he will make a statement. [38411]

Yvette Cooper: The Medical Research Council (MRC) is not currently funding any studies using Glivec.

However, the STI571 Prospective International Randomised Trial (SPIRIT) for newly diagnosed chronic myeloid leukaemia—which proposed using Glivec—is under consideration, and a decision is expected from the MRC by July at the latest. Figures for numbers of patients and total cost have not been finalised. It is important to note that all clinical trial applications made to the MRC are considered in open competition for funding with all other calls on MRC resources.

Novartis, the pharmaceutical company which manufactures Glivec, have conducted pre and post licensing trials of Glivec for chronic myeloid leukaemia.

Homeopathic Treatment

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what his policy is towards funding homeopathic treatment in all parts of England; and if he will make a statement; [38814]

(2) what recent representations he has received about the withdrawal of funding by health authorities for homeopathic treatment; and if he will make a statement. [38813]

Yvette Cooper: The Government are committed to a patient centred NHS where those in the front line in providing NHS services have maximum flexibility to develop those services in a way which is responsive to local health needs. The NHS must also take into account the needs and wishes of patients.

Complementary and alternative medicine treatments, such as homeopathy, can feature within NHS services—and this is a matter for local decision. Our Complementary Medicine Information Pack for Primary Care Groups stated that the best evidence for the effectiveness of homeopathy was in treating illnesses with an allergic component.

I do from time-to-time receive representations from individuals and organisations about the role of complementary and alternative medicine within the NHS. I am not aware of any recent representations specifically about the withdrawal of homeopathy.

Car Passenger Deaths (Children)

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many child car passengers from social class *(a)* five and *(b)* one have been killed in car accidents in each of the last five years; and in how many of these accidents speed was a contributory factor. [39968]

Yvette Cooper: The social class of child car passengers killed in car accidents is not routinely recorded, nor is the specific causation.

The 1997 ONS publication "Health Inequalities: Decennial Supplement" states that:

> "Childhood injury death rates by social class have been compared for years around the 1981 and 1991 Censuses. Death rates from injury and poisoning fell between the two periods for children in each social class, although the differential between the social classes had increased. The decline in rates for children in Social Classes IV and V (21 per cent. and 2 per cent. respectively), was smaller than those for children in Social Classes I and II (32 per cent. and 37 per cent.). Motor vehicle accidents accounted for half of all childhood injury deaths and showed a similar social class gradient to that for all accidental deaths in childhood".

The number of child car occupant fatalities is as follows:

	Deaths
1996	79
1997	74
1998	64
1999	71
2000	49

NHS Recruitment Special Envoy

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what countries the Government's Special Envoy for the national health service will visit in his recruitment drive; and what his budget is. [40459]

Mr. Hutton: We are working with Professor Sir Magdi Yacoub to plan a programme of international visits.

There is £3 million to support the International Fellowship Scheme over the next year.

International Recruitment

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to extend the ethical foreign nurse recruitment code of practice to the recruitment of overseas *(a)* medical practitioners and *(b)* professionals allied to medicine; and if he will list those (i) covered and (ii) not covered. [40458]

Mr. Hutton: The purpose of the code of practice is to promote high standards in the recruitment and employment of all health care professionals from abroad.

Recruitment of internationally qualified medical staff and other health care professionals have specific sections within the code of practice.

MMR Vaccine

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the system for the reporting of adverse side effects of the MMR vaccine. [40686]

Yvette Cooper: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave him on 24 May 2000, *Official Report*, columns 507–08W.

Digital Hearing Aids

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects NHS trusts in Gloucestershire to provide digital hearing aids; and if he will make a statement. [40439]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 5 March 2002]:* The "Modernising NHS hearing aid services" project is evaluating leading edge digital hearing aids for NHS patients, coupled with an evaluation of associated service delivery changes. Digital hearing aids require different service delivery models as they incorporate IT based assessment and fitting procedures. £10.75 million has been made available to 20 pilot sites across the country in 2000–01 and 2001–02. On 24 December 2001 we announced funding of £20 million would be available for 2002–03. This will enable the 20 pilot sites to continue to participate in the project and will enable at least a further 30 new sites to join the project and be fitting digital hearing aids by the end of March 2003. The Gloucestershire Health Community has submitted an expression of interest in participating in the project. A decision on the bid will be made shortly.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS trusts *(a)* are and *(b)* are not providing digital hearing aids; and if he will make a statement. [40438]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 5 March 2002]:* At least 48 national health service trusts are providing digital hearing aids under the bulk purchase contract arranged by Purchasing and Supply Agency. This includes the 20 sites in the first wave of the Modernising Hearing Aid Services' pilot project. The number of trusts accessing the bulk contract is increasing as more sites attain the infrastructure needed. Around 100 sites are providing only analogue aids.

Folic Acid

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) when the Food Standards Agency is expected to complete its consideration of the legal, technical and health implications of fortification of flour with folic acid and make its recommendation to Government; [40777]

(2) when he will announce his policy on the fortification of flour with folic acid. [40781]

Yvette Cooper: The Food Standards Agency (FSA), together with Health departments, is hosting a stakeholder meeting on the issue of fortification of flour with folic acid on 18 March 2002. The aim of this meeting is to ensure that, all relevant information and points of view are taken into account.

I understand that following the stakeholder meeting, the [redacted] board plans to consider the issue at its open meeting on 9 May 2002. Health Ministers will, thereafter, consider the way forward on the issue taking the agency's advice into account.

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the recommended dose is of folate for women to reduce the risk of spina bifida pregnancy. [40780]

Yvette Cooper: The Committee on Medical Aspects of Food and Nutrition Policy issued advice on the prevention of neural tube defects (the most common of which is spina bifida) in 1992.

Women who are trying to conceive or who are likely to become pregnant, are advised to take a daily 400 µg supplement of folic acid until the 12th week of pregnancy. In addition, all women who may become pregnant are advised to increase their daily intake of folic acid by eating more folate-rich foods and foods fortified with folic acid—especially breads and breakfast cereals.

To prevent the recurrence of a neural tube defect, folic acid supplements are a daily dose of 5 milligrams (5000 µg) are advised and this can be reduce to 4mg, if this dose becomes available.

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the evidence relating to the effect flour fortification with folic acid has on rates of *(a)* homocysteine levels, *(b)* stroke, *(c)* stroke mortality, *(d)* heart attacks and *(e)* colon cancer. [40779]

Yvette Cooper: The Committee on Medical Aspects of Food and Nutrition Policy (COMA) report on folic acid and the prevention of disease (2000) noted that fortification of flour with folic acid might result in a reduction in the risk of cardiovascular disease (CVD, especially strokes and heart attacks).

In otherwise healthy people, an increased blood level of homocysteine is associated with increased risk of CVD. Studies have shown that low intakes of folate are an important cause of increased homocysteine level in the general population and increasing folate intake can reduce homocysteine level. However, whether there is a causal relationship between folic acid intake and cardiovascular disease still requires confirmation. There are on-going randomised controlled trials assessing the impact of lowering homocysteine levels (by increasing folic acid intake) on incidence of heart disease.

In 1998, the COMA report on the nutritional aspects of cancer concluded that there was insufficient evidence for any specific links between folate intake and the development of cancer.

Vitamin B12

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the oral statement of 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 395, when and in what form the research on the prevalence of vitamin B12 deficiency and its diagnosis among adults over 65 years of age will be published. [40776]

Yvette Cooper: A common concern expressed in the Department of Health/Food Standards Agency consultation on folic acid was the potential risks for older people. It was therefore necessary to have more information on the potential risks before proceeding with any course of action. This included:

an estimation of the prevalence of vitamin B12 deficiency in older people aged 65 and above;

the appropriate methodology for the diagnosis of vitamin B12 deficiency;

the feasibility of routine identification of vitamin B12 deficiency in older people.

This research was undertaken by Professor Grimley Evans and colleagues at the university of Oxford. The research was completed in August 2001. The results of the research are to be published in a peer-reviewed journal later this year.

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the benefits for disease prevention if vitamin B12 is added to folic acid in flour fortification. [40778]

Yvette Cooper: The Committee on Medical Aspects of Food and Nutrition Policy (COMA) recommendation (2000) on the fortification of flour with folic acid aimed to minimise the number of people having intakes of folic acid which may mask vitamin B12 deficiency.

The committee did consider combined fortification of flour with B12 and folic acid. It would be necessary to fortify foods with very large amounts of vitamin B12 to allow for the low absorption in people with pernicious anaemia, which is the chief cause of severe B12 deficiency.

COMA stated that

"At present there is inadequate information on the amount of vitamin B12 that would be required to prevent deficiency in the population, especially those with pernicious anaemia. Although there is no formal evidence of toxicity from vitamin B12, any exposure of the whole population to levels many times their usual intake or requirements should be considered with particular caution".

Therefore, this option was not recommended.

Human Rights Act

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what monitoring of compliance with the Human Rights Act 1998 in *(a)* residential care homes and *(b)* nursing homes his Department has undertaken in the last three years; and what resources have been made available for this. [38368]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 6 March 2002]:* The Human Rights Act 1998 came into force on 2 October 2000. The Act did not create new rights, but enabled the European Convention on Human Rights to be enforced in United Kingdom courts. Best practice in residential and nursing home care should be fully compatible with the convention.

Until 31 March 2002, local councils and health authorities respectively are responsible for registering and inspecting residential care and nursing homes under the provisions of the Registered Homes Act 1984. The Social Services Inspectorate carries out performance monitoring of local council inspection units. Local Authority Circular LAC(2000)17 expects local councils to ensure that procedures and practices comply with the Human Rights Act.

From 1 April 2002, the National Care Standards Commission will be responsible for registration and inspection of residential care homes and nursing homes, under the Care Standards Act 2000, taking account of national minimum standards, which are fully compatible with the Human Rights Act.

Cervical Screening

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the uptake among Asian women in Luton has been of cervical screening in each quarter since 1998. [40880]

Yvette Cooper: Figures for uptake of cervical screening are not collected by ethnic group.

Luton primary care trust and Luton health action zone are working with the community to increase the level of uptake in the difficult to reach Asian women groups.

Union Duties

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he intends to answer the question of 13 February from the hon. Member for Buckingham regarding staff involvement in union duties. [41577]

Yvette Cooper: I refer the hon. Member to the reply my hon. Friend the Parliamentary under Secretary of State for Health (Ms Blears) gave on Wednesday 27 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1405W.

Helicopter Ambulances

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether ambulance trusts can be reimbursed by charity for the cost of staff who serve on helicopter ambulances. [40894]

Ms Blears: *[Holding answer 7 March 2002]:* From April 2002, the NHS will meet the cost of approximately £150,000 for equipping each air ambulance helicopter with a paramedic crew. The staff who crew these aircraft are responding on behalf of NHS ambulance trusts to emergency patients who would otherwise be conveyed by land ambulances.

National Care Standards

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what flexibility he has introduced into the national care standards to meet the needs of care homes with small rooms and their residents and those which support drug and alcohol dependency. [41271]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 7 March 2002]:* Existing homes, including local authority homes, will have until 2007 to comply with some of the more challenging environmental space standards. We decided that the requirement for existing single rooms to have a minimum of 10 square metres of usable floor space should be postponed until April 2007. In addition, the standards include flexibility to allow some rooms down to 9.3 square metres to remain in use after 2007, provided additional compensatory facilities are made available.

We have listened to concerns from the drug and alcohol sector and have amended the standards for care homes for younger adults to meet those concerns.

The draft standards said that new homes should accommodate up to 16 people in groups of up to eight. The final standards raise the limits to 20 and 10, and allow homes that accommodate people for less than six months further flexibility.

The draft standards said that there should be one WC for each two people and one bathroom for three people, in both cases adjacent to bedrooms. The ratio has been changed to 1:3 for both WCs and bathrooms, and existing homes have been given two more years (until 2004) to reach the standard. The standards say that facilities should be "near" bedrooms.

The draft standards said that all service users should be offered a single room. Existing shared accommodation is to be phased out by 2004, unless people choose to share. New provision would be built with single rooms. The standards now recognise the concept of a clinical need for sharing in the substance misuse sector. In existing homes, up to four people may continue to share a room where there is a clinical need, and in new premises, rooms can be shared by two. The standards also recognise that two people may choose to share a room.

We have also issued statutory guidance to the National Care Standards Commission, which says the commission should consider whether care homes can fulfil the needs to service users without making environmental changes to meet the standards. The guidance particularly covers issues of room size, lifts, baths and shared rooms.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how the national care standards take account of the desire of married couples to share rooms. [41212]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 7 March 2000]:* Standard 23 of the standards for care homes for older people allows residents who wish to share a room to do so. Standard 23.10 states that in new build, extensions and all first time registrations, service users wishing to share accommodation should be offered two single rooms for use, for example, as bedroom and sitting room.

In the standards for care homes for younger adults, standard 25.8 recognises that two people may choose to share a room.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received on the accuracy of the estimate by the regulatory impact assessment of the cost of implementing national care standards. [40886]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 7 March 2002]:* Ministers at the Department have received only one representation as to the accuracy of the regulatory impact assessment for the implementation of the regulations and national minimum standards for care homes.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the basis is for the assessed capital cost of changes in the physical environment for younger adults contained in annexe A of the national care standards full regulatory impact assessment. [40889]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 7 March 2002]:* The basis for the assessment of the capital cost for changes in the physical environment for younger adults final regulatory impact assessment for care homes was the same as that used for the estimated costs during

consultation. A survey undertaken by the Department in 1999 indicated that only 13 per cent. of care homes in this sector would have difficulty in meeting the 10 sq.m. room requirements. It also showed that 7 per cent. of homes had more than 20 per cent. of places as shared places. As a result of the flexibilities introduced in relation to overall room sizes and additional flexibilities for homes dealing with drug and alcohol rehabilitation we estimated that between no more than 10 to 15 per cent. of homes in this sector would be significantly affected.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many residential and nursing care provisions he estimates meet the national care standards; how many have programmes to upgrade their homes to meet the standards; and what proportion each represents of all care homes. [41241]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 7 March 2002]:* Following analysis from responses to the original consultation on the national minimum standards for care homes, "Fit for The Future?" the Department estimated that 50 per cent. of local authority and 20 to 25 per cent. of independent care homes for older people would have difficulty meeting the standards as proposed at that time. Subsequently the standards were amended and flexibilities introduced in relation to space standards.

For care homes for younger adults a departmental survey estimated that 13 per cent. of homes would have difficulty meeting the room size standards. The additional flexibilities introduced following consultation on the standards for both sectors has, in the view of the Department, significantly reduced the number of providers likely to have difficulty meeting the standards.

The National Care Standards Commission will not have a comprehensive picture of how many care homes meet the standards, how many producers have established programmes to upgrade their homes and what proportion this represents of all care homes, until it completes the first round of inspections of all homes after 1 April 2002.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health to what extent the cost to local authorities of purchasing places at care homes complying with the national care standards is met by the local government financial settlement for 2002–03. [41209]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 7 March 2002]:* The local government finance settlement for 2002–03 takes full account of the cost to local authorities of purchasing places at care homes complying with the National Care Standards Commission's requirements.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which representative organisations constituted the reference group referred to in paragraph 12.1 of the national care standards full regulatory impact assessment. [41210]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 7 March 2002]:* The following organisations were members of the reference group for the development of national minimum standards for care homes for younger adults.

Alcohol Concern

Association for Residential Care

British Council of Disabled People

CHANGE

Drugscope

Independent Healthcare Association

Leonard Cheshire

Local Government Association

Mental After Care Association

National Association of Adult Placement Services

National Association of Inspection and Registration Officers

National Autistic Society

National Centre for Independent Living

National Institute for Social Work

National Heads of Registration and Inspection

NHS Confederation

Norwood Ravenswood

NSF Registered Homes

Oxfordshire county council

People First

Portland College

Richmond Fellowship

Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation

Royal College of Nursing

Royal College of Psychiatry

Royal National Institute for Deaf People

SENSE

Turning Point

Voluntary Organisations Disability Group.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what basis he concluded that the estimated cost of changes to the environment for a home providing places for 28 residents to comply with the national care standards would be significantly lower than that estimated by the full regulatory impact assessment. [41208]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 7 March 2002]:* The information provided by the provider at paragraph 9 of annexe A of the full regulatory impact assessment was a general statement from that provider. That estimate was not disaggregated into its constituent parts and it was impossible to reach a conclusion as to its accuracy. On that basis the Department concluded that the estimate of overall compliance cost based on survey evidence was a more reasonable estimate.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reason his regulatory impact assessment for national care standards does not cite as a benefit of option 1 the saving of money which under option 2 would have to be spent on alterations of homes to meet new standards. [41272]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 7 March 2002]:* The regulatory impact assessment for regulations and national minimum standards for care homes does not cite option 1 as a money saving option for good reason. In the first instance keeping the status quo does not mean that there are no additional costs incurred. If the system of regulation is left as of now with local authorities and health authorities regulating providers locally this would lead to increased subsidies for the cost of regulation included in the funding to these authorities. Those who responded to the White Paper "Modernising Social Services" were unanimous that regulatory costs should be

borne by both providers and commissioners of services and that the new National Care Standards Commission should be funded through full cost recovery.

Finally, option 1 would do nothing to improve the standards of care and accommodation afforded to service users.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to monitor the responses to the national care standards and to amend the regulations. [41211]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 7 March 2002]:* The national minimum standards will be continuously monitored. We propose to review them within the first three years of operation, and in the light of the review consider any changes needed.

Nursing and Care Homes

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many care homes have presented their statement of purpose to the National Care Standards Commission as set out in Statutory Instrument 3969; how many are expected to do so by 1 April 2002; what methods he is using to publicise the statements of purpose; how many should already have presented their statements of purpose to the National Care Standards Commission; and what steps he will take if a care home has failed to produce the statement of purpose by the required date. [40803]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 8 March 2002]:* Care homes that were previously exempt from regulation under the Registered Homes Act 1984, such as local authority provision and homes set up by Royal Charter are required under transitional arrangements to make an application for registration by 31 March 2002 (SI.3852(C. 125)). They are required to provide a statement of purpose to the National Care Standards Commission with the application for registration (SI. 3969). Because applications do not have to be with the Commission until 31 March it is not possible to estimate how many will be received by that date. The Commission is now starting to receive applications but does not expect to receive the bulk of these until the last week in March.

Currently, registered care homes will be required to comply with regulation 4 of the Care Homes Regulations 2001 (SI 2001 No. 3965) which requires a statement of purpose to be compiled. The National Care Standards Commission will establish, as part of the first inspection of care homes, that they have prepared a statement of purpose. If regulation 4 is not complied with on inspection, the Commission will agree action and a timescale with the provider for compliance to be achieved. If compliance is not achieved at the end of this period the Commission will take enforcement action.

Information on the number of care homes failing to do so will be provided by the Commission to the Department of Health as part of the Commission's general reporting on care homes' compliance with the regulations and national minimum standards. The Department has no plans to publicise statements of purpose but providers must make these publicly available.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he plans to publish the regulatory impact assessment for care homes for younger adults; and if he will place a copy in the Library. [40804]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 8 March 2002]:* The Regulatory Impact Assessment for the Care Homes Regulations and National Minimum Standards for Older People and for Younger Adults were placed in the Library on 21 January 2002. We will be placing the regulatory impact assessment for care homes and for other service areas on the Department's National Care Standards Commission website shortly.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) pursuant to his answer of 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 945W, on nursing care, what plans he has to compensate those self-funding residents who have not had their free nursing care assessment money passed on to them by the care home in the form of a reduced fee; [40805]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 945W, on nursing care, what *(a)* evidence and *(b)* representations he has received that care homes are failing to pass on payment for free nursing care to self-funding residents; [40807]

(3) pursuant to his answer of 27 February, ref. 26579, on nursing care, if the Government plans to *(a)* pay compensation and *(b)* pay interest to those people whose banding of nursing had not been completed by the end of December 2001. [40809]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 8 March 2002]:* I have received correspondence on this subject from many people who are distressed about the way that nursing home owners are taking account of the Registered Nursing Care Contribution (RNCC) when revising their fee levels. I have written to some national providers of care homes about this and shall be meeting them shortly to discuss this matter further. Meanwhile, a core contract between the national health service and nursing homes developed by the Department has been sent to the Service. This clarifies the relationship between the parties and makes clear the relationship between the two and how the RNCC should be accounted for.

The national health service is funding care from a registered nurse, which is being provided by the nursing home and payments are made in respect of individuals' care to the home for that care with effect from 1 October 2001 or from whenever they entered the nursing home. There is therefore no question of compensation or payments to individuals.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 27 February, refs. 26582 and 26638, on nursing homes, what exceptions would entail residents receiving funding under the scheme of the country other than that in which the nursing home is situated. [40808]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 8 March 2002]:* A protocol to manage this is currently being developed by officials in the Department of Health and in the Welsh

Assembly. This will set out the responsibilities for funding care and, if there are to be any exceptions to people receiving funding under the scheme of the country other than that in which the nursing home is situated, will spell out the circumstances.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what investigations he undertakes into charges made by nursing homes, with particular reference to amounts paid by those who are *(a)* in receipt of state funded places and *(b)* privately financed; and if he will make a statement. [42633]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 12 March 2002]:* The Department has funded research by the Personal Social Services Research Unit into the closure of care homes for older people. The research looked at the impact of pricing policies. A report on the results of the research will be placed in the Library.

Where a nursing home placement is supported by a local council, the contribution paid by the resident is determined by the National Assistance (Assessment of Resources) Regulations 1992.

I announced on 11 March that we will be amending the care home regulations to oblige homes to provide a breakdown of their fees. This will make it clear which aspects of the fees relate to nursing care and which to residential care.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 27 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1400W, on care homes, whether the regulatory impact assessment was a final document. [43367]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 14 March 2002]:* The full Regulatory Impact Assessment for the Care Homes Regulations and National Minimum Standards for Older People and for Younger Adults, which was placed in the Library on 21 January 2002, was the final version.

Transplants

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients died last year while on the waiting list for *(a)* heart, *(b)* heart and lung, *(c)* lung and *(d)* liver transplants; how many people are awaiting (i) kidney transplant, (ii) heart transplant, (iii) heart and lung transplant, (iv) lung transplant and (v) liver transplant; and how many organ transplants were carried out last year. [43309]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 14 March 2002]:* The number of patients dying while on the United Kingdom organ transplant waiting list in 2001 are as follows:

Organ	*Number dying*
(a) Heart	26
(b) Heart and lung	30
(c) Lung	35
(d) Liver	60

The number of patients active on the United Kingdom organ transplant waiting list at the end of 2001 are as follows.

Organ	*Number waiting*
(i) Kidney	4,934
(ii) Heart	105
(iii) Heart and lung	72
(iv) Lung	241
(v) Liver	158

There were 2,717 solid organ transplants carried out in the UK in 2001. This figure includes all solid organs, including kidney and living donor transplants.

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients died while waiting for an organ transplant in the last five years for which figures are available. [43310]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 14 March 2002]:* The figures for patients dying while on the United Kingdom organ transplant waiting list in the last five years are as follows:

	Number
1997	207
1998	217
1999	227
2000	189
2001	151

The figures for patients dying on the kidney waiting list (not necessarily from kidney failure) are only available from 2000 and the figures are as follows.

	Number
2000	288
2001	230

The figures are not available broken down by local authority. A table of the figures broken down by region is as follows:

Region	*Number*	*Percentage of population*
Northern and Yorkshire	835,870	13.4
Trent	637,321	12.4
Eastern	806,534	15.3
London	910,432	12.9
South-east	1,401,383	16.4
South-west	916,436	18.7
West Midlands	641,611	12.1
North-west	920,939	13.9
Channel Isles and Isle of Man	5,225	2.5
England	7,088,436	14.3
Wales	474,722	16.3
Scotland	908,269	17.8
Northern Ireland	151,793	9.1
Not available	394,004	—
Total	9,022,479	15.3

Emergency Care

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place in the Library the emergency readmission figures for Q1 2001–02, broken down by *(a)* region and *(b)* health authority. [43460]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 15 March 2002]:* Only information on readmissions for those aged 75 and over is collected centrally on a quarterly basis.

Information relating to Quarter 1, 2001–02 has been placed in the Library.

Cystic Fibrosis

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of suffers of cystic fibrosis have pancreatic insufficiency. [43640]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 15 March 2002]:* About 90 per cent. of individuals with cystic fibrosis develop pancreatic insufficiency. Dealing with this condition is a normal part of the management of cystic fibrosis patients.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what periodic reviews of the number of outstanding parliamentary questions are carried out by his Department; and how often they are undertaken. [43987]

Yvette Cooper: These issues will be addressed in the report of the current investigation referred to in the reply I gave my right hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 192W.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, (1) pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood of 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W, on parliamentary questions, of those outstanding questions due for reply before 14 February, how many questions have been answered by the target date of 12 March; and of those not answered by the announced date, what estimates he will make for the full reply to all outstanding questions; [43643]

(2) pursuant to the answer, of 11 Mar[illegible] ref 41778, on parliamentary questions, if he will list *(a)* the tabling hon. Members, *(b)* the question reference numb[illegible] *(c)* the date of tabling and *(d)* the date the question[illegible]ere falsely recorded as answered. [43646]

Yvette Cooper: I refer the hon. Member to the reply my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Milburn) gave to the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) on 13 March 2002.

The information about individual questions incorrectly recorded as answered will be placed in the Library as soon as the disciplinary investigation is complete.

Care Funding

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the answer of 12 March, ref. 28289, if he will publish the methodology used to derive the 2002–03 allocation as indicated in the document entitled "Improving Social Services for Older People"; what the rates of delayed discharge were in the 55 highest by council area and the next 45 by council area in summer 2001; and if he will publish the methodology used to derive the amounts awarded to councils in the Building Care Capacity Grant 2002–03. [43988]

Jacqui Smith: The methodology and information used has been placed in the Library.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 19 March 2002

SCOTLAND

Illegal Meat Imports

5. **Mr. Alan Reid:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions she has had with the Scottish First Minister regarding the prevention of illegal meat imports. [41518]

Mrs. Liddell: I regularly meet the First Minister. The Scottish Executive is working closely with UK Government Departments to help tackle the animal disease risk associated with illegal meat imports.

Drugs

6. **Ann McKechin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what joint activities she is planning with the First Minister to intensify the campaign against drugs. [41519]

Mrs. Liddell: The First Minister and I are planning a number of possible combined activities against drugs misuse. These include matters related to the Scottish Drugs Enforcement Agency; the Scottish Communities Against Drugs initiative; and port police and Customs efforts to stop drugs entering the country from overseas.

Life Assurance Industry

7. **Mr. McFall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent discussions she has had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer about the role within the Scottish economy of the life assurance industry. [41520]

Mrs. Liddell: I have regular discussions on a range of issues with my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Long-term life funds under Scottish management currently total £100 billion.

Scottish Parliament

8. **Mr. Luff:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will make a statement on the progress of her consultations on the size of the Scottish Parliament. [41521]

Mrs. Liddell: Over 775 copies of the consultation on the size of the Scottish Parliament have been issued since its launch on 18 December 2001. It has also been accessed about 1,000 times on the Scotland Office website.

As at 19 March, 85 responses have been received from both a range of organisations and individuals. I expect that considerably more will be received before the end of the consultation on 29 March.

14. **Dr. Julian Lewis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when she last met the First Minister to discuss the operation of the electoral system for the Scottish Parliament. [41527]

Mrs. Liddell: I have regular meetings with the First Minister where we discuss a wide range of issues.

Poverty

9. **Mr. Wray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when she last met the Scottish Minister responsible for social services to discuss Government measures to alleviate poverty in Scotland. [41522]

Mr. Foulkes: I last met the Minister for Social Justice from the Scottish Executive on 21 January. We are making good progress on tackling poverty in Scotland. Details can be found in the Government's annual "Opportunity for All" Report and in the Executive's annual "Social Justice" Report.

Aggregates Levy

10. **Mr. Weir:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations she has received from the aggregates industry concerning the introduction of the aggregates levy in Scotland. [41523]

16. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent representations she has received from the British Aggregates Association on economic problems in the industry. [41529]

Mr. Foulkes: I met representatives of the British Aggregates Association on 21 January.

Winter Fuel Allowance

11. **John Barrett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people in Scotland have claimed the winter fuel allowance for the 2001–02 winter. [41524]

Mr. Foulkes: Most people aged 60 or over do not need to claim their winter fuel payment. Payments have been made automatically this winter to eligible people receiving social security benefits (excluding housing benefit, council tax benefit and child benefit), or who made a successful claim for a winter fuel payment last winter.

Details of the number of winter fuel payments made this winter are not yet available, but are expected to be similar to last winter when more than 980,000 people in Scotland benefited.

13. **Mr. Connarty:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many pensioners in Scotland are benefiting from the winter fuel payment scheme. [41526]

Mr. Foulkes: Most people aged 60 or over at the qualifying date are entitled to a winter fuel payment, regardless of whether they receive a state retirement pension. Last winter, more than 980,000 people in Scotland received a winter fuel payment. Figures for this winter are not yet available, but are expected to be similar.

Shipbuilding

12. **John Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps she is taking to implement the recommendations of the report of the Clyde shipbuilding taskforce. [41525]

Mr. Foulkes: One of the key recommendations identified by the work of the Clyde Shipyards Task Force involves the promotion of Clydeside's case in securing

new export orders. I am taking forward this activity on two fronts. Firstly, in liaison with the MOD's Defence Exports Services Organisation (DESO), identifying appropriate opportunities for Scotland Office involvement in promoting active campaigns on behalf of Clydeside. Secondly, in discussion with the relevant interested parties, on developing trading opportunities, specifically relating to warship building, in key geographical markets. I will write to my hon. Friend with further details once available and place a copy in the Library of the House.

Cross-border Road Links

15. **Mr. Hepburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent discussions she has had with the Scottish Executive on cross-border road links, with special reference to the A1. [41528]

Mr. Foulkes: I have regular discussions with Scottish Executive Ministers on a wide range of transport-related matters.

The upgrading of the route to the south of Dunbar has been taken forward in the A1 Route Action Plan under the auspices of the A1 Steering Group, whose membership includes the Scottish Executive, the Highways Agency, local authorities and police from both sides of the border. The steering group meets nominally once a year and I understand the last meeting was in Newcastle on 19 February 2002.

Foot and Mouth

17. **Mr. Stephen O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will make a statement about recent discussions with Scotland's farming industry about foot and mouth. [41530]

Mrs. Liddell: Animal health policy, including policy on foot and mouth disease, is devolved to the Scottish Parliament. Discussions between the Scottish farming industry and the Scottish Executive are a matter for Scottish Ministers to report on.

18. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions she has had with Agriculture Ministers from the Scottish Parliament on policy on foot and mouth. [41531]

Mrs. Liddell: Animal health policy, including policy on foot and mouth disease, is devolved to the Scottish Parliament. I regularly meet Scottish Ministers to discuss matters of common interest.

21. **Mr. Liddell-Grainger:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what consultations she has had with Scottish Executive Ministers and European Union officials to discuss the possibility of a public inquiry into the foot and mouth outbreaks in Scotland. [41534]

Mrs. Liddell: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him and the hon. Member for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale on 14 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 1207W.

24. **Angela Watkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what consultations she has had with Scottish Executive Ministers and European Union officials on a public inquiry into the foot and mouth outbreaks in Scotland. [41537]

Mrs. Liddell: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale on 14 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 1207W.

Waiting Lists

19. **Mr. Baron:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when she intends to meet Health Ministers from the United Kingdom Government and the devolved Administrations to discuss NHS waiting lists. [41532]

Mrs. Liddell: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 12 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 141W.

Tourism

20. **Pete Wishart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will assess the impact of UK Government policies on the tourism industry in Scotland. [41533]

Mr. Foulkes: The Government are contributing to efforts to promote the recovery of tourism in Scotland. The UK tourist industry, including the industry in Scotland, will be able to benefit from the £20 million challenge fund which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport has established.

I am sure that the hon. Member will also join me in welcoming the BTA's already very successful Royal Heritage Map, promoting over 50 attractions and places of interest around the UK, noting that two of those attractions, Glamis Castle and the Queen's View are within his constituency.

Working Families Tax Credit

22. **Mr. MacDougall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people in Scotland are benefiting from the working families tax credit. [41535]

Mr. Foulkes: At August 2001, 119,062 families in Scotland were benefiting from the working families tax credit. The average award in Scotland was £80 per week.

Barnett Formula

23. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions he has had with the Scottish Executive about the calculation of the Barnett formula. [41536]

Mrs. Liddell: I have discussions with Executive Ministers on a wide range of issues. The Barnett Formula provides a fair deal for Scotland. It has provided stable settlements under successive governments for over 20 years.

The Government have no plans to scrap or to review the Barnett Formula.

European Capital of Culture

25. **Mr. David Stewart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions she has had with the First Minister and the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport on the European capital of culture competition 2008. [41538]

Mrs. Liddell: I am in regular contact with colleagues on a wide range of matters, including cultural issues of relevance to Scotland and the UK. The award of the

European City of Culture would be a boost for any of our cities and towns throughout the UK. I am very aware of the interest shown by Inverness and the Highlands in bidding to become the European City of Culture in 2008 and wish them well with their bid.

ADVOCATE-GENERAL

Value for Money

30. **Mr. Carmichael:** To ask the Advocate-General what steps she has taken to promote better value for money in the execution of her duties at her Department. [41543]

The Advocate-General for Scotland: I am always conscious of the need to secure value for money in my role as Advocate-General. The organisation of my office as part of the Scotland Office provides for efficient operation and contributes towards better value for money.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Court of Protection

37. **Mr. Hendrick:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will make a statement on the progress of the court of protection pilot scheme in Preston. [41551]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The pilot was launched on 1 October 2001. It is testing whether holding Court of Protection hearings locally for contested matters and fund management benefits parties by reducing the time, cost and anxiety involved in attending court. A full evaluation report will be available by the end of April 2002, but early indications are that local hearings will prove to be more convenient to parties, their families and their legal representatives. If successful, the Lord Chancellor will consider extending the scheme to other parts of England and Wales.

Magistrates Courts

39. **Mr. Luff:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement on the future of Evesham magistrates court. [41554]

Mr. Wills: The hon. Member will be aware that decisions concerning the future of magistrates courts in the West Mercia area are for the West Mercia Magistrates' Courts Committee to determine, in consultation with the local paying authority.

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what measures his Department uses to assess the work load in different magistrates' courts in England and Wales; and if he will make a statement. [43775]

Mr. Wills: Work load, in the form of completed cases, performed in the magistrates courts is collected by each of the 42 Magistrates Courts Committees (MCCs) and collated centrally. Each MCC provides the numbers of completed proceedings in one of 14 case types (as detailed in the attached list) and agreed weightings are applied to each case type to provide an overall unitary value of case load.

Case types:

- Indictable/triable either way
- Breaches
- Summary non-motoring
- Summary motoring
- Youth (all categories)
- Section 8 orders
- Emergency Protection Orders
- Care proceedings
- All other family
- Licensing sessions
- Licensing petty
- Other applications
- Means inquiries
- Right to Representation (formerly Legal aid).

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what recent representations he has received on the closure of magistrates courts in North Yorkshire. [43844]

Mr. Wills: The Lord Chancellor's Department has received six representations on the closure of magistrates courts in North Yorkshire. It is the Government's policy that decisions concerning the number, location and future of magistrates courts are for each magistrates courts committee to determine, in consultation with its local paying authority or authorities.

Auld Report

40. **Mr. Laurence Robertson:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what recent discussions he has had with the central council of the magistrates courts committees concerning the Auld report; and if he will make a statement. [41555]

Mr. Wills: I met with the central council of the magistrates courts committees on 31 January to discuss their views on Sir Robin Auld's review of the criminal courts. The central council have also submitted a written response to the report which is available on our website. Their views are being considered along with the other responses received and will help inform the Government's conclusions on the report's recommendations.

Maintenance Agreements

41. **Mr. Connarty:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will make a statement on the enforcement of maintenance agreements made by Scottish courts in English courts. [41556]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Under Scots Law a maintenance agreement can be drawn up by means of a Minute of Agreement. (This is an agreement entered into by two or more people, usually drawn up before a solicitor). If there is a clause of consent for registration in the Books of Council and Session and sheriff court, this can then be transferred under section 18 of the Civil Jurisdiction and Judgments Act 1982.

Section 18 of the Civil Jurisdiction and Judgments Act 1982 deals with cross border judgments in the UK. In this section "judgment" can mean any document which in Scotland has been registered for execution in the Books of Council and Session or in the sheriff court books kept for any Sheriffdom. If a Minute of Agreement has been registered for execution, this can therefore be transferred to the appropriate court in England under that section.

An individual who is in possession of a Minute of Agreement, that has not been registered, has another option. For example, if a party did not subsequently adhere to the obligations stated in the minute, the other party would be able to present the Minute of Agreement to the appropriate court in Scotland and request that a maintenance order is granted. In the event that an order was granted, it could be transferred to another part of the UK under section 16(2)(b) of the Maintenance Orders Act 1950.

An order made in a Scottish court, in relation to either spousal or child maintenance can be transferred to the appropriate court in England for registration and enforcement under section 16(2)(b) of the Maintenance Orders Act 1950.

Subject to the provisions of section 18 of the Maintenance Orders Act 1950; a maintenance order registered in a court in any part of the United Kingdom may be enforced in that part of the United Kingdom to which it is sent in all respects as if it had been made by that court and as if that court had had jurisdiction to make it.

Legal Aid Board

42. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what her policy is on payment of fees by the Legal Aid Board to members of the legal profession; and if she will make a statement. [41557]

Ms Rosie Winterton: In making any remuneration order for publicly funded legal work administered through the Legal Services Commission (LSC), formerly the Legal Aid Board, the Lord Chancellor is required by section 25(3) of the Access to Justice Act 1999 to have regard to

(a) the need to secure the provision of services of the description to which the order relates by a sufficient number of competent persons and bodies;

(b) the cost to public funds; and

(c) the need to secure value for money.

The Lord Chancellor is required by section 25(2) to consult the General Council of the Bar and the Law Society before making any such order.

Payments made to members of the legal profession for publicly funded work under the General Criminal or General Civil contracts are of an agreed monthly amount and are paid on a regular basis. In addition, the Lord Chancellor requires the Legal Services Commission to publish targets for bill processing and payment in their annual report. The Commission monitors performance against these targets on a monthly basis.

Social Exclusion

43. **Mrs. Fitzsimons:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what role Community Legal Services Partnerships play in combating social exclusion. [42355]

Ms Rosie Winterton: By planning and co-ordinating local help and advice and by developing referral systems, Community Legal Service Partnerships are improving access to good quality legal services, so bringing valuable help and assistance to many of society's most vulnerable groups and individuals. In so doing they act as a valuable mechanism with which to help combat social exclusion. Through their growing involvement in Local Strategic Partnerships, representatives from Community Legal Service Partnerships are also able to ensure that legal and advice services play a central role within local community strategies to promote neighbourhood renewal.

Freedom of Information

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how much money was spent on advertising the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information to the public in *(a)* 1998, *(b)* 1999, *(c)* 2000 and *(d)* 2001. [43449]

Mr. Wills: None. Information about the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information is available on the websites of the Lord Chancellor's Department (www.lcd.gov.uk) and the Parliamentary Ombudsman (www.ombudsman.org.uk).

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what assessment he has conducted of the length of time Governments in other countries have taken to implement their Freedom of Information Acts; and if he will place the results of this research in the Library. [43451]

Mr. Wills: I have assessed the implementation of similar legislation in some other countries from various published materials. In summary, other countries have implemented their freedom of information legislation within different time scales. The Canadian federal freedom of information legislation was enacted in June 1982 and came into force in July 1983. The New Zealand Official Information Act was enacted in December 1982 and came into force in July 1983. However, these countries were able to implement their Acts over a shorter time scale than is proposed in the United Kingdom because of the more limited scope of their legislation. The Canadian Act applies only to information held by Government Departments and most Government agencies, roughly 150 bodies, while the New Zealand legislation applies only to central Government. In contrast, the Freedom of Information Act 2000 will apply to approximately 70,000 bodies across the whole of the public sector. The Irish Act was signed into law in April 1997. It will eventually have roughly the same scope as the United Kingdom Act, although generally it is not retrospective in effect unlike the UK Act. It has been rolled out on an incremental basis from April 1998 onwards and it is likely that their implementation period will be longer than the time taken to fully implement the UK Act. The duties on public authorities under the Freedom of Information Act will come into effect in

stages from November 2002 to January 2005 and the Act will be fully in force 11 months ahead of the statutory deadline.

City Status (Northern Ireland)

Bob Russell: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when the decision was made to award city status to a second town in Northern Ireland; and on whose recommendation it was based. [44655]

Mr. Wills: Decisions on the award of city status to mark the Queen's Golden Jubilee were made in February 2002, when the Queen approved the recommendations of my noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor. The decision to grant city status to both Lisburn and Newry was based on the recommendation of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Children Act

Mr. John Taylor: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans she had to take up and implement the recommendations of the Children Act Sub-Committee of her Family Law Advisory Committee in its report entitled, Making Contact Work; whether *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary legislation will be necessary to bring about change in practice; and what timetable may be expected for legislation. [43426]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Government acknowledge the valuable contribution the report 'Making Contact Work' will make in addressing this difficult and sensitive area. The report makes a large number of recommendations, including some which would require legislative changes, on the facilitation and enforcement of contact between children and a parent who no longer lives with them. The Government are considering the proposals very carefully and will publish their response in due course. The Government remain committed to the principle that the welfare of the child must be paramount in any decision-making concerning a child's future, including decisions relating to contact.

Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service

Ms Ward: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when she will publish HM Magistrates Courts Service Inspectorate's report of its programme of visits to the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service during 2001. [44805]

Ms Rosie Winterton: HM Magistrates Courts Inspectorate (MCSI) has published its report 'Setting Up: Report of Programme of Visits to the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service' today. Copies of the report have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses. Further copies may be obtained from the Inspectorate.

Public Guardianship Office

Linda Gilroy: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what key performance measures and targets the Lord Chancellor has set for the Public Guardianship Office Executive Agency for 2002–03. [44806]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Lord Chancellor has set the following key performance measures (KPMs) and targets for the Public Guardianship Office for 2002–03:

KPM1: To develop an effective system for identifying client needs.

Target:

To carry out an annual customer satisfaction survey of panel and lay receivers to provide quantitative feed back data on PGO services as perceived by receivers by 31 December 2002.

To run four receiver and client focus groups in different parts of the country by 31 March 2003 to provide qualitative data to inform the Needs Assessment project of receiver needs.

To have completed the design and development phases of the Needs Assessment project and to have commenced the implementation phase by 15 January 2003.

KPM2: To increase the proportion of effective visits.

Target:

To maintain the current level of visits (6,000 per annum plus a visit to all new receivership clients).

To achieve 75 per cent. effective visits over the year.

KPM3: To increase the percentage of accounts collected on time and reviewed on time, as a basis for effective action to meet clients' needs.

Target:

To complete the review of 100 per cent. of accounts received or have requested further information within five weeks (25 working days) of receipt (to apply to both Receivership and Protection clients).

To collect 60 per cent. of accounts within two calendar months of the accounting end date, 80 per cent. within four calendar months of the accounting end date, and 100 per cent. within six calendar months of the accounting end date referring cases to the Court of Protection where necessary or taking other steps to ensure proper accounts are produced on behalf of clients (applies to Protection clients only).

To review and set appropriate targets for 2003–04 by 31 March 2003.

KPM4: To improve investment performance.

Target:

To ensure that annually 85 per cent. and on a three year rolling basis 80 per cent. of measured funds perform in line with a model performance based upon the Association of Private Client Investment Managers' and Stockbrokers' (APCIMS) capital indices; or an acceptable performance is achieved, taking into account clients' overall circumstances, including the income generated.

To establish benchmark appropriate to new investment strategies by the date those strategies are implemented.

KPM5: To secure an improved service in:

responding to correspondence

payment out

getting information to receivers once appointed to enable them to support our clients

closing cases

registering Enduring Power of Attorneys (EPAs)

Target:

Responding to correspondence: Respond to 95 per cent. of letters, faxes and e-mails within 15 working days of receipt.

Payment out: For 95 per cent. of requests, pay out or despatch direction to external receiver allowing access to funds to use for benefit of client within 15 working days of receipt.

Information to receivers: Despatch court orders and directions to applicants, receivers or their representatives in 95 per cent. of cases within 25 working days of their being made.

Closing cases: For 95 per cent. of complete applications for final directions, transfer all of clients' assets to personal representatives within 25 working days.

Registering EPAs: Registering and returning 95 per cent. of correctly lodged EPAs where there are no objections within five working days of the end of the statutory waiting period.

KPM6: To establish protocols for working with our receivers and our partners setting out the outcomes we intend to achieve jointly for clients

Target:

To: review the protocols established with key partner organisations in 2001–02 to ensure they are working properly by 31 October 2002; consider the usefulness of protocols with agencies identified in phase 2 of the partner protocol work stream by 31 October 2002; develop agreed written protocols setting out the outcomes we intend to achieve jointly for clients and memorandums of understanding setting out the ways we will work together to achieve these outcomes by 31 March 2003; draft agreed plans by 31 March 2003 for the development of each protocol over the next two to three years.

KPM7: To demonstrate our capability through a range of measures.

percentage staff have required skills and competencies

percentage receiving training

an effective research programme which underpins planning to meet clients' needs

stage reached in developing an automated case management system—the MERIS project

Target:

Staff skills and competencies: At least 90 per cent. of permanent staff to have a current Personal Development Plan which identifies their learning and development needs and makes specific plans to develop their skills and competencies to defined standards.

Staff training: At least 75 per cent. of permanent staff to receive at least three days training in line with their Personal Development Plan.

Research: To commission two research studies, one by 30 September 2002 and one by 31 March 2003 and to progress these to timetable in line with PGO's published programme of research.

Stage reached in developing an automated case management system—the MERIS project:

By 31 March 2003:

system design to be reviewed and approved (against agreed contract);

confirm specification for first phase implementation;

first phase of implementation to be accepted, following user acceptance testing.

Gateway 4 Review to be undertaken and provide approval to proceed;

data to be migrated in accordance with phased implementation plan, client service trained in accordance with first phase plan and first phase to be fully implemented.

KPM8: To demonstrate improvements in efficiency by achieving a unit cost per case target set by the Lord Chancellor.

Target:

To achieve a unit cost per case of not more than £480.

Data Protection Act

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if his Department has plans to *(a)* amend and *(b)* seek the repeal of the Data Protection Act 1998. [43448]

Mr. Wills: The Government is continuing to keep the operation of the Data Protection Act 1998 under review. At present we have no plans to amend the Act. Repeal of the Act would be inconsistent with our international obligations.

Census (1901)

Mr. John Taylor: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he plans to include Birmingham in the number of centres providing 1901 Census Online availability. [43450]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Public Record Office has provided Birmingham City Council with the necessary technical configurations so that its library service can access the 1901 Census online. Once work on compatibility issues has been completed by the City Council, Birmingham should be ready for operation as a service centre when the 1901 online census is relaunched.

PRIVY COUNCIL

Modernisation

48. **Julie Morgan:** To ask the President of the Council if he will consult the voluntary, business and trade union sectors on proposals to modernise the House of Commons. [41562]

55. **Margaret Moran:** To ask the President of the Council what plans he has to use electronic means of consultation on his proposals for reform of the House of Commons. [41571]

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the President of the Council if he will consult the voluntary, business and trade union sectors on his proposals to modernise the House. [41568]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: I understand that the Modernisation Committee has taken evidence from a number of individuals and organisations as to how Parliament might be made more topical, relevant and effective. I have been working with the National Council of Voluntary Organisations to ensure that the voluntary sector has a full input into this consultation, and am hoping to do more in the coming months.

I know the Leader of the Commons is very keen to hear the views of as many people as possible on the contents of the memorandum he presented to the Modernisation Committee in December. To this end I understand the Modernisation Committee is exploring the possibility of an e-consultation.

49. **Peter Bradley:** To ask the President of the Council if he will consult right hon. and hon. Members on the need for reform of conventions in the House. [41563]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: My right hon. Friend welcomes ideas for reform from all Members. Where there are outmoded or inappropriate conventions in the House, the Modernisation Committee will be happy to consider proposals for reform.

53. **Mr. Lazarowicz:** To ask the President of the Council what consideration he has given to improving the links between young people and Parliament in his proposals for modernisation of the House. [41569]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: My right hon. Friend hopes that his proposals will make Parliament more accessible to all groups, including young people. In addition, the parliamentary education service does a great deal to inform and involve young people.

Private Members' Bills

51. **Simon Hughes:** To ask the President of the Council how many private Members' Bills introduced by *(a)* Government Back Benchers and *(b)* Opposition Members have been enacted in each of the last 10 years; and what proposals he has to give greater opportunity for Back-Bench legislative initiatives to become law. [41566]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The information requested is as follows:

Session	*Number of PMBs enacted*	*Introduced by Government Back Bencher*	*Introduced by Opposition Member*
1991–92	13	11	2
1992–93	15	12	3
1993–94	16	11	5
1994–95	17	11	6
1995–96	17	12	5
1996–97	22	18	4
1997–98	10	7	3
1998–99	8	4	4
1999–2000	6	3	3
2000–01	0	0	0

My right hon. Friend has no such proposals at present.

House of Lords Reform

52. **David Taylor:** To ask the President of the Council if he will make a statement on progress on Lords reform. [41567]

54. **Mr. George Osborne:** To ask the President of the Council how many recent representations he has received calling for a wholly or substantially elected House of Lords. [41570]

56. **Joyce Quin:** To ask the President of the Council if he will make a statement on the response to the Government's White Paper on House of Lords reform. [41572]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: I refer the Members to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House to my hon. Friends the Members for Slough and Rhondda in the House today, *Official Report*, column 163.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the President of the Council (1) when he will respond to the report of the Select Committee on Public Administration on Lords Reform; [43818]

(2) how many responses were received to the White Paper on Lords Reform; and if he will make a statement. [43812]

Mr. Robin Cook: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave earlier today to my hon. Friends the Members for Slough and Rhondda, *Official Report*, column 163.

Prime Minister's Questions

57. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the President of the Council what recent representations he has received on the alteration of timing of questions to the Prime Minister. [41573]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: My right hon. Friend and I have received representations about the ability of those living in the north of England to attend Prime Minister's questions if it is brought forward significantly.

Traffic Disruption

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the President of the Council if he will make a statement on the level of consultation between his office and the House authorities with other bodies to ensure that traffic disruption is kept to a minimum while the House is sitting. [41833]

Mr. Robin Cook: At the beginning of each Session the House issues the Sessional Order which instructs the Commissioner of Police to keep the streets around the Houses of Parliament free from obstruction so that Members and Peers have a clear passage.

House officials liaise with the traffic authorities of Westminster city council and Transport for London. When problems, such as traffic congestion occur both bodies have been helpful in seeking to alleviate the problems.

If the right hon. Member has a specific point of concern, I would welcome further details.

Staff Numbers

Mr. Bercow: To ask the President of the Council how many staff have been employed by his Department in each of the last 10 years. [42468]

Mr. Robin Cook: The number of staff employed by the Privy Council in each of the last 10 years is shown in the table.

	Staff in post
1991	32
1992	32
1993	33
1994	33
1995	38
1996	37
1997	35
1998	33
1999	32
2000	35
2001	[1]40

[1] Four staff who worked in the Business Co-ordination Unit transferred to the Cabinet Office.

Sitting Hours

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the President of the Council if he will make a statement on his proposals for changing sitting hours of the House. [41565]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: My right hon. Friend's proposals are contained in his memorandum to the Modernisation Committee. The Committee is undertaking an inquiry into the proposals and welcomes the views of MPs on reform.

Accommodation Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the President of the Council what the cost was of hotel accommodation for departmental staff working away from home in each of the last four years. [41064]

Mr. Robin Cook: This figure can be provided only at disproportionate costs, but the total amount would be modest as there is little requirement for travel in the Department.

Equipment Leasing

Mr. Bercow: To ask the President of the Council if he will list the equipment leasing arrangements entered into by his Department in each of the last four years; and what the cost is to public funds in each case. [39081]

Mr. Robin Cook: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Teignbridge (Richard Younger-Ross) on 11 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 45W.

The details of the other leasing arrangements in my Department are:

Financial year	*Cost*[1] *(£)*
Photocopiers	
1998–99	13,216
1999–2000	16,770
2000–01	16,770
2001–02	17,455
Drinking water coolers	
1998–99	363
1999–2000	480
2000–01	480
2001–02	480

[1] Including VAT

Relocation Expenses

Mr. Bercow: To ask the President of the Council what his policy is on the payment of relocation expenses to staff in his Department. [41019]

Mr. Robin Cook: My Department does not pay relocation expenses.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Gibraltar

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on referendums held since 1972 in Gibraltar on the subject of Gibraltar's relationship with *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* Spain. [43489]

Peter Hain: There have been no referendums held in Gibraltar since 1972.

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations have been made to him by Spain in respect of the future of Gibraltar. [43467]

Peter Hain: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary last met his Spanish counterpart under the Brussels process on 4 February 2002. I refer the hon. Member to the Foreign Secretary's statement on these talks in answer to my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) on 5 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 735.

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations have been made to him by the Government of Gibraltar in respect of the discussions between Her Majesty's Government and Spain. [43468]

Peter Hain: I refer the hon. Member to my answer to the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Nicholas Winterton) on 12 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 865W.

Mr. MacDougall: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the level of UK investment in Gibraltar has been in each of the last five years. [42405]

Peter Hain: No figures are available for private sector investment flows from the UK to Gibraltar. Capital investment by the Ministry of Defence in Gibraltar over the last three financial years has been as follows:

FY	*£ million*
2001–02[1]	9.9
2000–01	7.2
1999–2000	3.9

[1] To date

There was no capital investment in the previous two financial years.

General Affairs Council

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs for what reason no devolved Administration Minister attended the 2416 European Union Council of Ministers (General Affairs) meeting on 11 March; which particular suggestions or matters of concern from the Scottish Executive were raised in their absence by the UK Government delegation; and what information is being provided by his Department to guarantee effective post-council scrutiny by the European Committee of the Scottish Parliament. [44317]

Peter Hain: Decisions on ministerial attendance at Council meetings are taken on a case-by-case basis by the lead UK Minister. I attended this meeting, representing all parts of the UK.

It is the responsibility of the European Committee of the Scottish Parliament to scrutinise the Scottish Executive's involvement in preparations for EU Council meetings. These arrangements are a matter for the

Committee and the Scottish Executive. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office provides information to Scottish Executive officials as part of that process.

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the outcome was of the General Affairs Council held in Brussels on 11 and 12 March; what the Government's stance was on each issue discussed, including its voting record; and if he will make a statement. [44057]

Peter Hain: I represented the UK at the General Affairs Council (GAC) in Brussels on 11th March. The Council adopted the "A" points listed in document 6924/02 (with the exception of point 5, where a scrutiny reserve was introduced). It also noted the resolution, decisions and opinions adopted by the European Parliament listed in document 5899/2. Copies of these documents will be placed in the Library of the House. No formal votes were taken. Joint actions, a common position and council conclusions were all adopted by consensus.

Preparation of the Barcelona European Council

The Presidency briefed on preparations for the European Council. The Council noted a document drawing on contributions from work in various formations of the Council (ECOFIN, Employment and Social Policy, Internal Market, Consumer Affairs and Tourism and Environment Councils) on the Union's economic, social and environmental situation. The Council endorsed an updated road map, which outlines implementation plans for the sustainable development strategy agreed in Goteborg. It also adopted a framework document proposing a strategy for better integrating environmental concerns into the Union's external relations. The Council noted a Commission document on the Lisbon strategy's external dimension, which focuses on the Doha development agenda, the Monterrey Conference on Financing for Development and the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development.

Annual Policy Strategy 2003

The President of the Commission presented an overview of the Annual Policy Strategy for 2003. The Council noted the Commission's policy priorities and welcomed the Commission's intention to hold a comprehensive dialogue on the strategy. Discussion of the dossier will continue at the General Affairs Council in May.

Situation in the Great Lakes Region

The Council adopted conclusions welcoming the signing of the National Indicative Programme for the DRC on 5 February 2002. The Council adopted a common position on EU support for the implementation of the Lusaka cease-fire agreement and the DRC peace process.

Preparation of Monterrey Conference

The Council discussed how best to achieve success at the UN Conference on financing for development, (Montserrey, Mexico, 18–22 March). As the world's largest contributor of development aid, the EU reaffirmed its commitment to fulfilling the development goals outlined in the UN Millennium accord. As agreed at Goteburg, it would seek to achieve the UN target for official development assistance (ODA) of 0.7 per cent. of GDP as soon as possible.

External aspects of the sustainable development strategy

The Commission's communication towards a global partnership for sustainable development was discussed and broadly welcomed by the Council. The Council agreed that work should continue so as to enable the General Affairs Council to co-ordinate the Union's position in advance of the Johannesburg World Summit in September.

Middle East Peace Process

The Council exchanged views on recent developments and agreed to continue working on how to best promote progress towards peace in the region. The UK supported the Presidency's idea of a statement on the MEPP at the Barcelona European Council.

Western Balkans

The Council welcomed a presentation by the UN Secretary General Special for Kosovo, Michael Steiner. The Council agreed with his objectives: to lay the foundation for economic progress, develop the rule of law, (including the fight against crime and violence), and to build a fair and just society. The Council welcomed the prospect of the donor's meeting for FYROM, co-hosted by the European Commission and the world bank, in Brussels on 12 March. It called on all parties and community leaders in FYROM to match the international community's determination to achieve economic recovery, inter-ethnic reconciliation and stability through the framework agreement and in the context of the stabilisation and association process.

The Council welcomed the recent high-level talks between Belgrde and Podgorica and called on both sides to intensify their efforts and to co-operate with the High Representative to achieve early agreement on future constitutional arrangements between Serbia and Montenegro.

The Council expressed full support for the work of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and noted improvement in co-operation between the countries of the region and ICTY over the last year. It underlined that co-operation with the Tribunal will be an essential element of the full realisation of the European perspectives of the countries in the region.

The Council welcomed Special Co-ordinator for the Stability Pact, Erhard Busek, and endorsed his priority objectives for 2002 in the areas of trade and investment, infrastructure, refugee issues, cross-border co-operation, small arms and light weapons and organised crime.

Following its conclusions of 18 February, the Council adopted a joint action establishing a European Union Police Mission (EUPM) to provide the follow-on to the UN International Police Task Force (IPTF) in Bosnia-and-Herzegovina (BiH) from 1 January 2003. The Council also adopted a joint action concerning the appointment of Lord Ashdown as the European Union Special Representative (EUSR) in Bosnia-and-Herzegovina.

Zimbabwe

The Council took stock of the latest development in the Presidential elections in Zimbabwe and agreed to monitor the situation closely over the coming days.

Human Rights and the next UN Commission in Geneva

The Council reaffirmed the EU's commitment to liberty, democracy, respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law. It recalled the adoption of EU guidelines on human rights dialogues on 13 December 2001 and the addition of supplementary guidelines on the death penalty and torture, reflecting the overriding importance the EU attaches to this subject. It reaffirmed that the fight against terrorism must respect human rights and the rule of law.

The Council expressed its satisfaction with the central role the Commission on Human Rights has achieved and the major role played by the EU and its member states at this forum. At the next CHR forum, the EU will present a significant number of country and thematic initiatives: on the death penalty, the rights of the child and the human rights situation in specific countries. The Council reaffirmed the EU's commitment to the International Criminal Court (ICC) as an essential means for promoting respect for humanitarian and human rights law and welcomed the fact that the ratification of the Rome statute of the ICC was advancing at a fast pace.

The Council decided that the EU at the UN Commission on Human Rights would convey its deep concern at the serious violations of human rights in China and the lack of progress in a number of areas. The EU will urge China to take a number of specific steps to improve the situation on the ground. If a draft resolution on human rights in China is tabled at the 58th session

of the UN Commission on Human Rights, the EU will study its contents carefully. If such a draft resolution is put to a vote, EU members of the Commission will consider favourably voting for its adoption.

Minority Languages

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what level of scrutiny was conducted in relation to the assessment of *(a)* Ulster Scots, *(b)* Lallands, *(c)* Northern Irish Gaelic and *(d)* Cornish before considering whether each should be specified by the Government under the provisions of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. [44242]

Mr. MacShane: The Charter does not set out what, if any, kind of scrutiny should be undertaken before specifying a language under its provisions. In the case of the UK, HMG has taken advice from the relevant Administrations of the UK on which languages to specify.

(a) Scots has had a presence in the island of Ireland for approximately four centuries. Ulster Scots ("Ullans") is defined in the North/South Co-operation (Implementation Bodies) Northern Ireland Order 1999 as

"the variety of the Scots language traditionally found in parts of Northern Ireland and Donegal".

Ministers decided that this qualified it for specification under the terms of the Charter.

(b) The Scots language has a long history and many points of difference from standard English. In the light of these considerations, Ministers decided that it should be considered a language and thus be covered by Part II of the Charter.

(c) Irish (Gaeilge) has been spoken throughout the island of Ireland for at least two millennia. The 1991 Census identified 142,003 people in Northern Ireland (9.4 per cent. of the population) who claimed competence in the language. Ministers decided that this qualified it for specification under the terms of the Charter.

(d) The Government office for the south-west commissioned an independent study in order to provide a sound factual basis for informing HMG's on-going assessment of its position on Cornish in relation to the Charter.

Convention on the Future of Europe

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much money and what other resources the Government have allocated for debate and information about the convention on the future of Europe; what assessment he has made of the money and resources made available by other member states; and if he will make a statement. [43020]

Peter Hain: The Government support a national debate on the future of Europe. This will be one of the calls on the FCO European Union Command's public diplomacy budget.

The resources made available in other member states are a matter for them.

EU Information Campaign

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the cost is of his Department's EU information campaign; and if he will make a statement on its purpose. [43610]

Peter Hain: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office's EU information campaign has cost a total of £236,038 to date for the financial year 2001–02. The campaign aims to help to raise awareness and understanding of the European Union and Britain's role within it.

UK Citizens (France)

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has received on the treatment of UK citizens held in prison in France, with particular reference to *(a)* access to legal representation, *(b)* access to an interpreter and *(c)* time taken in proceeding to trial. [42715]

Mr. Bradshaw: We often receive representations on behalf of UK citizens held in prison in France. We look into each case on an individual basis and discuss the details of the case with the detainee. We do not record statistics on the points raised by my hon. Friend. It would involve disproportionate cost to provide the information requested.

Former Yugoslavia

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's policy on the future of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. [43549]

Mr. MacShane: The United Kingdom fully supports the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in fulfilling its mandate to bring to justice persons allegedly responsible for violations of international humanitarian law, to render justice to the victims, and to contribute to the restoration of peace by promoting reconciliation in the former Yugoslavia.

The Tribunal's Chief Prosecutor, Carla del Ponte, held discussions with the Foreign Secretary on 14 March about the Tribunal's future. Her stated aim is to complete the Tribunal's work by 2008. The UK supports her in this aim. However, this timetable is conditional upon states in the former Yugoslavia co-operating with the Tribunal and beginning to take responsibility for trying lower level war criminals in their jurisdiction. We continue to encourage the states in former Yugoslavia to take these necessary steps.

International Criminal Court

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress towards the establishment of the International Criminal Court. [43550]

Mr. MacShane: Good progress is being made towards the establishment of the International Criminal Court. The UK ratified in October 2001. 55 states have ratified to date.

The court will enter into force upon the 60th ratification of the Rome Statute. We expect the deposit of the 60th ratification this summer with the court entering into force by the end of this year. The United Kingdom is urging other states, in our bilateral contacts and with EU partners and associated states (in pursuance of the EU common position on the ICC) to ratify the Rome Statute.

Private Simon Jeans

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on how many occasions since 1997 he has made representations to his Croatian counterpart regarding the killing of Private Simon Jeans in Split, Croatia, in September 1996. [43303]

Mr. Bradshaw: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence raised Private Jean's case with the Croatian Defence Minister when he visited the UK in 2000. The then Minister for Europe, my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz), also raised the case on several occasions. The case has been officially raised at various levels on numerous other occasions. Our consular staff in London and Zagreb continue to offer full support and assistance to Private Jean's family.

Holocaust Denial

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Italian Government concerning the conference on Holocaust denial to be held in Trieste at the end of March; and if he will make a statement. [43479]

Peter Hain: None. We have not been informed of the Trieste meeting. The Government deplore Holocaust denial—as do all our EU partners. The Government are working at many levels to promote Holocaust education, remembrance and research, both at home, through for example the national curriculum and the annual Holocaust Memorial Day; and overseas through its membership of the International Task Force on post-Holocaust issues.

Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the progress of the UN Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee. [43548]

Mr. MacShane: The Counter-Terrorism Committee was established to monitor implementation of UN Security Council resolution 1373 (2001), which imposed mandatory obligations on all states to prevent and suppress terrorist financing and deny terrorists safe havens. The British Permanent Representative to the United Nations in New York, Sir Jeremy Greenstock, is its chairman.

As of 11 March 2002, the Counter Terrorism Committee had received reports from 135 of the UN's 189 member states. This is an unprecedented response rate, demonstrating the importance the entire international community attaches to fighting terrorism.

The Counter-Terrorism Committee is now in the process of analysing these reports, and seeking further information from states where necessary. The picture being built up should help the committee and states concerned to identify and address areas in which existing counter-terrorism structures need to be improved.

Sub-Continent

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his efforts to encourage the Governments of India and Pakistan to sign up to the *(a)* non-proliferation and *(b)* test ban treaties. [43808]

Mr. Bradshaw: We have regular contacts with both India and Pakistan on the full range of disarmament and non-proliferation issues. We are currently encouraging both countries to reduce nuclear tension in the region by engaging in a dialogue on confidence building measures. We also emphasise that our long-term goal is for India and Pakistan to abide by their obligations under UN Security Council Resolution 1172, including accession to the Non-Proliferation Treaty as non-nuclear weapons states and signature and ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty.

Iraq

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what actions his Department has taken to secure the reinstatement of UN weapons inspectors in Iraq. [43530]

Mr. Bradshaw: We have continuously urged Iraq to co-operate with the UN, particularly on weapons inspections. Security Council Resolution 1284—a UK initiative—offered for the first time the suspension of UN sanctions as an interim step pending the complete elimination of Iraq's WMD, which would in turn lead to the full lifting of sanctions. We support the efforts of the UN Secretary General to persuade Iraq to co-operate with the UN through renewed dialogue, while making clear that there can be no watering down of Iraq's obligations under UN resolutions.

Middle East

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what measures he is taking to stop the violence between the Palestinians and Israelis; and if he will make a statement. [43221]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Government are profoundly concerned at the continuing violence in the middle east. We believe United Nations Security Council Resolution 1397 is a clear expression of the international desire to end the violence. In this context we welcome the return of US envoy General Zinni to the region, and the Saudi Arabian initiative. We urge both parties to support Zinni's efforts to broker a ceasefire and implement the Tenet security workplan and Mitchell Committee recommendations.

UK-Sudan Relations

Richard Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on UK-Sudan relations. [39551]

Mr. MacShane: We have a full bilateral relationship with Sudan. Our focus there remains the search for peace and, in this respect, my right hon. Friend the Foreign

Secretary recently announced the appointment of Alan Goulty as the UK Special Representative for Sudan. Mr. Goulty will continue our policy of engagement with all parties to the conflict in an attempt to bring an end to the suffering caused by so many years of war. We continue to support the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) peace process, and, accordingly, the IGAD Declaration of Principles, which includes the right of self-determination for southerners. We also continue to promote democracy and human rights in Sudan.

Advertising

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the publicity and advertising campaigns run by his Department in each of the last four years, specifying the *(a)* purpose, *(b)* cost to public funds, *(c)* number of staff involved and *(d)* method of evaluation in each case. [39102]

Mr. MacShane: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office conducted a publicity campaign in the UK in 1998 to reduce the number of ticketless fans travelling to France for the World Cup Finals and to explain what consular services were available. The Department also provides information on Britain and the EU for the British public. The aim is to increase knowledge of UK membership of the EU. Tables 1 and 2 give figures for expenditure and numbers of staff involved.

Table 1: consular publicity campaign

	Cost to public funds (£)	*Staff*
1998–99	1,000,000	3
1999–2000	0	0
2000–01	0	0
2001–02	0	0

Note:
Methods of evaluation included a face-to-face omnibus survey, before and after the campaign, on a targeted audience of football fans aged between 18 and 40.

Table 2: information on the EU

	Cost to public funds (£)	*Staff*
1998–99	0	0
1999–2000	102,574	5
2000–01	258,000	8
2001–02	[1]236,038	9

[1] To date
Note:
Methods of evaluation have included hit counters on websites and an opinion poll in 2001.

Information on publicity or advertising campaigns organised by UK missions overseas could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Flexible Working

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many and what proportion of the staff of his Department are *(a)* job sharing, *(b)* term working and *(c)* engaged in another form of flexible working. [42421]

Mr. Bradshaw: The FCO has 44 people job-sharing (0.78 per cent. of FCO staff), two people term working (0.03 per cent. of FCO staff) and 130 people engaged in other forms of flexible working ie part-time, home working and compressed hours (2.3 per cent. of FCO staff).

Other arrangement include staggered hours, flexi-time and home working.

The FCO is actively exploring the scope to offer increased flexibility to staff in order to meet the growing demand for a healthy work/life balance and to improve our record on diversity. This has the personal support of the Secretary of State.

Diplomatic Guidelines

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 4 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 63W, what guidelines there are to inform diplomats on how to assess whether representations will benefit the UK; and if he will make a statement. [42914]

Mr. MacShane: I have nothing to add to my previous answer.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

EU Directives

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the European Union directives and regulations relating to her Department that have been implemented in each of the last four years, specifying *(a)* the title and purpose of each, *(b)* the cost to public funds of each and *(c)* the cost to businesses of each. [39112]

Mr. Caborn: The information requested is as follows for this Department:

Council Directive (89/552/EEC) of 3 October 1989 on the "Coordination of Certain Provisions Laid Down by Law, Regulation or Administrative Action in Member States Concerning the Pursuit of Television Broadcasting Activities", as amended by Directive 97/36/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 June 1997.

Directive 2001/38/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 June 2001 amending Council Directive 93/7/EEC on the return of cultural objects unlawfully removed from the territory of a member state.

Cost information in the form requested in part *(b)* of the question is not held in this Department and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Departments are required to produce regulatory impact assessments for proposals, including those originating in European legislation, likely to impose significant costs on business, charities or voluntary organisations. Copies of these are available in the Commons and Lords Libraries.

Sports Funding

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what her policy is on the provision of financial support for international sporting events in the UK. [43439]

Mr. Caborn: The benefits to the United Kingdom of hosting international sporting events are enormous. As well as encouraging economic investment and tourism, such events leave legacies of sporting development.

The provision of financial support for major events bids is a matter for the Sports Councils to determine against their clear and robust funding criteria. UK Sport currently makes available approximately £1.6 million per year in Lottery funding to assist with the bidding processes for, and the staging of, major sporting events in the UK. Sport England considers funding applications for these purposes against its general funding criteria.

Lottery Grants

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many organisations in receipt of Lottery grants in 2000–01 were subject to special investigations arising from concerns about how the money was used; and if she will make a statement. [43810]

Mr. Caborn: This information is not held centrally. The National Lottery distributing bodies make decisions independently of the Government on the award and monitoring of Lottery grants.

The distributing bodies are required by the financial directions issued to them under section 26 (3), (3A) and (4) of the National Lottery etc. Act 1993 (as amended by the National Lottery Act 1998) to attach conditions to any National Lottery grant award. These conditions must include the provision that the grant must be used for the purpose set out in the application made by the recipient, and the condition that the grant may have to be repaid in full or in part if any of the grant conditions are breached.

The financial directions issued to each distributing body also require the body to maintain effective controls to prevent and detect fraud and have systems in place to deal effectively with cases of fraud, however they might have been identified. Distributors are expected to ensure that their procedures address the risks identified in a manual on lottery fraud issued by my Department.

Correspondence

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when she will reply to the letter of 12 December from the hon. Member for Totnes concerning Mr. C. Kelland of Dartmouth, Devon and digital television. [43139]

Dr. Howells: I replied to the hon. Gentleman on 17 January 2002 and I have sent him another copy of my reply.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General if she will list the public service agreement targets which have been revised and those which have been introduced since the publication of the 2001 departmental report. [43257]

The Solicitor-General: The Law Officer's Departmental Report for 2001–02 to 2003–04 was published in March 2001. The departmental report reported performance against PSA targets agreed in the 1998 comprehensive Spending Review and set out the new targets agreed as a result of the SR2000 Spending Review. Since their publication in the departmental report, there have been no changes to these PSA targets.

Porton Down

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Solicitor-General when the Attorney-General expects to make a decision regarding a new inquest into the death of Ronald Maddison at the Chemical Defence Establishment, Porton Down under section 13 of the Coroners Act 1988; and if she will make a statement. [43441]

The Solicitor-General: The applicant for the Attorney-General's consent to an application to the High Court for a fresh inquest under section 13(1)(b) Coroner's Act 1988 into the death of Ronald Maddison at Porton Down in 1953 is Her Majesty's Coroner for Wiltshire and Swindon. He has asked that his application is not considered until the evidence of a recently discovered witness is made available to the Attorney-General. The Attorney-General will consider the application when that evidence is received.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Engineers

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many chartered engineers there are in her Department; and what grades they hold. [43583]

Clare Short: There are a total of 34 chartered engineers working for DFID as permanent and pensionable staff, of which two are at the SCS level, 16 are at the A1 level and 16 are at the A2 level.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what use her Department makes of engineers to alleviate world poverty; and if she will make a statement. [43581]

Clare Short: Infrastructure services play a key role in both directly addressing poverty (access to safe water, the provision of clean energy, transport, etc.) and, more indirectly, in contributing to longer term sustainable poverty elimination. Effective services supported by adequate physical infrastructure are essential if we are to promote [illegible] rates of economic growth in our partner countries necessary to meet the millennium development goals.

DFID's engineering staff are employed both in our infrastructure and urban development department in London (where they are responsible for developing innovative approaches to meeting infrastructure service needs and managing a wide ranging knowledge and research programme) and in our country and regional offices (where they are working with our partner Governments to help them take forward programmes which draw on the innovation and knowledge programmes developed in the centre).

I see our professional engineering staff, and the programmes they help to develop and implement, as a very important part of DFID's contribution to our poverty

elimination agenda. I will shortly be publishing a strategy paper highlighting the importance of infrastructure services to the achievement of the millennium development goals and setting out the approach proposed by DFID to maximising the poverty elimination potential of work in the infrastructure sector.

CDC Capital Partners

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development when she last had discussions with officials from CDC Capital Partners regarding their investment strategy; and when she next plans to do so. [43659]

Hilary Benn: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development discussed the CDC investment policy and related issues with the chairman and chief executive in November last year. Her next meeting with CDC will be in April 2002.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the countries in which CDC Capital Partners has closed its offices in the last three years. [43656]

Hilary Benn: Since 1999 CDC has closed offices in Peru, Trinidad, Jamaica, Uganda, Malawi, Bangladesh, Philippines, and Fiji. CDC continues to manage existing investments and look for new investment opportunities in these countries from neighbouring regional offices.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if it is her policy to compensate those from whom investment has been withdrawn by CDC Capital Partners. [43658]

Hilary Benn: No. CDC has sold some investments to other owners, well placed to develop these businesses further. These disposals have been done in a socially responsible manner.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the projects from which CDC Capital Partners has withdrawn its investment in the last three years. [43657]

Hilary Benn: CDC Capital Partners sold its investments in the following enterprises:

Enterprise	*Country*
1999	
Rusitu Valley Development Co. (pvt) Ltd.	Zimbabwe
Corporacion Privada de Inversiones de Centroamerica	Costa Rica
Textiles Rio Lindo SA de CV	Honduras
Alliance Credit International	India
Apollo Tyres Ltd.	India
Credit Capital Venture Fund (India) Ltd.	India
DSQ Software Ltd.	India
Modi Mirlees Blackstone Ltd.	India
Wipro Financial Services	India
Blantyre Netting Co. Ltd.	Malawi
Vanik Inc. Ltd.	Sri Lanka
Neopac (Swaziland) Ltd.	Swaziland
Trinidad Cement Ltd.	Trinidad and Tobago
2000	
Industrial Credit Co. Zambia	Zambia
Safety, Security and Justice Management (pty)	South Africa
Clovergem Celtel Ltd.	Uganda
Zimbabwe Development Bank	Zimbabwe
Tip Top Industrial Co. Ltd.	Nicaragua
PT Semens Andalas Indonesia	Indonesia
2001	
Kawalazi Estate Co. Ltd.	Malawi
Sable Farming Co. Ltd.	Malawi
East Umbara Tea Co.	Tanzania
Rwenzori Tea Investments	Uganda
Chilanga Cement	Zambia
Mbeya Cement	Tanzania
Portland Cement	Malawi
Capital Developments Ltd.	Malawi
National Seed Cotton Milling	Malawi
Home Finance Co. Ltd.	Fiji
Tropik Wood Industries Ltd.	Fiji
Housing Development Finance Corporation Ltd.	India
India Access Fund	India
ABC Holdings Ltd.	Botswana

Zimbabwe

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what contingency plans she has made to deal with the consequences of the elections in Zimbabwe. [43664]

Hilary Benn: We are very concerned about the future for ordinary Zimbabweans. The election outcome is likely to accelerate poverty and hunger. The UK is working with key stakeholders and the international community to urge policy changes on the part of the Zimbabwe Government to halt the catastrophic decline in agriculture, the economy, and social services. In parallel, we continue to provide humanitarian assistance for the vulnerable, and to address the HIV/AIDS epidemic that affects one in three adults in Zimbabwe.

Burundi

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much overseas aid is provided to the Congolese Banyamulenge community in Burundi. [43665]

Hilary Benn: DFID does not provide any aid that is targeted specifically at the Congolese Banyamulenge community in Burundi. DFID has provided £350,000 to the British Red Cross to assist Congolese refugees in Tanzania, which include some Banyamulenge. We have also provided about £1 million in general humanitarian assistance to programmes in Burundi itself during this financial year. The UK continues to support the full implementation of the Arusha and Lusaka Peace Accords to achieve a lasting peace in the region.

Indigenous Peoples

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the rights of indigenous peoples in her Department's development policy. [43663]

Hilary Benn: DFID's aim is the elimination of poverty in poorer countries. Discrimination and marginalisation is frequently a cause of poverty, and we are seeking to ensure that poor people are consulted on policies and decisions that affect them and are aware of their rights. By adopting such an approach, we aim to promote social justice, including tackling discrimination against indigenous people and ethnic minorities.

Africa

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what percentage of her Department's overall aid programme in Africa is provided specifically to help rural development. [43666]

Hilary Benn: Around £840 million in new commitments was made to Africa last year. Of this approximately 27 per cent. was allocated to projects in support of sustainable rural livelihoods.

Kalahari Bushmen

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what representations she has made to UNESCO regarding the fate of the Kalahari. [43660]

Hilary Benn: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development has not made any representations to UNESCO about the Kalahari. UNESCO has a strong interest in supporting San communities across Southern Africa, and DFID has co-operated with UNESCO in supporting the South African San institute.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much overseas aid is provided to the Kalahari bushmen. [43661]

Hilary Benn: The UK provides no assistance directly to the Kalahari bushmen. In the financial year 2000–01 the Department for International Development provided about £2 million to Botswana, for activities in education, governance, health and livelihoods creation.

Botswana

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what was the value of *(a)* bilateral and *(b)* multilateral aid provided to the Government of Botswana for the development of game parks and national reserves in each of the last five years. [43662]

Hilary Benn: In 1996–7 the UK provided £425,000 for a capacity building programme in the Government of Botswana's Department of Wildlife and National Parks. The project lasted one year. The European Union is the only multilateral donor assisting in this area, and has committed over 20 million euro to wildlife conservation since 1997.

Timber

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the companies from which her Department has obtained timber and wood products and the total spent with each firm over the last five years. [43409]

Hilary Benn: The companies that have provided timber and wood products over the last five years are listed. The amounts given are in some cases estimated, as the companies supply a range of products, not all of which are timber and wood, and a precise breakdown is not available.

Company	*Amount £*
Kinnarps	905,423
J.S. Seating and Desking	294,660
Optimum Business Furniture	226,196
Kellys Interiors	63,283
Ensemble Corporation	51,605
Desking Systems	55,679
Ness	16,092
Guilberts	7,108

Lakshmi Mittal

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if he consulted *(a)* the EBRD and *(b)* the World Bank before signing the letter to the Romanian Prime Minister about the SIDEX steel plant. [43770]

Hilary Benn: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development has not written to the Romanian Prime Minister about the Sidex steel plant.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what representations she has received from the Office of the Prime Minister regarding future loan applications from Mr. Lakshmi Mittal to the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. [43772]

Hilary Benn: None.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what representations she has received from Mr. Lakshmi Mittal regarding future loan applications to the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. [43771]

Hilary Benn: None.

DEFENCE

Ministerial Visits

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what dates Ministers in his Department have visited United States Government military bases and establishment on United Kingdom territory since 1 January 1999; which Ministers were involved; and what facilities were visited. [43476]

Dr. Moonie: Since 1 January 1999, Ministers from the Ministry of Defence have visited bases made available to the United States visiting forces in the United Kingdom on a number of occasions. The most recent visit was by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence to RAF Menwith Hill on 5 July 2001. Prior to this, RAF Menwith Hill was visited by my right hon. Friend the Member for Warley (Mr. Spellar), the then Minister of State for the Armed Forces, on 24 January 2000, and my noble Lord (Lord Gilbert) the then Minister for Defence Procurement, visited RAF Fairford on 3 June 1999. A number of Ministers have also visited RAF Fairford during the Royal International Air Tattoo.

Efficiency Measures

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what savings have accrued from the replacement of five

contracts supporting a guided missile system with a single incentivised contract streamlined stockholdings and overheads, as noted in his Department's performance report 2000–01. [44219]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 18 March 2002]:* The reference in the report relates to a support contract for the Rapier FSB2 guided weapon system. This contract has been in place since April 2000. Savings of approximately £134,000 were achieved in the first year and similar levels of savings are expected throughout the remainder of the contract. Of equal importance is the increase in availability of the equipment system as a result of this contract.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what savings have accrued to his Department from the use of incentives in the MOD's food supply contract that require the contractor to seek improved value for money on behalf of the Department. [44217]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 18 March 2002]:* The decision to contractorise Ministry of Defence food supply is estimated to be saving £13 million per year compared to previous arrangements. This is as a direct result of employing the contractor's commercial buying power to secure best value for money in the marketplace. The contractor does not profit from the cost of food supplied to the MOD and prices are subject to regular, independent, benchmarking. In addition to these savings the contractor's operating costs, on which the contractor does earn profit, are constrained through the use of a contracted Target Cost Incentive arrangement, under which annualised cost under-runs are shared. We are currently in negotiation over the precise amount accrued.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which sections of his budget received extra resources as a result of money gained from efficiency savings in each of the last three years; and how much was given to each. [43217]

Mr. Ingram: The allocation of resources within the Ministry of Defence is carried out in accordance with agreed priorities and objectives. We take into account many issues, including predicted efficiency savings. These are not managed separately and we therefore do not track how they are reinvested.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how the efficiency savings in each of the last three years were achieved; [43218]

(2) which single efficiency measures have resulted in annual savings of over *(a)* £500,000, *(b)* £1 million and *(c)* £5 million. [44223]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 18 March 2002]:* Efficiency savings are achieved by each area of the Ministry of Defence and of the services reviewing its business and identifying ways in which it might operate more efficiently and effectively. This can involve, for example, internal restructuring, use of public private partnerships and wider markets and increased use of IT.

The MOD does not maintain a central list of efficiency measures and the information requested on individual measures could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Information on financially significant efficiency measures for 1998–99 and 1999–2000 was, however, provided to the House of Commons Defence Committee, and was published on 9 May 2001 as part of the Committee's 8th Report, copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

Examples of efficiency measures taken in 2000–01 are set out in the Departmental Performance Report 2000–01 (Cm 5290), copies of which are also available in the Library of the House.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the annual target is for efficiency savings to be made in his Department's spending; and how much was saved in each of the past five years. [44216]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 18 March 2002]:* The Ministry of Defence's achievement against the efficiency target agreed in the 1998 Comprehensive Spending Review is set out in the Departmental Performance Report 2000–01 (Cm 5290), copies of which are available in the Library of the House. The cumulative achievement is:

£ million

	Target	*Achievement*
1998–99	505	594
1999–2000	998	1,126
2000–01	1,499	1,462

Information on efficiency achievement in 1996–97 and 1997–98 has been archived. I will write to the hon. Member when the information is available.

Cancelled Projects

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the estimated cost of *(a)* Lion Sun 15/99, *(b)* Tradewinds 01, *(c)* Hairspring 00, *(d)* Winter Deployment 00 and *(e)* Aswex 00 was before they were cancelled. [44663]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Defence Logistics Organisation

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which Defence Logistics Organisation Information Technology projects have been cancelled since 1997; and what has been the total spending to date on these projects. [44215]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 18 March 2002]:* The Defence Logistics Organisation was launched on 3 April 2000, since when none of the IT related projects or programmes that it has initiated have been cancelled.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reasons work has been stopped on the Defence Stores Management Solution system; and what assessment he has made of the effect this will have on the efforts of the Defence Logistics Organisation to achieve cost reductions in the delivery of its services. [44214]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 18 March 2002]:* The Defence Stores Management Solution aims to improve inventory management by introducing new processes to provide better visibility across the entire supply chain. Work in industry on the development of a possible means of meeting this requirement has been suspended pending the outcome of the annual review of the forward defence

programme. We are taking this opportunity to conduct a reappraisal of the options for meeting the requirement to ensure that the most effective solution is chosen to provide all the benefits, including cost reductions, that are required.

Pensions

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the cost has been of administering the war pension scheme in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [44020]

Dr. Moonie: The cost of administering the War Pensions Scheme is published in the Annual Report and Accounts of the War Pensions Agency; copies of which are held in the Library.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the changes his Department is considering in the Review of Armed Forces Pension Scheme will require primary legislation to effect the changes required; what the timescale is for implementing the review; and if he will make a statement. [44018]

Mr. Ingram: The Ministry of Defence legal advisers are currently considering whether extant legislation for the current Armed Forces Pension Scheme (AFPS) could be amended or if primary legislation would be the most effective means of implementing a new scheme. The timescale for implementation is expected to be determined by factors such as the introduction of a new joint personnel administration system which would provide the IT framework for the pension scheme and for the closely associated systems for personnel data. This system is scheduled for introduction from late 2004 onwards, and we are hoping to introduce the new pension scheme around 2005–06, subject to IT and legislative requirements.

Green Howards Regiment

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what rank is held by former Privates Wayne King, Thomas Myers, Marc Hunter and Lance Corporal David White who were with the Green Howards regiment stationed at Warminster in June 2000. [43714]

Mr. Ingram: Former Privates Wayne King and Thomas Myers are no longer serving in the Army. Private Marc Hunter and Lance Corporal David White maintain the same ranks they held while stationed at Warminster in June 2000.

Warship Maintenance Modernisation Programme

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the Warship Maintenance Modernisation Programme. [44037]

Mr. Ingram: The way ahead on the Warship Support Modernisation Initiative is currently being considered by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence. It is anticipated that an announcement will be made in the near future.

Afghanistan

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the outcome was of the investigation led by Colonel Zemary Fazil into the death of a man and injury of his pregnant wife in Kabul on the weekend of 16 and 17 February; what statements were issued contemporaneously by the Army press office and other agencies given responsibility for press relations; what subsequent clarifications have been issued; what explanation for the incident has been given to partners in the International Security Assistance Force; how many rounds were fired by each of the members of the Parachute Regiment involved in the incident; what ranks these soldiers were; how many spent rounds were recovered in the vicinity; in whose custody scene of crime evidence has been retained; how many soldiers have been withdrawn from the area of operation; if disciplinary charges are pending; what attempts have been made by senior officers to contact the family of the deceased; and what representations have been received from the Afghan authorities. [41096]

Mr. Hoon *[holding answer 18 March 2002]:* Early on the morning of 16 February, an Observation Post manned by members of 2nd Battalion, the Parachute Regiment, reported coming under fire from as-yet-unidentified gunmen. The soldiers returned fire. At first light, a joint patrol with the Afghan Interim Authority Police was despatched to the area for follow-up action. In the vicinity of the incident, they discovered a car that had suffered damage from gunfire. On further investigation, they found in a nearby house one dead and four injured people and a new-born baby. The injured were taken to hospital. Their injuries were not life threatening.

The Afghan Interim Authority Police are investigating this incident, with support from members of the Royal Military Police (RMP). The Afghan police have retained any evidence that they wish to and the RMP have retained other items, including the car that had been fired upon. Before the investigation is complete it would not be appropriate to comment further on details of the incident.

The press were briefed at the time in Kabul and have been updated as necessary by the Ministry of Defence press office. Other troop-contributing nations of ISAF were informed of the incident along the same lines as the press.

In accordance with standard procedure, the two soldiers involved in the incident were withdrawn from the area of operations. Until the RMP investigation is completed, the question of disciplinary proceedings does not arise.

ISAF have held informal meetings with the family of the deceased man who understand that the investigation is continuing.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received from his US counterpart regarding an increase in the numbers of international peacekeepers in Kabul and Afghanistan; and if he will make a statement. [41889]

Mr. Hoon: None.

International Security Assistance Force

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the United Kingdom will cease to be the lead nation for the International Security Assistance Force

for Kabul and its surrounding area under the terms of Annex 1 to the Bonn agreement; and if he will make a statement. [41895]

Mr. Hoon: Negotiations continue with Turkey in pursuit of our aim to hand over our lead nation status of the International Security Assistance Force by 30 April.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has made to his Turkish counterpart regarding the takeover of the ISAF command in Kabul; and if he will make a statement. [41893]

Mr. Hoon: Official are in close talks with their Turkish counterparts to secure Turkish agreement to take over our status as Lead Nation of the International Security Assistance Force. A joint Ministry of Defence and Foreign and Commonwealth office team visited Ankara last week for further discussions with Turkish officials. I will be seeing my Turkish counterpart this week.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what representations he has made in the last two months to his European counterparts regarding the extension of the ISAF's mandate; and if he will make a statement; [41891]

(2) what representations he has received from his European counterparts regarding the extension of the ISAF's mandate; and if he will make a statement. [41892]

Mr. Hoon: I have discussed a number of issues regarding the International Security Assistance Force with the defence ministers of several European countries with military personnel deployed with ISAF.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will make a statement on the British forces' commitment to participating in the ISAF after 30 April; [41897]

(2) what support the British troops deployed in Kabul will give to a lead nation after 30 April. [41898]

Mr. Hoon: The United Kingdom will remain a significant contributor to the International Security Assistance Force although we plan to reduce the level of our commitment once we relinquish the leadership of the force.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans there are for ISAF troops to be deployed outside Kabul; and if he will make a statement. [41890]

Mr. Hoon: The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF)'s area of responsibility (AOR) is limited to Kabul and its environs, as stipulated by the United Nations Security Council resolution 1386 and the Military Technical Agreement signed between the Commander ISAF and the Afghan Interim Administration on 4 January 2002. There are no plans to change this.

Northern Ireland

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence further to his answer of 15 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 947W, on Northern Ireland, if he will provide *(a)* the information requested up to the end of 2001 and *(b)* the information on injuries and fatalities to include incidents of Army use of firearms outside Army property. [42539]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Engineers

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of the Army were *(a)* royal engineers and *(b)* royal electrical and mechanical engineers in (i) 1997, (ii) 1992, (iii) 1987 and (iv) 1982. [43590]

Mr. Ingram: The figures are the percentage of Royal Engineers and Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers as a proportion of UK trained Army personnel.

Percentage

Date	*Royal Engineers*	*Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers*
April 1997[1]	9.0	10.3
April 1992[1]	9.7	10.0
April 1987[1]	9.4	9.7
April 1982[2]	9.2	9.7

[1] The figures are taken from a DASA-held database of officers' and soldiers' records of service.

[2] Computerised figures are not held before 1986 so these data are taken from manual records.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what support is given to engineers in the armed services seeking to attain chartered status. [43588]

Mr. Ingram: Engineers play a vital role within the armed forces. Training is accredited where appropriate with the relevant national awarding bodies. The successful Royal Navy engineering sponsorship scheme at Southampton university is shortly to be expanded to other universities and, to maintain the high quality of our technical officer intake across Defence as a whole, will include Army and RAF officers as well. A proportion of engineering graduates are selected each year to undertake a MSc; the number depends on the operational requirement. The holders of such higher degrees can apply for chartered status. Registration costs and the first year's membership fee are granted on a case by case basis to those whose posts require such status. However, the Engineering Technology Board, which recently superseded the Engineering Council, has revised the guidance for registration. As a result, for the majority of engineering posts in the armed forces, incorporated engineer status is more appropriate than chartered engineer.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many female chartered engineers, excluding reservists, there are in *(a)* the Royal Navy, *(b)* the Army, *(c)* the Royal Air Force and *(d)* the Royal Fleet Auxiliary; and what the corresponding numbers were for years (i) 1997, (ii) 1992, (iii) 1987 and (iv) 1982. [43587]

Mr. Ingram: The number of female chartered engineers is set out in the table.

	Naval Service	*Army*	*RAF*
1 February 2002	2	2	7
1 April 1997	2	1	3
1 April 1992	0	0	2

There are currently no female chartered engineers in the Royal Fleet Auxiliary and there have been none in the previous years.

There were no female chartered engineers in the armed forces in 1987 and 1982.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many defence fellowships have been awarded to officers for the study of engineering matters since 1997. [43589]

Mr. Ingram: The Ministry of Defence's Defence Fellowship scheme provided an opportunity for one or two Ministry of Defence personnel a year (regular officers and MOD civilians) to pursue a chosen subject of study or research of benefit to the Department, for one year at an advanced level in a British university of their choice. The scheme has now finished. In the period since 1997 none of the fellowships concerned engineering matters.

We provide a wide range of engineering training opportunities and I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

NORTHERN IRELAND

MOX Nuclear Reprocessing Plant (Terrorism)

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the need for stronger civil defence precautions in Northern Ireland to safeguard against the effects of a terrorist attack on the new MOX nuclear reprocessing plant in Sellafield. [35340]

Dr. John Reid: Since the attacks of 11 September on the United States, the British Government have been reviewing their contingency planning arrangements. Much work has been done, and continues to be done, to strengthen our national resilience. This includes an examination of all key sites, of which Sellafield is one.

This work deals both with the counter-terrorism aspect, improving intelligence against the enemy we face and strengthening our defences, and the civil contingencies aspect, ensuring that the necessary resources are in place to minimise the consequences of a successful attack.

It is not possible, for security reasons, to divulge the details of the measures being put in place. However, the Government will do whatever is necessary, at Sellafield and throughout the UK, to maximise our resilience to any threat.

TREASURY

Government Audit and Accountability

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the bodies which will be consulted about his proposed extension of audit and accountability in central Government. [44312]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Consultation will involve bodies and individuals affected by the proposed extension of audit and access powers for the Comptroller and Auditor General.

Consulted bodies will include those non-departmental public bodies whose auditors are currently appointed by the Government, the auditors of those bodies and bodies, or their representative organisations, that will be covered by the statutory access orders to be made under the Government Resources and Accounts Act 2000. These include bodies in receipt of grant from central Government, train operating companies, registered social landlords, Government contractors and their sub-contractors.

The Government will also be consulting the Comptroller and Auditor General about the powers, as required by the Government Resources and Accounts Act 2000.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the consultation on proposed improvements to audit and accountability in central Government will begin; and how long it will last. [44319]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Following publication of the Government's response to Lord Sharman's report "Holding to Account", consultation papers will now be prepared and issued as soon as possible. The normal consultation period is three months.

Correspondence

Mr. Steen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will respond to the letter from the hon. Member for Totnes dated 28 November 2001 concerning Mr. Mike Atkinson of Denbury, Devon and civil service pay. [43141]

Mr. Andrew Smith: I replied to the hon. Gentleman on 11 December 2001, and am sending him a copy of my letter.

Equitable Life

Mr. Chope: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the inquiry by Lord Penrose into Equitable Life will be completed in 2002. [44654]

Ruth Kelly: No firm date has been specified for the completion of the Penrose Inquiry. Lord Penrose is keen to ensure that the inquiry proceeds as quickly as possible consistent with producing the thorough and authoritative account required.

Roberts Report

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects to publish the Roberts report into the supply of scientists and engineers; and if he will make a statement. [43574]

Mr. Boateng: Sir Gareth Roberts is in the process of completing his final report, and arrangements are being made for it to be published after Easter. The Government look forward to receiving Sir Gareth's final report.

Data Series

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what new data series broken down by gender, race, disability and age have been commissioned by his Department since August 1997. [42916]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 14 march 2002]:* This information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the subject of each gender impact assessment drawn up by his Department since June 1997, indicating in each case whether the outcome has been *(a)* put out to consultation and *(b)* published. [42919]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 14 March 2002]:* The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Departmental Report

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the component sub-units of each unit listed on pages 10 and 11 of HM Treasury's departmental report; and if he will make a statement. [44381]

Ruth Kelly: The teams listed on pages 10 and 11 of HM Treasury's departmental report show the lowest formal units of organisation in the Department.

VAT

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he intends to implement the changes to VAT for small business announced in his March 2001 Budget speech. [44370]

Mr. Boateng: As the Chancellor announced in his pre-Budget report on 27 November 2001, the measures not already in place will be introduced as part of Budget 2002.

Alcohol Smuggling

Mrs. Irene Adams: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what measures he plans to introduce to help reduce smuggling of alcohol into the United Kingdom. [43938]

Mr. Boateng: On 27 November the Government announced as part of the pre-Budget report that Customs activity tackling cross-channel passenger smuggling of alcohol and tobacco has had a dramatic impact. Revenue losses in 2001 from this form of smuggling have reduced by 76 per cent. compared to 2000, with cross-channel passenger smuggling of beer almost eliminated and wine and spirits more than halved.

Building on these successes, and those of its wider efforts to tackle tobacco smuggling, the Government published alongside the PBR a paper "Tackling Indirect Tax Fraud". It sets out the strategic principles that underlie the Government's approach to tackling fraud and outlines the steps being taken to tackle other forms of fraud and smuggling in the alcohol sector.

Economic Deprivation (UK)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the areas within the UK that suffer from economic deprivation. [43922]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Details of the most deprived areas in England are published in the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions' Indices of Deprivation 2000, which are available at http://www.regeneration.dtlr.gov.uk/research/id2000/index.htm and in the Library. The Indices of Deprivation 2000 are measures of deprivation for every ward and local authority area in England. They combine a number of indicators which cover a range of domains (income, employment, health deprivation and disability, education, skills and training, housing and geographical access to services) into a single deprivation score for each area. Responsibility for measuring deprivation in Scotland and Wales is devolved to the Scottish Executive and the National Assembly for Wales respectively.

Ministerial Answers

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the average length of time taken to answer letters to Ministers has been in the past 12 months; and if he will make a statement. [43947]

Mr. Boateng: Within all the Chancellor's Departments the average time taken to reply to letters in 2001 was 22 working days. This compares to 24 days in 2000 and 31 days in 1999.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many answers to parliamentary questions are more than *(a)* two weeks and *(b)* three months outstanding; and if he will make a statement. [43928]

Mr. Boateng: As at 18 March, 3,340 of the 3,453 written questions tabled to the Treasury in the present Session had been answered substantively. 2,612 of the questions tabled (75.6 per cent.) had received replies on or before the due date for answering. Of the 113 questions which had not been answered, 28 were more than two weeks overdue, four were more than three months late, and in 52 cases the dates by which answers were due had not yet been reached.

Departmental Contracts

Dr. Cable: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the 30 largest contracts awarded by his Department from *(a)* May 1997 to April 1998, *(b)* May 1998 to April 1999, *(c)* May 1999 to April 2000, *(d)* May 2000 to April 2001 and *(e)* May 2001 to the latest date for which figures are available, stating in each case the values of the contracts and the companies with which the contracts were placed. [43678]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given to the hon. Member for North Tayside (Mr. Wishart) on 28 February 2002, *Official Report,* column 1433W.

Electronic Tendering Service

Mrs. Lawrence: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the result of the electronic tendering service pilot. [45055]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Further to my answer of 17 December to my hon. Friend the Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire *Official Report* column 26W, the Office of Government Commerce has now completed its e-tendering pilot scheme, run to assess the possible future establishment of an approved e-tendering system for use across government.

Tested across ten central government departments, the information gathered from the e-tendering pilot scheme has provided valuable experience and knowledge. In the light of the fact that the pilot did not fully meet all its operational objectives, the Government will not roll out the scheme.

The knowledge gained from the pilot will, along with feedback from other e-procurement pilots now underway, allow government to make a full assessment of the technological options that will work best and ensure value for money. Plans for adopting this technology will be announced later this year.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Territorial Forces

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many members of staff of his Department are members of the Territorial forces; and if he has a strategy to encourage members of staff to become members of the Territorial forces. [44063]

Dr. Whitehead: The DTLR does not keep a centralised record of those members of staff who are members of the Territorial forces.

My Department supports staff who wish to be members of the Territorial forces and provides special leave in order for staff to undertake appropriate training. It will also consider releasing staff who are asked to volunteer for a period of mobilised service.

Departmental Policies

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what criteria he adopts in determining whether *(a)* to monitor and *(b)* to research the effects of changing departmental policies. [43354]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 14 March 2002]:* Almost all policy development work will involve elements of appraising the evidence base, assessing the likely impact and evaluating the outcome. The Department also has in place a formal programme of policy evaluation, focusing on areas where:

the achievement of objectives may entail significant costs;

the objectives are of particular importance to the Department;

the scientific and technical basis is uncertain or shifting rapidly, and the risks involved are perceived to be substantial.

Individual projects are brought together in a five-year rolling programme which will meet the Department's service delivery agreement (SDA) target to deliver a programme of policy evaluation covering all the Department's major policies by March 2004.

The Department will also play a full role in meeting the Government's manifesto commitment to review the working and impact of major pieces of regulation within three years of implementation.

Press Office

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many people his Department's press office employs; and how many press officers have left his Department since 7 June 2001. [40212]

Mr. Byers: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I have given today to hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) [ref 40104].

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) how many *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time employees in his Department's press office (i) there were in June 2001 and (ii) there are at present; [40104]

(2) how many *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time employees there were in the Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions' press office in May (i) 1997 and (ii) 2001; [40105]

(3) how many people have been hired by his Department's press office since June 2001, on a *(a)* part-time and *(b)* full-time basis; [40102]

(4) what impact the departmental restructuring following the 2001 general election had on numbers in DETR/DTLR's press office; [40106]

(5) how many individuals have left through *(a)* resignation and *(b)* dismissal from his Department's press office since June 2001. [40103]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* At the creation of the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions in June 2001 the press office employed: 27 full-time press officers; and two part-time press officers. Currently there are: 28 full-time press officers; and one part-time press officer.

Detailed information on the numbers of permanent civil servants employed in departmental press offices during the financial year 1997–98 were provided in a memorandum dated 16 June 1998 to the Select Committee on Public Administration and published in its report on the Government Information and Communication Service (HC770) in July 1998. A copy is in the Library of the House.

Since 7 June 2001, the number of press officers recruited on a permanent basis were nine full-time and one part-time. In addition, two press officers have also been employed on a short-term contract basis.

Eight press officers (all full-time permanent staff) were transferred to the newly created DEFRA following the Machinery of Government changes that led to the creation of DTLR in June 2001.

Other Machinery of Government changes involving the creation of DTLR, and affecting press officer staffing, were negligible in resource terms and did not involve any staff transfers.

The majority of people leaving the DTLR press office have transferred to other Government Departments or agencies in order to gain wider experience to progress their career. It is not Government policy to comment upon the reasons for the departures of individuals.

These figures do not include administrative staff who provide a pooled support service to the Directorate of Communication (of which the press office is only a part).

Regional Assemblies

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what his policy is on the tax-raising powers that elected regional assemblies will have. [43853]

Dr. Whitehead: The forthcoming Regional Governance White Paper will set out our policy for elected regional assemblies, including their funding.

Local Government

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the future of local government in the north-west. [44045]

Dr. Whitehead: The recently published Local Government White Paper, "Strong Local Leadership, Quality Public Services", sets out the future of local government in England.

In addition, the forthcoming Regional Governance White Paper will set out how we plan to take forward our manifesto commitment that:

> "provision should be made for directly elected regional government to go ahead in regions where people decided in a referendum to support it and where predominantly unitary local government is established".

Local Government Finance

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what types of premises are zero-rated for local taxation. [43937]

Dr. Whitehead: The information is as follows:

Non-Domestic Rates

The Local Government Finance Act 1988, schedule 5, exempts the following types of non-domestic property from business rating:

- Agricultural land and buildings;
- Fish farms;
- Places of religious worship;
- Lighthouses and related property used by Trinity House;
- Sewers;
- Land and structures used by drainage authorities;
- Public parks;
- Property used for the training of the disabled, and the provision of welfare services to them;
- Air raid protection works;
- Swinging moorings for boats and ships, i.e. moorings which are not connected to the river bank or shore, but to the river or sea bed;
- Road crossings over water courses;
- Property used for road user charging schemes;
- Property in enterprise zones; and
- Property occupied by visiting armed forces, such as air force bases.

Under section 45 of the Local Government Finance Act, empty non-domestic properties are exempt from rates for the first three months. After that period 50 per cent. of the full rates are levied on the property, unless it falls within a prescribed type, in which case it continues to be entirely exempt from rates while unoccupied. The most significant type that remains exempt after three months is industrial property such as factories, warehouses, and mineral workings. Other types of property which remain exempt are: listed buildings; buildings with rateable values of less than £1,900; buildings which the owners are prohibited by law from occupying or which are kept vacant by the actions of a public body; and buildings whose owners are either bankrupts, or are insolvent companies which are being wound up.

Diplomatic non-domestic property is exempt from rates by virtue of the Diplomatic Privileges Act 1964. However, premises occupied by diplomatic missions and visiting armed forces pay a contribution in lieu of a proportion of the rates due on the property, to reflect the use they make of local authority services, currently 6 per cent. of the full rate liability.

Under the Local Government Finance Act 1988 various reliefs are available to ratepayers. In some cases, local authorities have discretion to give relief up to 100 per cent., so their occupiers pay no rates. In some of these cases this is a top-up on a lower level of mandatory relief. 100 per cent. relief is available, at local authority discretion, to charities, small businesses in designated rural settlements, and new small-scale farm diversification enterprises, ratepayers suffering hardship and non-profit making bodies engaged in philanthropic, cultural, sporting and other activities.

Council Tax

Certain classes of domestic property are exempt from the council tax. These are set out in the Council Tax (Exempt Dwellings) Order 1992. They are:

- Class A: Empty and substantially unfurnished dwellings where works are required, underway or recently completed (valid for up to 12 months);
- Class B: Empty dwellings owned by charities (valid for up to six months);
- Class C: Dwellings left empty and substantially unfurnished (valid for up to six months);
- Class D: Dwellings left empty by prisoners;
- Class E: Dwellings left empty by patients in hospitals and care homes;
- Class F: Dwellings left empty by deceased persons;
- Class G: Dwellings where occupation is prohibited by public law;
- Class H: Empty clergy dwellings;
- Class I: Dwellings left empty by people receiving care;
- Class J: Dwellings left empty by people providing care;
- Class K: Dwellings left empty by students;
- Class L: Repossessed dwellings;
- Class M: Student halls of residence;
- Class N: Dwellings occupied only by students or school leavers;
- Class O: Armed forces' accommodation;
- Class P: Visiting armed forces' accommodation;
- Class Q: Dwellings left empty by bankrupts;
- Class R: Empty caravan pitches and boat moorings;
- Class S: Dwellings occupied by minors only;
- Class T: Empty annexes which cannot be let separately;
- Class U: Dwellings occupied only by persons who are severely mentally impaired;
- Class V: Dwellings occupied by persons with diplomatic privilege or immunity;
- Class W: Annexes occupied by dependent relatives.

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the *(a)* actual and *(b)* percentage change expressed in real terms was in total external support for Westminster city council in each year from 1990–91 to 2002–03. [43504]

Dr. Whitehead: Westminster city council have reported the following total central Government support for revenue expenditure. Total figures for 2002–03 are not yet available.

Westminster city council total central Government support for revenue expenditure[1]

	Total (cash terms) £ million	*Total at 2001–02 prices*[2] *£ million*	*Percentage change (real terms)*[2]
Outturn			
1990–91	158.9	217.0	—
1991–92	187.3	241.2	11.1
1992–93	224.2	279.5	15.9
1993–94	195.4	237.8	−14.9
1994–95	198.3	238.2	0.2
1995–96	202.9	237.0	−0.5
1996–97	200.2	226.6	−4.4
1997–98	208.9	229.4	1.3
1998–99	205.7	219.8	−4.2
1999–2000	214.9	224.2	2.0
2000–01	224.0	229.6	2.4
Budget			
2001–02	235.6	235.6	2.6

[1] This comprises of aggregate external finance (AEF). AEF is central Government support towards total standard spending. It comprises revenue support grant, redistributed non-domestic rates, and certain specific, supplementary and special grants. For Westminster city council these include SSA reduction grant (1994–95 onwards) and central support protection grant (1999–2000 onwards).

[2] Real terms at 2001–02 prices calculated using the GDP deflator.

Sources:

1990–91—2000–01 revenue summary (RS) and revenue grant (RG) returns. 2001–02 general fund revenue accounts budget estimate return (RA) and RA(SG) (income from specific, special and supplementary grants).

Council Tax (Newcastle)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many properties there are in each council tax band in the city of Newcastle upon Tyne; and how many in each band are *(a)* empty and *(b)* exempt because all residents are students. [43598]

Dr. Whitehead: The table shows the number of properties in each council tax band in the city of Newcastle upon Tyne as at 16 October 2001. Information is also provided as at 1 November 2001 on the number of dwellings that were exempt from council tax because they were halls of residence provided predominantly for the accommodation of students, and those dwellings that were exempt because they were only occupied by students or school leavers.

These types of dwellings are prescribed in legislation as falling into exemption classes M and N respectively. In addition, the table shows the number of dwellings that were classed as either empty or second homes on 1 November 2001. A split between the number of empty dwellings and second homes is not available for the city of Newcastle upon Tyne.

Information for Newcastle upon Tyne	*Band A*	*Band B*	*Band C*	*Band D*	*Band E*	*Band F*	*Band G*	*Band H*	*Total*
Number of dwellings on the valuation list as at 16 October 2001	73,187	17,198	16,451	7,194	3,535	1,648	1,295	114	120,622
Exemption Class M—A hall of residence provided predominantly for the accommodation of students.	375	507	138	8	1	1	0	14	1,044
Exemption Class N—A dwelling which is occupied only by students, the foreign spouses of students, or school and college leavers.	1,577	794	422	186	84	10	4	0	3,077
Total for Exemption Classes M and N	1,952	1,301	560	194	85	11	4	14	4,121
Number of dwellings classed as empty or second homes as at 1 November 2001.	2,535	481	360	207	102	70	58	19	3,832

Spring Supplementary Estimates

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions for what reason the Spring Supplementary Estimates were revised; and if he will list the differences between the original and revised Spring Supplementary Estimates. [41609]

Mr. Jamieson: The Spring Supplementary Estimates were revised in order to allow provision for short-term financial support of up to £30 million to the National Air Traffic Services, as referred to in my right hon. Friend's answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Pound) on 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 807W.

As a consequence the revised Spring Supplementary Estimates differ from the Spring Supplementary Estimates as follows: the introduction includes a new sub-paragraph xlvi; the ambit of RfR2 has been revised; the total capital expenditure figure at Part II has been increased; column 7 of RfR2 section C has been increased with consequent changes to the totals in the revised subhead detail section, the resource to cash reconciliation table and the forecast cash flow statement; and a note has been added recording that the expenditure rests on the sole authority of the Appropriation Act.

Ring-fenced Grants

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much has been given to local authorities in Government ring-fenced grants, broken down by local authority and service area, since 1997–98; and if he will make a statement. [42843]

Dr. Whitehead: The information requested has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

The Government have made clear in the Local Government White Paper "Strong Local Leadership—Quality Public Services" that it will restrict ring-fencing to cases which are genuine high priorities for Government and where we cannot achieve our policy goal by securing output or outcome targets. We will be keeping all ring-fencing under review with the aim of removing it as soon as possible to do so.

Housing Transfer Programme 2002

Lawrie Quinn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he will announce the 2002 Housing Transfer Programme. [45053]

Ms Keeble: I am announcing today the names of 24 authorities in England which, on a voluntary basis and subject to the approval of their tenants, should be able to proceed with proposals to carry out 26 transfers of all or part of their stock to registered social landlords. I have today placed 15 proposals on the transfer programme while holding a place open for a further 11 transfers. Together the programme could involve over 180,000 dwellings in large scale voluntary transfers over two years.

Authorities on the 2002 Programme have decided, with their tenants, to pursue housing stock transfer as their vehicle for reaching by 2010 the Government's Decent Homes Target. They will have made this decision after considering the various options for reaching the target. Housing transfer enables the new landlords to obtain increased investment from private sources to carry out any backlog of repairs and subsequent improvements more quickly than if the properties had remained in local authority ownership. Housing transfer can also bring about higher levels of tenant involvement, ensuring housing services meet tenants' needs and preferences. It can also provide a significant boost to the wide-scale regeneration of the surrounding area. Over time, tenants' rents will be similar to what they would pay to their local authority, due to the Government's policy of bringing greater fairness and coherence to the structure of social rents.

Housing transfers are voluntary and may only take place if tenants are in favour. The consent of the Secretary of State is also required before a transfer can proceed and that will only be granted if it appears that a majority of tenants wish the transfer to proceed.

Proposals submitted for the 2002 Programme have been of high quality. However some are not as advanced as we would wish to secure a place immediately. Therefore Copeland, Teignbridge, Middlesbrough and the London boroughs of Hackney (Kings Crescent) and Islington (Tollington Estates) have been asked to develop their transfer proposals further. I am also holding open places on the programme for Cannock Chase, Nuneaton and Bedworth, Sheffield, Southwark (Tabard Gardens Estate), Solihull, and Worcester pending the agreement of valuations with them.

The authorities that have successfully gained places on the programme, together with the intended recipient RSL, are as follows:

(a) a disposal by Amber Valley borough council of not more than 7,120 dwelling-houses to Amber Valley Housing Limited;

(b) a disposal by Bromsgrove district council of not more than 3,239 dwelling-houses to a registered social landlord;

(c) a disposal by Cherwell district council of not more than 3,800 dwelling-houses to a registered social landlord;

(d) a disposal by Forest of Dean district council of not more than 3,754 dwelling-houses to Forest of Dean Housing;

(e) two disposals by the Liverpool city council of not more than 2,260 dwelling-houses on the Walton Estate to a registered social landlord and not more than 295 dwelling-houses on the Kensington Estate to Community 7;

(f) A disposal by Maidstone borough council of not more than 6,487 dwelling-houses to a registered social landlord;

(g) a disposal by the Manchester city council of not more than 106 dwelling-houses to a registered social landlord;

(h) a disposal by North Hertfordshire district council of not more than 8,570 dwelling-houses to a registered social landlord;

(i) two disposals by Oldham metropolitan borough council of not more than 1,281 dwelling-houses on the Fitton Hill Estate to a registered social landlord and not more than 645 dwellings on the Limeside (The Avenue)/Hollins Estate to a registered social landlord;

(j) a disposal by Ruschliffe borough council of not more than 3,559 dwelling-houses to Metropolitan Housing;

(k) a disposal by Scarborough borough council of not more than 5,000 dwelling-houses to a registered social landlord;

(l) a disposal by South Norfolk council of not more than 4,417 dwelling-houses to a registered social landlord;

(m) a disposal by Stockport borough council of not more than 13,301 dwelling-houses to a registered social landlord.

Parish Councillors

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what procedure can be adopted in cases where a complaint against a parish councillor for non-declaration of interest is made, when neither the parish council nor the borough council have either a code of practice or a monitoring officer. [43298]

Dr. Whitehead: Parish councillors are currently expected to observe a National Code of Local Government Conduct, issued in 1990. The code is for guidance, although Section 94 of the Local Government Act 1972 provides that if a person should fail to declare a pecuniary interest they may be liable to prosecution and, if convicted, fined up to £200 for each offence.

Pre-School Nursery Premises

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make dedicated pre-school nursery premises zero-rated for local taxation. [43936]

Dr. Whitehead: We have no plans to do so. Almost all non-domestic premises are liable for rates, and this includes all nurseries and schools, in the public and private sectors.

Rates are used to fund local authority services. Any relief or exemption from rates would reduce the amount collected and available to local authorities.

Post Offices

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to improve post offices in deprived urban areas with special reference to how the money allocated in the Comprehensive Spending Review 2000 will be spent; and what definition he uses to identify a deprived urban area. [43344]

Ms Keeble: The Neighbourhood Renewal Unit is developing a fund to help sustain and improve post offices in deprived urban areas. £15 million was allocated for this Fund in Spending Review 2000, and this sum remains committed for this purpose. The development of this fund has taken longer than we hoped, as there are some complex legal issues that we must resolve in order to launch the fund on a firm footing.

However, we hope to be in a position to announce the details of the scheme in spring or early summer this year.

Cornish Language

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many meetings with outside bodies he has held to consider the recommendations of his Department's commissioned study on the Cornish language in respect of the case for introduction via the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. [44244]

Dr. Whitehead: The Government Office for the South West acting on behalf of the Department commissioned an independent academic study to establish the position on the use and currency of the Cornish language historically and today. The purpose of the study was to provide a sound factual basis for informing the Government's assessment of its position on Cornish in relation to the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. The study report made no recommendations on this issue and I have, therefore, had no meetings with outside bodies to consider any.

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when his Department expects to complete its assessment of the case for specifying the Cornish language within the provision of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. [44241]

Dr. Whitehead: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Ms Keeble) on 20 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 216W. The report of the Government Office for the South West to Ministers is expected imminently.

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions for how long his Department has been assessing the case for specifying the Cornish language under the provisions of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. [44243]

Dr. Whitehead: The Department has been responsible for coordinating advice on the Government's policy on Cornish in relation to the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages since 31 March 1999 through the Government Office for the South West (GOSW).

Fire Service

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) pursuant to his answer of 13 March 2002, ref. 42923, on rescues by the Fire Service, if he will state from where this information can be obtained; [44616]

(2) what was the total cost to the taxpayer of rescues by the Fire Service from *(a)* road traffic accidents and *(b)* for other rescues in each of the last three years. [44617]

Dr. Whitehead: Chief Fire Officers may be able to provide this information relative to their own brigades.

Firefighters (Buckinghamshire)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the average number of days lost through sickness absence was per firefighter at each station in Buckinghamshire in each of the last five years; and how many firefighters based in Buckinghamshire were on long-term sick leave in each of the last five years. [43292]

Dr. Whitehead: The average number of days lost through sickness is not available for each station. For the brigade the figures are given in the table with those for long-term absence.

	Average number of days lost due to sickness	*Individuals on long term sick*
1996–97	7.4	15
1997–98	7.9	20
1998–99	8.0	24
1999–2000	7.6	15
2000–01	9.5	27

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many retained firefighters there were at each fire station in Buckinghamshire in each of the last five years. [43293]

Dr. Whitehead: Figures by station are only available for the last year. Total figures are given for earlier years. The figures relate to individuals in post. Where these are "0" the station is day crew only and does not have a retained complement.

Station	*Staff in post 2002*
Amersham	11
Aylesbury	18
Beaconsfield	7
Bletchley	13
Brill	7
Broughton	13
Buckingham	11
Chesham	9
Gerrards Cross	0[1]
Great Holm	10
Great Missenden	10
Haddenham	8
High Wycombe	13
Marlow	13
Newport Pagnell	0[1]
Olney	11
Princes Risborough	9
Stockenchurch	10
Waddesdon	10
Winslow	11
Total	194
Earlier years	
1997	214
1998	199
1999	187
2000	193
2001	200

[1] Station is day crew only and does not have a retained complement.

False Alarm Emergency Calls

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many *(a)* genuine and *(b)* malicious false alarm emergency calls were received in Buckinghamshire in each year since 1997. [43289]

Dr. Whitehead: The number of *(a)* genuine and *(b)* malicious false alarm emergency calls received in Buckinghamshire were as follows:

		False alarm emergency calls		
	All calls	*Malicious*	*Good intent*	*Due to apparatus*
1997	9,164	879	1,466	2,087
1998	7,754	402	1,251	2,089
1999	8,641	505	1,306	2,154
2000[1]	8,941	500	1,514	2,311

[1] Data for 2000 are provisional.

False fire alarms are categorised thus:

(i) Malicious: the call was made with the intention of getting the brigade to attend a non-existent fire-related event. This includes 'deliberate' and 'suspected malicious' intentions.

(ii) Good intention: the call was made in good faith in the belief that the brigade really would attend a fire.

(iii) Due to apparatus: the call was initiated by fire alarm and firefighting equipment operating (including accidental initiation of alarm apparatus by person).

A21

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many accidents occurred on the A21 between *(a)* Lamberhurst and Flimwell and *(b)* Tonbridge and Pembury in (i) May to December 1997, (ii) January to December 1998, (iii) January to December 1999, (iv) January to December 2000, (v) January to June 2001, and (vi) July to December 2001. [43128]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 14 March 2002]:* The figures requested are shown in the table:

Injury accidents on the A21: GB 1997–2001

	Year of accident				
Location	*1997*[1]	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Lamberhurst—Flimwell[2]	8	6	14	15	—
Tonbridge—Pembury[3]	15	25	22	26	—

[1] Figures relate to May to December.

[2] Figures relate to accidents on the A21 between the junction with the B2169 near Scotney Castle and the north end of the dual carriageway at Flimwell.

[3] Figures relate to accidents on the A21 between the junction with the A26 at Quarry Hill and the junction with the A264.

Note:

Statistics are not yet available for 2001.

Central Railway

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he will announce a decision on the Central Railway project; and if the proposal will use the hybrid Bill route. [41399]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, North (Mr. Hopkins) on 15 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 1276W.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what studies he has commissioned into reopening sections of the Great Central railway line. [41737]

Mr. Jamieson: None. However, the Strategic Rail Authority's Strategic Plan includes proposals to reopen to passenger services part of the Great Central alignment north of Aylesbury. The Government are also considering proposals by Central Railway plc. I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Transport to my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, North (Mr. Hopkins) on 15 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 1276W.

Railtrack

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what his estimate is of the date when bids will close for Railtrack in administration. [44239]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 18 March 2002]:* This is a matter for the administrator.

Railway Fencing

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the state of fences alongside railway lines running into Romford. [42971]

Mr. Jamieson: Railtrack advise that appropriate repairs are carried out as part of the company's on-going maintenance programme.

London Underground

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the expected annual investment spending this year is by London Underground; and what the figure was in 1996–97. [41293]

Mr. Spellar: London Underground is currently forecasting that it will deliver investment expenditure of £422 million in 2001–02, against a Government target of at least £410 million. The equivalent investment figure for investment in the core underground network in 1996–97 at cash prices was £397 million.

Capital renewals accounted for £198 million of the £397 million expenditure in 1996–97. The estimated investment expenditure for 2001–02 reflects London Underground Ltd.'s adoption in 1999 of Financial Reporting Standard (FRS) 15, which requires that such expenditure must now either be charged to cost of operations, or capitalised as an addition to fixed assets.

Seamen's Certificate Requirements

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether he has proposed changes in the international seamen's certificate requirements to the relevant international organisations; and if he will make a statement. [43914]

Mr. Jamieson: No such changes in requirements have been proposed. The modernisation of seafarer identity documentation is being considered within the International Labour Organisation, to which reference was made during the intersessional meeting in February of the International Maritime Organisation on maritime security.

Harbour Authorities

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions under what statutory provisions a competent harbour authority is required to ensure the safe provision of a pilotage service. [43973]

Mr. Jamieson: A competent harbour authority has a duty under section 2 of the Pilotage Act 1987 to keep under consideration whether any and, if so, what pilotage services need to be provided to secure the safety of ships navigating in or in the approaches to its harbour.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what legislative authority the Port Marine Safety Code carries. [43974]

Mr. Jamieson: The legislative authority of the code comprises the legal duties and powers of harbour authorities relating to marine safety. It was agreed with the representative bodies with whom the code was developed that it did not need to create new legal duties for harbour authorities, and it has been implemented without the Government having to take—or confer on harbour authorities—any new powers for that purpose.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will review the Pilotage Act 1987. [43952]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government has already undertaken a review of the Pilotage Act, which was published in July 1998.

Sangatte

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the impact on freight transport movements of the closure of the facilities at Sangatte over the weekend of 8 to 10 March. [43054]

Mr. Jamieson: The Sangatte centre did not close, nor did the nearby rail freight terminal at Fréthun operated by SNCF (the French railway company). Rail freight services to the UK through the channel tunnel are however currently severely disrupted as a result of the actions of would-be illegal immigrants trying to board the trains at Fréthun. SNCF are currently not accepting new traffic bound for the UK through the tunnel, while the backlog of trains in transit is cleared.

We are continuing to press the French Government at the highest levels to ensure that sufficient police resources are made available as soon as possible to enable the normal level of freight services to resume, free from disruption.

Single European Sky

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what his policy is on the Single European Sky. [41756]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government are a strong supporter of the Single European Sky as we consider that it offers the best route to overcoming delays and congestion caused by the structural problems in Europe's Air Traffic Management (ATM) system. It should also improve safety, and provide the necessary framework for future air traffic growth.

Air Traffic Controllers

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if it was the intention of the Transport Bill of 2000 to make an air traffic controller personally responsible for accidents resulting from misreading the alpha-numeric data on the display screens. [43066]

Mr. Jamieson: The position of an air traffic controller is unaffected by the enactment of the Transport Act 2000.

Airports (Security)

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what standards airport operators in the United Kingdom are required to meet regarding waiting time for passengers to pass through *(a)* security and *(b)* ticket checks, broken down by (i) airport and (ii) airport operator. [43862]

Mr. Jamieson: There are no statutory requirements for airport operators with regard to waiting times for passengers passing through security and ticket checks. 20 UK airports and 10 UK airlines have, however, signed up to the Voluntary Commitments on Air Passenger Rights, which were launched at a Council of Europe ceremony in Strasbourg on 14 February. These contain non-legally binding commitments to deliver defined standards of service to air travellers, and waiting times and measures to speed up check-in are included within them.

Aircraft Safety

Mr. John Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will meet representatives of UK registered airlines to discuss the reduction of air flow by pilots in aircraft cabins. [43683]

Mr. Jamieson: The issue of the reduction of airflow by pilots in aircraft cabins will be placed on the agenda for discussion at the next meeting of the Aviation Health Working Group, when representatives of UK registered airlines will be present.

Mr. John Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what assessment he has made of the effect of a significant reduction in cabin air pressure on the health of airline passengers; [43686]

(2) what assessment he has made of the effect of the reductions of air flow in cabins on the health of airline passengers. [43685]

Mr. Jamieson: In 2001 the Government commissioned the Building Research Establishment Ltd. to undertake a review of the current state of research in a number of key areas of the aircraft cabin environment. BRE reported that some research has been carried out into the effects of cabin air ventilation rates on the health of passengers, but the report identified a number of areas where further research was needed. The inter-departmental Aviation Health Working Group is expected shortly to finalise a proposal for some of this work to be carried out.

Mr. John Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will undertake an assessment of the extent to which pilots reduce air flow in passenger aircraft cabins and the reasons for doing so; and if he will issue guidelines on this issue. [43684]

Mr. Jamieson: It is normal for air conditioning packs to be in operation during a flight. This is reflected in the manufacturers' instructions to crews and repeated in operators' manuals. On many aircraft it is possible to reduce the flow to a low setting, which is about 80 per cent. of the normal flow rate. However, there would be clear guidance in the operating manual that this setting should only be used when the aircraft is carrying significantly fewer passengers than the maximum. Figures would be specified.

In the event of a problem with an air conditioning pack in flight, the problem pack can be switched off. The remaining pack(s) have the capacity to maintain cabin pressure and adequate conditioned air.

In these circumstances the issuance of guidelines is not necessary.

UK Airlines

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on what emergency aid schemes have been authorised to compensate UK airlines for losses caused by the closure of airspace between 11 and 14 September 2001. [43975]

Mr. Jamieson: On 13 December my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced a package of up to £40 million in financial assistance designed to compensate UK airlines for the closure of US, Israeli and central London airspace in the period immediately following the terrorist attacks. Twelve claims for assistance under this scheme have been received and these are currently being examined. The European Commission authorised this scheme on 12 March and we expect to make payments shortly.

NATS

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what discussions his Department had after 18 January concerning whether Swanwick should be taken into operation on 27 January. [43063]

Mr. Jamieson: No such discussions were held.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will publish the letter dated 8 January from HM Inspector of the Health and Safety Executive to the General Manager, NATS(En-Route)Ltd., concerning breaches of the Display Screen Equipment Regulations 1992. [43060]

Mr. Jamieson: HSE cannot publish this letter because of the restrictions placed on it by Section 28 of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment has been made of the compliance of the new en-route centre at Swanwick with the *(a)* Display Screen Equipment Regulations 1992 and *(b)* BSEN 29241–3/ISO 9241–3. [43057]

Mr. Jamieson: HSE inspectors and HSE's expert on display screen equipment visited the new en-route centre at Swanwick on 18 January. The purpose of this visit was to begin assessing NATS (En-Route) Limited's compliance with the Display Screen Equipment Regulations 1992. Since the visit NATS have provided HSE with further information about the display screen equipment in use at the Swanwick centre and this has been used to complete HSE's assessment of compliance. HSE's expert took BSEN 29241–3/ISO 9241–3 into account in making the assessment.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions for what reason the Health and Safety Executive considered issuing an enforcement order in respect of the equipment at the new en-route centre at Swanwick; for what reason the order was withdrawn; and what is being done to resolve these outstanding issues and improve safety at Swanwick. [43064]

Mr. Jamieson: HSE's inspectors considered the working conditions at Swanwick against the Health and Safety Commission's expectations for enforcement and did not consider it appropriate to serve an enforcement notice. Therefore there is no question of a notice being withdrawn.

HSE wrote to NATS on the 18 January summarising its concerns. HSE's expert on display screen equipment is finalising a detailed report on his findings. HSE will present that report to the management and employees' representatives at NATS shortly, and will require an action plan to address any matters which are outstanding at that time within an appropriate timescale.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if the Government intend to charge NATS public private partnership interest on tax proceeds from the Airland Group deferred sale; and if he will make a statement. [43067]

Mr. Jamieson: As part of the PPP, the Government received £35 million of deferred sales proceeds by way of a loan note from NATS. Interest has accrued, and will continue to accrue, on these notes since the date of sale. No tax is outstanding on which interest could be claimed.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if the CAA commissioned a formal ergonomic evaluation of the display screen equipment at the new en-route centre at Swanwick prior to granting approval for the equipment; [43056]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1808W, for what reason the CAA gave NATS its final approval to take Swanwick into operation; [43061]

(3) what assessment has been made of the implications for air safety of the display screen equipment at the en-route centre at Swanwick. [43058]

Mr. Jamieson: These are matters for the CAA as the independent aviation safety regulator.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) when the promised capacity gains will be delivered by the Swanwick centre; [43065]

(2) for what purpose a further meeting was convened involving senior management staff from NATS, CAA and the Health and Safety Executive; [43062]

(3) if he will require NATS Ltd. to publish the management reports relating to the display screen equipment at the new en-route centre at Swanwick. [43059]

Mr. Jamieson: These are operational matters for NATS.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much public money has been paid to NATS since it became a PPP. [41295]

Mr. Spellar: I refer right hon. Member to the answer given by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Mr. Jamieson), on 11 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 741W to the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown). Of the £23 million referred to since the creation of the Public Private Partnership, on 26 July 2001, the residual balance of £200,000 has been paid to National Air Traffic Services.

Special Purpose Vehicle

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what plans he has for the creation of a special purpose vehicle to undertake work in connection with the South Coast upgrade; if he will place them in the Library; and what the *(a)* status of, *(b)* start date of and *(c)* expected completion date for such works is; [42836]

(2) what plans he has for the creation of a special purpose vehicle to undertake works in connection with the West Anglia Route Modernisation; if he will place them in the Library; and what is *(a)* the status of, *(b)* the start date of and *(c)* the expected completion date for such works; [42826]

(3) what plans he has for the creation of a special purpose vehicle to undertake works in connection with the Brighton Main Line upgrade; if he will place them in the Library; and what the *(a)* status of, *(b)* start date of and *(c)* expected completion date for such works is; [42835]

(4) what plans he has for the creation of a special purpose vehicle to undertake works in connection with the TransPennine upgrade (stations and new trains); if he will place them in the Library; and what is *(a)* the status of, *(b)* the start date of and *(c)* the expected completion date for such works; [42825]

(5) what plans he has for the creation of a special purpose vehicle to undertake works in connection with the Hurst Green to Uckfield electrification; if he will place them in the Library; and what is *(a)* the status of, *(b)* the start date of and *(c)* the expected completion date for such works; [42833]

(6) what plans he has for the creation of a special purpose vehicle to undertake works in connection with the Connex South Eastern platform extensions; if he will place them in the Library; and what the *(a)* status of, *(b)* start date of and *(c)* expected completion date for such works is; [42821]

(7) what plans he has for the creation of a special purpose vehicle to undertake works in connection with the Chiltern upgrade; if he will place them in the Library; and what is *(a)* the status of, *(b)* the start date of and *(c)* the expected completion date for such works; [42823]

(8) what plans he has for the creation of a special purpose vehicle to undertake works in connection with the South Central upgrade; if he will place them in the Library; and what is *(a)* the status of, *(b)* the start date of and *(c)* the expected completion date for such works; [42831]

(9) what plans he has for the creation of a special purpose vehicle to undertake works in connection with Gatwick Station; if he will place them in the Library; and what the *(a)* status of, *(b)* start date of and *(c)* expected completion date for such works is; [42817]

(10) what plans he has for the creation of a special purpose vehicle to undertake works in connection with the South West Trains upgrade; if he will place them in the Library; and what the *(a)* status of, *(b)* start date of and *(c)* expected completion date for such works is; [42837]

(11) what plans he has for the creation of a special purpose vehicle to undertake works in connection with the Thameslink 2000; if he will place them in the Library; and what is *(a)* the status of, *(b)* the start date of and *(c)* the expected completion date for such works; [42827]

(12) what plans he has for the creation of a special purpose vehicle to undertake works in connection with the West Coast upgrade; if he will place them in the Library; and what the *(a)* status of, *(b)* start date of and *(c)* expected completion date for such works is; [42819]

(13) what plans he has for the creation of a special purpose vehicle to undertake works in connection with the Felixstowe to Nuneaton upgrade; if he will place them in the Library; and what is *(a)* the status of, *(b)* the start date of and *(c)* the expected completion date for such works; [42829]

(14) what plans he has for the creation of a special purpose vehicle to undertake works in connection with the Arun Valley upgrade; if he will place them in the Library; and what the *(a)* status of, *(b)* start date of and *(c)* expected completion date for such works is; [42834]

(15) what plans he has for the creation of a special purpose vehicle to undertake works in connection with the East London Line extension; if he will place them in the Library; and what is *(a)* the status of, *(b)* the start date of and *(c)* the expected completion date for such works; [42824]

(16) what plans he has for the creation of a special purpose vehicle to undertake works in connection with the Ashford to Hastings electrification; if he will place them in the Library; and what is *(a)* the status of, *(b)* the start date of and *(c)* the expected completion date for such works; [42832]

(17) what plans he has for the creation of a special purpose vehicle to undertake works in connection with the Midland Main Line upgrade (stations and new trains); if he will place them in the Library; and what the *(a)* status of, *(b)* start date of and *(c)* expected completion date for such works is; [42818]

(18) what plans he has for the creation of a special purpose vehicle to undertake works in connection with the Southampton to West Midlands upgrade; if he will place them in the Library; and what is *(a)* the status of, *(b)* the start date of and *(c)* the expected completion date for such works; [42828]

(19) what plans he has for the creation of a special purpose vehicle to undertake works in connection with the CrossCountry upgrade; if he will place them in the Library; and what the *(a)* status of, *(b)* start date of and *(c)* expected completion date for such works is; [42820]

(20) what plans he has for the creation of a special purpose vehicle to provide new trains for Connex South Eastern; if he will place them in the Library; and what is *(a)* the status of, *(b)* the start date of and *(c)* the expected completion date for such works; [42822]

(21) what plans he has for the creation of a special purpose vehicle to undertake works in connection with the East Coast Main Line upgrade; if he will place them in the Library; and what is *(a)* the status of, *(b)* the start date of and *(c)* the expected completion date for such works. [42830]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 12 March 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to answers given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Mr. Jamieson) to the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) on 4 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 728–29W. Special purpose vehicles are a potential option for taking forward projects involving new or enhanced rail infrastructure. Their use will be a matter for commercial negotiation between interested parties.

Wembley Park Underground

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how he plans to respond to the London Development Agency/ London Underground report on the options for increasing capacity at Wembley Park underground station. [43231]

Mr. Byers: I welcome this report, copies of which have been placed in the Library of the House. It demonstrates that it should be possible to make real improvements to capacity and access—particularly for disabled people—without the need to rebuild Wembley Park Station.

While the report's proposals are significantly less expensive than rebuilding the station, they cannot be accommodated within the £20 million which the Government have already agreed to make available for infrastructure improvements. In the light of this new evidence, I have now decided that if the stadium development proceeds, I should make available additionally up to £7 million from my transport provision. This would make it easier for people travelling to the new stadium, as well as those living and working in the area. I understand that the Mayor of London has also agreed to make available a similar sum.

Houses in Multiple Occupation

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the reason for the delay in the drafting of legislation for the regulation of HMOs. [42229]

Mr. Byers: The Government are committed to introducing a national licensing scheme for houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) and we consulted on our proposals in 1999. We remain committed to legislating for this at the earliest possible opportunity.

The Government are also currently supporting the Home Energy Conservation Bill promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Dr. Turner). This Bill would introduce reforms to the current discretionary HMO registration regime, most notably by making it mandatory and providing for a revised definition of an HMO.

Public-Private Partnerships

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 4 March 2002, ref. 37622, on reputational externalities, what is the size of the adjustment made for reputational externalities in the calculations underlying the final assessment report; and if he will make a statement. [41396]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 4 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 83W.

Public Bodies

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many appointments to public bodies have been made through his Department *(a)* from April 2000 to March 2001 and *(b)* since 31 March 2001; and how many of these were (i) men and (ii) women. [42150]

Ms Keeble: Ministers in this Department have appointed or reappointed *(a)* 116 people in the year April 2000 to March 2001 *(i)* 82 of whom are men and *(ii)* 34 women and *(b)* 100 people since 31 March 2001 *(i)* 58 of whom are men and *(ii)* 42 women.

Transport and Telecommunications Council

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether a Scottish Executive Minister will be a member of the UK delegation to the forthcoming Transport and Telecommunications European Union Council of Ministers meeting on 25–26 March; and what information is being provided by his Department to guarantee effective pre-council scrutiny by the European Committee of the Scottish Parliament. [42690]

Mr. Jamieson: There are no plans for a Minister from the Scottish Executive to be a member of the UK delegation to the Transport and Telecommunications Council on 25–26 March.

In developing the UK position, there is regular contact between Ministers and officials of the Department and the Scottish Executive on those issues in which there is a Scottish interest, as required by the memorandum of understanding between the UK Government and the three devolved Administrations. The then Transport Minister in the Scottish Executive attended the Transport Council on 28 June 2001 as part of the UK delegation.

Councils

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proportion of *(a)* district, *(b)* county and *(c)* Metropolitan councils he estimates will be judged as coasting. [42628]

Mr. Byers: No such estimate exists. The categorisation will be for the Audit Commission.

Continuous Registration

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to move to a system of continuous registration of all motor vehicles; and if he will make a statement. [42558]

Mr. Jamieson: A proposal to introduce continuous registration—under which the keeper of a vehicle would retain a statutory responsibility to license it until DVLA was notified of a change of keeper—was one of a number of proposals set out by the Government in its consultation document on abandoned vehicles in October 2001. My right hon. Friend intends to make an announcement on the outcome of the consultation shortly.

National Celebrations

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what arrangements his Department has made to celebrate *(a)* St. Patrick's Day, *(b)* St. George's Day, *(c)* St. Andrew's Day and *(d)* Her Majesty the Queen's Golden Jubilee; and how his Department celebrated St. David's Day. [42301]

Dr Whitehead *[Holding answer: Monday 11 March 2002]:* The Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions has fully supported the Department for Culture, Media and Sport in making suitable arrangements for Her Majesty the Queen's Golden Jubilee celebrations. Details of those events may be found on the Golden Jubilee website at www.goldenjubilee.gov.uk.

My Department has no specific arrangements to celebrate St. Patrick's Day, St. George's Day or St. Andrew's Day. My Department did not specifically celebrate St. David's Day.

Shoreham Harbour

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will publish the dates and minutes of meetings of the Maritime Vision for Shoreham Harbour Steering Group since its inception. [42357]

Mr. Jamieson: The Shoreham Maritime Regeneration Strategy was set up in May 1998 to foster the regeneration of Shoreham Harbour. The Shoreham Maritime Steering Group is seeking to implement this strategy and has since been holding regular meetings. Although the Government Office for the South East is a partner of the Steering Group, it is not within the remit of the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions to publish the dates and minutes of these meetings.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what feasibility study he has carried out into the provision of a road link between the A259 at Shoreham Harbour with the A27; and when he plans to publish the findings; [42390]

(2) what discussions he has had with Shoreham Port Authority about the provision of a link road between the A259 at Shoreham Harbour and the A27. [42356]

Ms Keeble: No discussions have been held with Shoreham Port Authority regarding the provision of a link road between the A259 and the A27. There is no Government-led study into such a link road but there is a wider local authority study currently taking place. This work includes a variety of separate work streams looking at the regeneration potential for the port area, and the feasibility of facilitating much of the future potential for local and port development.

Fire Stations

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many functioning fire stations there were, broken down by fire brigade area, in each year since 1997. [42235]

Mr. Byers: The number of fire stations in each fire authority area in England and Wales as at 1 January from 1997 to 2002 is in the table:

Number of fire stations in England and Wales at 1 January 1997–2002

Fire authority	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*
Avon	23	23	23	23	23	23
Bedfordshire and Luton	14	14	14	14	14	14
Buckinghamshire	20	20	20	20	20	20
Cambridgeshire and Peterborough	28	28	28	28	28	28
Cheshire	24	24	24	24	24	24
Cleveland	15	15	15	15	15	15

Number of fire stations in England and Wales at 1 January 1997–2002

Fire authority	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*
Cornwall	31	31	31	31	31	31
County Durham and Darlington	16	15	15	15	15	15
Cumbria	38	38	38	38	38	38
Derbyshire	31	31	31	31	31	31
Devon	58	58	58	58	58	58
Dorset	29	29	29	29	29	30
East Sussex	24	24	24	24	24	24
Essex	51	51	51	51	51	51
Gloucestershire	20	20	20	20	20	20
Greater Manchester	43	43	43	43	43	43
Hampshire	54	54	54	54	52	52
Hereford and Worcester	26	26	26	26	26	27
Hertfordshire	32	32	32	32	32	32
Humberside	31	31	31	31	31	32
Isle of Wight	10	10	10	10	10	10
Isles of Scilly	7	7	7	7	7	7
Kent and Medway Towns	66	66	66	66	66	66
Lancashire	40	40	40	40	40	40
Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland	20	20	20	20	20	20
Lincolnshire	37	37	37	37	38	38
London	113	113	113	113	112	112
Merseyside	27	27	27	26	26	26
Mid and West Wales	57	57	57	57	57	57
Norfolk	40	40	40	40	40	40
North Wales	44	44	44	44	44	44
North Yorkshire	37	37	37	37	37	37
Northamptonshire	22	22	22	22	22	22
Northumberland	19	19	19	19	19	19
Nottinghamshire and City of Nottingham	25	25	25	25	25	25
Oxfordshire	24	24	24	24	24	24
Royal Berkshire	20	20	20	20	20	20
Shropshire	23	23	23	23	23	23
Somerset	24	24	24	24	24	24
South Wales	50	50	50	50	50	50
South Yorkshire	24	24	24	24	24	24
Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire	30	30	30	30	30	30
Suffolk	36	36	36	36	36	36
Surrey	24	24	24	24	24	24
Tyne and Wear	18	19	19	19	19	19
Warwickshire	20	20	20	19	19	19
West Midlands	41	41	41	41	41	41
West Sussex	28	28	28	28	28	28
West Yorkshire	50	50	50	50	50	50
Wiltshire and Swindon	25	25	25	25	25	25

Source:
DTLR calendar year returns.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Departmental Reorganisation

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to reorganise his Department. [44722]

Mr. Darling: The Department for Work and Pensions was set up last year to bring together the Government's Welfare to Work programme and to ensure a far better focus on the people we serve. As part of this programme of reform, I am setting up two new executive agencies in April: Jobcentre Plus, which will deliver an integrated, work-focused service to benefit claimants of working age and to employers; and The Pension Service, which will deliver a service dedicated to today's and tomorrow's pensioners.

In consequence of these changes, the Benefits Agency and the Employment Service will close on 31 March. The Department's other executive agencies (the Child Support Agency and The Appeals Service) will continue. Disability and carer benefits will be delivered by a distinct business—the Disability and Carers Service—which will work closely with both Jobcentre Plus and The Pension Service. The Child Benefit Centre will form a separate business until its transfer to the Inland Revenue in April 2003.

The targets I have set Jobcentre Plus and The Pension Service for 2002–03 are given below.

Further information on Jobcentre Plus and The Pension Service plans for 2002–03 is contained in their business plans, copies of which have been placed in the Library.

I am also publishing today a departmental framework which sets out the main roles and accountabilities of each part of the Department, including its executive agencies, and the shared values and ways of working which ensure that the Department delivers a common agenda of reform. The framework incorporates the roles of each of the Department's executive agencies and replaces traditional free-standing agency framework documents.

Targets

Jobcentre Plus

Jobcentre Plus performance will be measured against the following targets[1]:

Job outcomes: To achieve a total points score of 6,656,000, based on job entry outcomes Jobcentre Plus achieves.

Business delivery: To ensure that specified key Jobcentre Plus business processes are delivered efficiently, accurately and to specified standards in 93.4 per cent. of cases checked (with a Jobcentre Plus management objective that no district will fall below 85 per cent. by the end of the year).

Fraud and error: By March 2003 to reduce losses from fraud and error in working age income support and jobseeker's allowance to no more than 7 per cent. of the monetary value of these benefits paid during the year.

Employer outcomes: At least 85 per cent. of employers placing their vacancies with Jobcentre Plus will have a positive outcome.

Customer service: To achieve a 79 per cent. customer service level in the delivery of the standards set out in the customers and employers charters (with a Jobcentre Plus management objective that individual regions will achieve specified levels by the end of the year).

The Pension Service

The Pension Service's performance will be measured against the following targets:

Customer service: To improve customer service in line with the standards set out in The Pension Service customer charter[2].

Accuracy: To achieve an accuracy rate of 94 per cent. on awards of MIG and of 98 per cent. on awards of retirement pension.

MIG claims processing:

To complete processing of MIG claims on average within 10 working days from the date the necessary evidence is received.

Fraud and error: To make progress in reducing the value of MIG fraud and customer error towards an overall reduction of 20 per cent. by 2004.

Winter fuel payments: To issue winter fuel payments for 2002–03 (all automatic payments and successful claims received before 20 September 2002) by Christmas 2002.

Retirement pension forecasts: To provide 95 per cent. of retirement pension forecasts within 40 days of receipt of the request.

Performance levels: To establish a baseline of performance across The Pension Service, to enable the setting of performance variation targets in 2003–04.

Sickness absence: To reduce the average sickness absence rate to 9.4 days by December 2002.

[1] A full explanation of the Jobcentre Plus targets is contained in the performance agreement, copies of which have been placed in the Library.

[2] The Pension Service customer charter will be published in April, to coincide with the launch of The Pension Service.

Pensions

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many couples getting divorced have applied to the courts to share their pension rights between them since December 2000. [44089]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I have been asked to reply.

Information on applications for pension sharing is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. My Department has, however, been monitoring pension sharing orders made by the courts and our records show that 217 such orders have been made in England and Wales since December 2000.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Small Businesses

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the exclusion of retail businesses from the small firms loan guarantee scheme. [39813]

Ms Hewitt: Retailing was originally included in the small firms loan guarantee scheme. Along with a number of other local service sectors it was excluded in April 1993. This followed an external evaluation report on the scheme that showed support for firms in these sectors was largely at the expense of displacing business from other local firms.

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the effectiveness of the Small Business Service's pilot scheme. [43125]

Nigel Griffiths: The Government does not want to see viable companies with good long-term potential being wound up because of temporary financial difficulties.

The pilot project is about determining the most effective means of rescuing such companies. Business survival rates for companies in the scheme will be monitored. Assessment of the impact of the pilot will take place and a full analysis in September 2002.

Trade Partners UK

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the *(a)* functions, *(b)* staffing and *(c)* funding at Trade Partners UK . [44472]

Ms Hewitt: Trade Partners UK brings together the joint work of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department of Trade and Industry in support of British trade and investment overseas. Details of its functions, staffing and funding are set out in "British Trade International, The Government's Expenditure Plans 2001–02 to 2003–04 and Main Estimates 2001–02", Cm 5123, a copy of which has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many requests for assistance were received by Trade Partners UK in the first six months of 2001; how many were refused; and what the grounds were for refusal. [44475]

Ms Hewitt: Trade Partners UK provides advice, information and support to over 20,000 businesses each year through a variety of schemes and through a network of offices which spans the English regions, overseas diplomatic posts and a range of partner organisations. Information on requests for assistance which are refused is not available.

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what criteria must be satisfied for an individual or company to receive assistance from Trade Partners UK . [44471]

Ms Hewitt: Trade Partners UK provides a range of information, advice and support to business. Detailed eligibility criteria vary according to the nature of specific

schemes. The general factors to be taken into account were set out by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in his reply to the hon. Member on 14 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 611W.

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether the functions of Trade Partners UK include *(a)* assistance to individuals or companies attempting to make acquisitions overseas and *(b)* scrutiny to ensure that the acquisition is in the interests of the UK. [44474]

Ms Hewitt: Trade Partners UK's public service agreement performance target is 'enhanced competitiveness of companies in the UK through overseas sales and investments'. It therefore supports overseas investment by companies in the UK where there is a benefit to the UK in doing so. Each case is considered on its own merits and Trade Partners UK has access to a range of information and advice through the DTI, FCO and other Departments, as appropriate, in doing so.

Internal Market, Consumer Affairs and Tourism Council (Scottish representation)

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry for what reason no devolved Administration Minister attended the Internal Market, Consumer Affairs and Tourism European Union Council of Ministers meeting on 1 March; which particular matters of concern from the Scottish Executive were raised in their absence by the UK Government delegation; and what information is being provided by her Department to guarantee effective post-council scrutiny by the European Committee of the Scottish Parliament. [42689]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 12 March 2002]:* The composition of the UK delegation to specific Council of Ministers meetings is decided in accordance with the Concordat on the Co-ordination of EU Policy Issues.

A report on the Council and matters on which I spoke is set out in my answer, of 13 March 2002, *Official Report*, columns 1075–76W. Post-council scrutiny by the European Committee of the Scottish Parliament is a matter for that Parliament and for the Scottish Executive. Reports of Council meetings are available to Scottish Executive officials and my officials stand ready to provide other information in line with the provisions of the Concordat.

Patent Office

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what powers she has to ensure that the Patent Office acts in a fair and impartial way. [42753]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Patent Office is an Executive Agency of the Department of Trade and Industry. The Agency Framework Document sets out the functions, aims and objectives of the Patent Office. It also lists the legislation under which the Patent Office has specific responsibility for the administration of domestic and international law on intellectual property. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry determines the policy framework within which the Patent Office operates, sets out key financial and performance targets and approves the Agency's Corporate Plan. Day to day management of the Patent Office is delegated to the Chief Executive of the Agency. The decisions of the Patent Office are subject to statutory routes of appeal.

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions her Department has had with Patent Office officials regarding a campaign by the charity ActionAid. [42752]

Miss Melanie Johnson: DTI officials were contacted by the Patent Office at the beginning of February, about the campaign by the charity ActionAid. Patent Office staff dealt with subsequent media inquiries regarding the campaign.

Insolvency

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many *(a)* small and medium enterprises and *(b)* other companies were declared insolvent in (i) 1997, (ii) 1998, (iii) 1999, (iv) 2000 and (v) 2001, in (A) north-west England, (B) north-east England, (C) the west midlands, (D) London, (E) south-east England, (F) Scotland and (G) Wales. [43372]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Official insolvency statistics are not able to identify the size of the company involved.

Company compulsory liquidations can be identified by location and are recorded under the official receiver's office and not by Government office regions. For example, insolvencies in Wales will be recorded under official receiver's offices in Cardiff and Swansea (South West) and Chester (North West).

The table gives the company compulsory liquidations by region in each of the years 1997 to 2001.

Region	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Anglia	591	704	719	672	708
London	1,060	1,487	1,161	951	911
Midlands	602	589	605	664	553
North East	608	531	599	546	504
North West	556	537	714	597	586
Public Interest Unit	0	0	37	94	150
South East	770	781	768	769	715
South West	548	587	606	632	548
Scotland	254	338	364	344	378
Total (England & Wales)	4,735	5,216	5,209	4,925	4,675
Total for GB	4,989	5,554	5,573	5,269	5,053

Stop Now Orders

Ross Cranston: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many stop now orders were obtained up to 28 February; and what the subject matters were of those orders. [43026]

Miss Melanie Johnson: No stop now orders have been made to date. Three cases have reached the courts.

These cases involve infringements under various regulations including the Sale of Goods Act 1979, Supply of Goods and Services Act 1982, and the Trade Descriptions Act 1968.

In addition two local authorities have secured written undertakings under the Regulations, and other cases are under consideration.

Imperial Measures

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the cost was of the recent prosecution of vendors using the imperial standard of measurement; and if she will make a statement on the public interest involved in the prosecution. [40756]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 14 March 2002]:* The enforcement of weights and measures legislation is an independent statutory responsibility for local authorities. In the prosecutions before the High Court recently, the vendors unsuccessfully sought to challenge the enforcement of the metric legislation made in 1994.

Beer Orders

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions she had with the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs prior to the decision to revoke the beer orders. [43341]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Since the beer orders no longer have any effect, it was not necessary to discuss the matter with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the impact that the revocation of the beer orders will have on Britain's micro-breweries; and whether a regulatory impact assessment has been produced. [43340]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Following careful consideration of the Director-General of Fair Trading's review of the beer orders and taking into account the views of all interested parties, including those of micro-breweries, I decided that the beer orders are no longer relevant to the industry as it is currently structured. The provision on guest beers applied only to large brewers with tied estates. No such brewer now exists. Revocation will impose no costs on business and is deregulatory, so a regulatory impact assessment is unnecessary.

Wind Turbines

John Thurso: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether she has received the findings of the study undertaken by her Department on interference to radar and navigational aid from wind turbines. [44458]

Mr. Wilson: QinetiQ are undertaking a study with the objective of determining the effects of wind turbines sited adjacent to primary and secondary air traffic control and air defence radars. The study will also provide information needed for the generation of guidance notes for developers. The study is due for completion towards the end of 2002.

TRIPS

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress she and her fellow WTO Ministers have made towards lifting the restrictions within the TRIPS agreement on poorer countries' access to affordable medicines. [43532]

Ms Hewitt: The Declaration on the TRIPS Agreement and Public Health, adopted at the WTO Ministerial in Doha in November last year, agreed that the TRIPS Agreement does not and should not prevent WTO Members from taking measures to protect public health.

However, the Declaration recognised that WTO Members with insufficient or no manufacturing capacities in the pharmaceutical sector could face difficulties in making effective use of compulsory licensing under the TRIPS Agreement and instructed the TRIPS Council to find an expeditious solution to this problem before the end of 2002.

The Government are keen to see a solution to this issue. Discussions in the TRIPS Council are ongoing.

Post Office

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what evaluation she has made of the feasibility of *(a)* auctioning and *(b)* charging a fee for licences for new post operators. [43628]

Mr. Alexander: Under the Postal Services Act 2000 the licensing of postal operators is a matter for the Postal Services Commission (known as Postcomm).

The legislation says that Postcomm has the power to require an application for a licence to be accompanied by such reasonable application fee as it may determine. Postcomm does not have the power under the Postal Services Act to charge a fee for licences or to auction them.

Urban Postal Services

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will place a copy of the agreement negotiated between the Post Office and the National Federation of Sub Postmasters, regarding the future of the urban network, in the Library. [43337]

Mr. Alexander: This is an operational matter for Consignia. As such, any provisional terms, negotiated between Consignia and the National Federation of Sub Postmasters on the future of the urban post office network, are commercially confidential.

Stolen Equipment

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 24 January 2002, *Official Report,* column 1071W, on stolen equipment, what criminal proceedings have been undertaken for cases of theft against her Department, stating in each case *(a)* whether the proceedings (i) led to a criminal conviction and (ii) were unsuccessful, *(b)* the cost incurred by her Department in pursuing a conviction and *(c)* the value of items recovered; and if she will make a statement. [41510]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 18 March 2002]:* There are no cases of theft where criminal proceedings were undertaken by the Department. Where appropriate the

police would have been informed of the theft but the Department has no record of the outcome of police investigations.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

School Computers (Pornographic Material)

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer of 5 February 2002, (ref 31830), what the normal disciplinary procedures are that head teachers should take when *(a)* a member of staff and *(b)* a student is discovered to have used school computers for viewing pornographic material. [34599]

John Healey: In the case of *(a)*, the procedure that would apply would be the staff disciplinary procedure of the school in question. In general, misusing a school computer in this way would constitute very serious or gross misconduct, and could possibly result in dismissal. Where applicable the school's procedure may be deferred pending the outcome of criminal proceedings.

In the case of *(b)* the normal disciplinary procedure would be for the head teacher to consider all the relevant facts and such evidence as may be available to support the allegation made, allowing the student to give his or her version of events. If the head teacher is satisfied on the balance of probabilities that the student did what he or she is alleged to have done, he or she may exclude the student for a fixed period or permanently. Misuse of computers by students to view pornographic material is a very serious matter and exclusion for a fixed period or permanently would be an appropriate response to such behaviour.

We are, however, also determined to help schools ensure that teachers and pupils do not access unsuitable material while accessing the wealth of educationally valuable material on the internet. We have produced detailed guidance for schools about the wide range of measures they can adopt. These include use of walled gardens and filtering software, monitoring and tracking pupil access, and providing 'user contracts' for pupils, spelling out how they should behave.

Capita Contracts

Mr. Boris Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much public money the Capita-administered schemes within the Department have paid out. [38370]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Capita has administered three schemes on behalf of my Department and its predecessors: teachers' pensions, Connexions card and individual learning accounts. Since 1996 approximately £19 billion of public money has been paid out under these schemes, largely in pensions-related payments to former teachers.

Individual Learning Accounts

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many people took advantage of individual learning accounts in *(a)* the UK, *(b)* the north-east, *(c)* south Tyneside and *(d)* the Jarrow constituency. [40626]

John Healey: Prior to the closure of the programme, some 2.6 million individuals opened individual learning accounts in England. Of these 1.4 million had booked learning. The table sets out the number of individuals in the north-east and Jarrow who took advantage of the help available through the individual learning accounts programme. It has not been possible to provide this for south Tyneside.

Area	*Number of active accounts*
North-east[1]	56,501
Jarrow[2]	1,502

[1] North-east figure based on Government office north-east area.
[2] Jarrow figure based on post codes NE31, 32, 35 and 36.

School Playing Fields

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what representations have been received by her Department in relation to disposal of school playing fields in the London borough of Haringey. [40716]

John Healey *[holding answer 5 March 2002]:* Since the introduction, in October 1998, of legislation to protect school playing fields, the Department has not received any representations in relation to the disposal of school playing fields in the London borough of Haringey.

Education Funding (Liverpool)

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much *(a)* capital and *(b)* revenue funding has been made available to schools and colleges in Liverpool in each year since 1997. [41124]

John Healey: Nationally, capital investment in school buildings has more than tripled from less than £700 million in 1996–97 to over £2.2 billion in 2001–02, and will rise to over £3.5 billion a year by 2003–04, totalling £8.5 billion from 2001–02 to 2003–04. Table A shows the total capital investment of over £168 million in school buildings in Liverpool from 1997–98 to 2001–02, including £74.3 million of PFI credits.

For revenue funding, between 1997–98 and 2001–02, Liverpool has seen a significant increase in its Education Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) and grants, as set out in Table B.

The overall settlement for 2002–03 is a good one, and Liverpool's pupils will further benefit. Its Education SSA will increase by £11.33 million or 4.48 per cent. over 2001–02. Liverpool will also benefit from an overall increase in Standards Fund grant of over £160 million; and an increase of 2.75 per cent. in the direct grant for schools. In addition, Liverpool will receive £8.04 million extra in revenue support grant (RSG) from the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions to bring its overall increase in RSG up to 4 per cent.

The Learning and Skills Council will write to the hon. Member about resources provided to colleges, and a copy of its letter will be placed in the Library.

Table A

Schools Capital Allocations By Central Government

Liverpool Local Education Authority

Year	Capital Allocation £ million
1997–98	15.306
1998–99	20.104
1999–2000	13.967
2000–01	97.961
2001–02	20.785
Total	168.123

Notes:

1. Allocations comprise capital grant and credit approvals including PFI credits for school buildings
2. The figure for 2000–01 includes £74.3 million of PFI credits

Table B

Grants and SSA

Liverpool Local Education Authority

	£ million		
	SSA	Grants	Total
1997–98	210.173	8.092	218.265
1998–99	229.914	2.798	232.712
1999–2000	238.304	7.773	246.077
2000–01	248.414	26.076	274.490
2001–02	252.286	44.743	297.029
Change[1]	42.113	36.651	78.764

[1] Change since 1997–98

Notes:

1. Figures reflect all sub-blocks of the Education SSA plus all revenue grants in DfES's Departmental Expenditure Limits relevant to pupils aged 4–19. The Private Voluntary Independent element of the SSA that replaced Nursery Education Grant funding is not included in the funding figures.
2. Grant figures exclude funds that include ages before 4 years old, Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant and Education Maintenance Allowance.

University Funding

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to link funding for universities to the socio-economic background of students admitted to those universities; and if she will make a statement. [40798]

Margaret Hodge: *[holding answer 6 March 2002]:* The Government is promoting wider access to universities. As part of this, the Higher Education Funding Council for England provides funding to higher education institutions to reflect the additional costs of recruiting students from low participation postcodes.

School Buildings

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the level of capital investment in school buildings in *(a)* coalfield areas and *(b)* England has been since 1997. [41789]

John Healey: We do not hold information on the level of capital investment in school buildings in coalfield areas. The Department allocates most capital funding for schools to Local Education Authorities (LEAs), based on needs related formulae, and it is for the Authorities to assess and prioritise the capital needs of their school buildings in line with their local Asset Management Plans (AMPs). Individual LEAs will, therefore, hold information on how much capital investment has been allocated to schools within coalfield areas.

The table below shows the level of central government support for capital investment in school buildings in England for each financial year from 1997–98 to 2003–04.

Year	Capital allocation £000s
1997–98	755
1998–99	1,088
1999–2000	1,400
2000–01	2,100
2001–02	2,200
2002–03	2,800
2003–04	3,500
Total	13,843

Pupil Numbers

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many pupils there are in each local education authority in the South West of England. [41871]

Mr. Timms: The information requested is shown in the table below.

All Schools: Number (headcount) of Pupils By Type of School

January 2001

	Nursery						
	LEA Mntd	Direct Grant	Total	maintained Primary	of which middle deemed	Maintained secondary	of which middle deemed
South West	2,003	0	2,003	399,918	6,420	314,652	14,763
Bath and North East Somerset	0	0	0	12,924	0	12,273	0
Bournemouth	0	0	0	11,449	0	9,770	0
Bristol, City of	1,658	0	1,658	31,597	0	17,907	0
Cornwall	117	0	117	41,146	0	32,011	0
Devon	77	0	77	56,503	2,690	39,832	0
Dorset	0	0	0	25,374	0	29,319	8,096
Gloucestershire	0	0	0	46,407	0	38,165	0
Isles of Scilly	0	0	0	140	0	124	0
North Somerset	0	0	0	14,927	0	12,269	0
Plymouth	151	0	151	21,285	0	18,829	0
Poole	0	0	0	11,250	3,730	8,197	673
Somerset	0	0	0	38,894	0	31,214	4,782

All Schools: Number (headcount) of Pupils By Type of School
January 2001

	Nursery						
	LEA Mntd	*Direct Grant*	*Total*	*maintained - Primary*	*of which middle deemed*	*Maintained secondary*	*of which middle deemed*
South Gloucestershire	0	0	0	23,462	0	16,442	0
Swindon	0	0	0	17,901	0	11,561	0
Torbay	0	0	0	10,328	0	8,708	0
Wiltshire	0	0	0	36,331	0	28,031	1,212

	Special[1]						
	LEA Mntd	*Non-Mntd*	*Total*	*Pupil Referral Units*[2]	*Independent*	*City Technology Colleges*	*All Schools*
South West	7,364	508	7,872	620	61,494	1,017	787,576
Bath and North East Somerset	317	0	317	0	4,264	0	29,778
Bournemouth	235	0	235	0	1,550	0	23,004
Bristol, City of	804	0	804	3	7,855	0	59,824
Cornwall	414	0	414	0	2,567	0	76,255
Devon	773	304	1,077	23	8,913	0	106,425
Dorset	523	0	523	10	5,830	0	61,056
Gloucestershire	1,055	68	1,123	60	8,339	0	94,094
Isles of Scilly	0	0	0	0	8	0	272
North Somerset	242	0	242	56	1,273	0	28,767
Plymouth	742	0	742	86	1,550	0	42,643
Poole	248	102	350	24	1,134	0	20,955
Somerset	599	0	599	75	9,532	0	80,314
South Gloucestershire	322	0	322	119	793	1,017	42,155
Swindon	411	0	411	29	28	0	29,930
Torbay	311	0	311	25	930	0	20,302
Wiltshire	368	34	402	110	6,928	0	71,802

[1] Excludes pupils who are also registered at a mainstream school.
[2] Excludes pupils who are also registered at a mainstream or special school.
Source:
Annual Schools Census

School Land Sales

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer of 29 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 231W, on school land sales, what rules govern whether a local education authority has to obtain permission to sell school land to developers; and if she will make a statement. [41912]

John Healey *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* Section 77 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 requires local authorities to obtain the consent of the Secretary of State before selling any playing fields which:

(a) are used by a maintained school for the purposes of the school, or

(b) have been used at any time within the last 10 years.

Applications to dispose, or change the use, of school playing fields are assessed against the following criteria:

i. schools' needs: that playing field provision and curriculum requirements at the school making the disposal, and at other schools in the local area, will be met;

ii. community needs: that community use of a school's playing fields is taken into account, with alternative facilities made available if necessary;

iii. finance: that any sale proceeds are re-invested to provide new or improved sports facilities at schools, or are used to help to raise standards by providing better educational facilities.

Only those applications that meet the criteria are approved. Since July 2001, all applications have been scrutinised by the Independent School Playing Fields Advisory Panel to make sure that they comply with the published criteria. The Panel comprises representatives from the National Playing Fields Association, the Central Council of Physical Recreation, the education organisation Learning through Landscapes, the National Association of Head Teachers and the Local Government Association.

Woodmancote Primary School

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what discussions she has had with Gloucestershire County Council about proposals to sell land of Woodmancote Primary School to developers; and if she will make a statement. [41913]

John Healey: *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* The Department has not had any discussions with Gloucestershire County Council about proposals to sell land at Woodmancote Primary School.

Wired Communities Projects

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to continue the wired communities projects. [42658]

John Healey: The Wired Up Communities initiative is currently being piloted in seven areas across the country. A final evaluation report is now due in November 2002.

After carefully considering this report, decisions will be made on any extension of the scheme to other communities.

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what evaluation she has undertaken on the wired communities projects; and if she will place a copy in the Library. [42665]

John Healey: An interim evaluation report collecting baseline information from the phase 1 wired up communities pilot in Kensington (Liverpool) was produced in September 2001. Further data collection activities in the six phase 2 projects are currently taking place. The final evaluation report was due to have been published in April 2002 but delays in some projects becoming operational has put the expected publication back to November 2002. A copy of the final report will be placed in the Library.

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the gender breakdown is of those involved in *(a)* IT for All and *(b)* wired communities projects. [42667]

John Healey: The IT for All scheme was a DTI initiative which ended in 2000. I have no information on the gender breakdown of those involved.

At this stage we do not have evaluation details from the six phase 2 wired up communities projects, but the phase 1 project located in Kensington (Liverpool) shows a 54 per cent. female: 46 per cent. male split within the representative sample. Data are currently being collected from the phase 2 projects and these will be available in April 2002.

Drinking Water

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what information she has collated on the number of schools which make provision for access to drinking water throughout the school day. [42694]

John Healey: The Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999 require all schools to have a wholesome supply of drinking water. The Department for Education and Skills does not collect information about pupils' access to drinking water throughout the school day.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what guidance she has issued in respect of access throughout the school day to drinking water. [42677]

John Healey: The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) produced guidance in April 2001, to assist school caterers to implement nutritional standards for school lunches. This guidance states that the Secretary of State expects that drinking water should be available to all pupils, every day, free of charge.

The DfES circular, 0029/2000 (Standards for School Premises), gives advice on health and safety matters that schools should consider when positioning drinking water outlets. It also recommends that the pattern of demand for drinking water outlets should be considered by local education authorities, governing bodies and others when deciding how drinking water should be provided on school premises.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what funding there is to meet the costs of the installation of drinking water supply to schools in Stoke on Trent, North; and if she will make a statement. [42695]

John Healey: All schools are required to have a wholesome supply of drinking water. As this is a fundamental requirement for all school premises and should be installed when they are built, there is no specific capital funding available. We expect governing bodies and local education authorities to secure a continuing wholesome water supply to all schools as part of their duty to secure the health and safety of staff and pupils, and are sure that this is an important consideration for local education authorities in considering how to distribute capital funding.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what surveys she has conducted into the access to, and availability of, drinking water in schools. [42696]

John Healey: The Department for Education and Skills has not conducted any surveys of access to, and availability of, drinking water in schools. It is for local education authorities, governors and schools to decide how and when drinking water should be made available to pupils.

Learning Support Units

Stephen Hesford: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many learning support units there are. [42890]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: There are approximately 1,090 learning support units in schools in England. We plan to increase this total further as independent evaluation of LSUs shows that they improve behaviour and cut exclusions. Phase 3 of Excellence in Cities and the Excellence Cluster programme should provide another 140 LSUs and up to 50 more outside the Excellence in Cities programme will be set up shortly.

Secondments

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to the answer of 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 236–37W on secondments, to which appointments the staff from *(a)* Ernst and Young and *(b)* PricewaterhouseCoopers were seconded. [42928]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The seven secondees were appointed to provide policy advice, in the areas of the Department set out in the table.

Parent organisation	*Area of work*	*Number*
Ernst and Young	School leadership	2
	Teachers pay and pensions	2
	Transforming secondary education delivery unit	2
PricewaterhouseCoopers	Surestart unit	1

Computers

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer of 8 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 633W, what the total cost was of the Computers Within Reach pilot scheme; how

much funding remains; what evaluation has been made of the success of the scheme; and how this will inform future policy on the computers within reach concept. [43326]

John Healey: To date, the Computers Within Reach scheme has cost just under £5.5 million, leaving £9.5 million of Capital Modernisation Funding (CMF) for a further phase or alternative scheme.

An external research evaluation has been carried out and the final report was received recently. This indicates the scheme successfully reached target groups and contributed positively to increased use of ICT among recipients and their families.

This report has contributed to our overall evaluation of the scheme and future policy will take this into consideration as well as the value for money of recycled computers compared with new ones and the technical and logistical issues that affect the recycled computer market.

IT Contracts

Valerie Davey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what measures she is taking to encourage competition *(a)* for departmental IT contracts and *(b)* for local education authority IT contracts. [44198]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Department follows EC Directives and UK Regulations in letting contracts, including those for IT goods and services. The Department works with the Office of Government Commerce to achieve enhanced competition in all market sectors.

Section 5 of the Local Government Act 1999 requires Best Value authorities to carry out reviews of the services they provide. This applies to local education authorities' IT requirements and, where they take on the role, for provision of IT requirements on behalf of the schools within their area.

The Department through BECTa has established a pilot procurement advisory service to advise schools on IT procurement. BECTa are running a competition to accredit ICT suppliers for education.

The Government has made it clear that the future for public service provision is one where there is real variety in the way services are delivered and genuine plurality among service providers. The objective is to not favour one supplier against another but to encourage diversity, innovation and the competitiveness of the supply base.

Golden Jubilee

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if commemorative items will be distributed to school children in celebration of the Queen's Golden Jubilee; and if she will make a statement. [44593]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Cannock Chase on 28 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 131–132W.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps are being taken to educate and prepare school children for the Queen's Golden Jubilee; and if she will make a statement. [44592]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: My Department has encouraged school children to play an active role in the Jubilee celebrations through its support of a range of projects, including a National Poetry Competition, the Commonwealth Games Spirit of Friendship Festival and the Millennium Children's Tapestry of Hope. Information about these projects and others, as well as helpful links to many useful resources for schools, are available on my Department's website at www.dfes/gov.uk/jubilee. I welcome the exciting and imaginative contributions school children are already making to the celebrations.

Engineering

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the *(a)* selection criteria for the engineering specialist schools, *(b)* time scale for selection of the schools and *(c)* schools selected to become engineering specialists. [43573]

Mr. Timms: The criteria against which engineering colleges are selected are set out in the booklet "Specialist Schools Programme: Engineering Colleges Applications: A Guide for Schools" a copy of which has been placed in the Library. The closing date for the first engineering college applications was 15 March and we expect to announce the names of successful applicants in July.

Technology Skills

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what instruction on the acquisition of technological and information technology skills are given to primary school teachers in their training. [43585]

John Healey: Before any trainee teacher, including trainee primary school teachers, can be awarded qualified teacher status they must demonstrate that they are competent in the use of ICT, both to teach their subject and to support their wider professional role.

Serving teachers in maintained schools have, since 1998, had an entitlement to undertake ICT training funded by the New Opportunities Fund. This is designed to bring them to the same level of competence and confidence in the use of ICT in the classroom as their counterparts now entering the profession.

The Government are now drawing up plans for further training in the use of ICT to support teachers' continuing professional development. A pilot scheme will be run in selected schools from April 2002.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Beef Exports

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent representations she has made to *(a)* the European Commission and *(b)* the French Government concerning beef exports to France; and if she will make a statement. [43034]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 14 March 2002]:* I made representations to both Commissioner Byrne and the then French Agriculture Minister during recent Agricultural Councils, making it clear that we expect

France to lift its ban as soon as possible. I also raised this issue with the new French Agriculture Minister during the Agricultural Council on 18 and 19 March.

We are confident the Commission will take the appropriate legal measures against the French if they continue to refuse to comply with the European Court of Justice Judgment.

Illegal Meat Imports

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 12 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 936W, on how many occasions, and when, members of the State Veterinary Service participated in exercises organised by Crawley borough council in respect of identifying illegal meat imports. [44229]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 18 March 2002]:* Since April last year, members of the State Veterinary Service have participated in four exercises with the Crawley borough council in respect of identifying illegal meat imports. The dates of which are 10 April 2001, 25 April 2001, 30 April 2001 and 8 March 2002.

BSE (Sheep)

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if there have been confirmed cases of BSE in sheep since 1996 in the UK. [43854]

Mr. Morley: To date, no cases of BSE have been found in the national sheep flock. The numbers tested are still relatively low because there is no validated, rapid method for differentiating between BSE and scrapie. We have to use a number of different tests, including where possible, bioassay in mice. Of course the Government have in place a comprehensive risk management strategy, should the theoretical risk of BSE in sheep become a real one. This includes: the National Scrapie Plan, aiming to reduce, and eventually eliminate, scrapie in the national sheep flock; a contingency plan, drawn up in conjunction with industry and other stakeholders; a major ongoing sheep TSE research programme, which is kept under review; and removal of specified risk material from the food chain. Independent advice from the Food Standards Agency remains unchanged: the risk of BSE in sheep is still entirely theoretical and the agency is not advising against the consumption of sheep or lamb.

Foot and Mouth

Paddy Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 27 February 2002, ref. 37621, if she will list *(a)* the 160 sites where ash has been removed and *(b)* those sites where foot and mouth carcases and ash were deposited in 2001, where deposits are planned to be moved. [41843]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 12 March 2002]:* The following is a listing by county in England and Wales of *(a)* the sites from which ash has been removed and *(b)* sites where ash is programmed to be moved or which are undergoing site specific risk assessment to assess whether or not the removal of ash is required. The list is by county, since the Department is constrained by the provisions of the Data Protection Act from providing full addresses of all the sites. There are no current plans to exhume carcases at any sites.

County in England and Wales	
(a) Sites from where ash has been removed	
County Durham	10
Cumbria	59
Devon	16
Gloucestershire	23
Gwent	1
Herefordshire	2
Monmouthshire	3
Northumberland	9
Powys	16
Shropshire	7
Staffordshire	1
Tyne and Wear	2
Wiltshire	1
Worcestershire	2
(b) Sites planned for ash removal	
County Durham	4
Worcestershire	3
Northumberland	1
Tyne and Wear	2
Powys	2

Agricultural Produce (Balance of Trade)

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the balance of trade was in agricultural produce between the United Kingdom and *(a)* the EU, *(b)* the USA and *(c)* the rest of the world in each of the last five years. [43037]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 14 March 2002]:* The tables show the balance of trade in food, feed and drink between the United Kingdom and *(a)* the EU *(b)* the USA and *(c)* all other countries in each of the last five years.

UK trade in food, feed and drink with EU countries (1997–2001)

£ million

Description	*Exports*	*Imports*	*Balance of trade*
1997			
Meat and meat preparations	767	1,713	–946
Dairy products and birds' eggs	469	987	–518
Fish and fish preparations	551	250	302
Cereals and cereal preparations	994	1,007	–13
Vegetables and fruit	340	2,622	–2,282
Sugars, sugar preparations and honey	191	235	–44
Coffee, tea, cocoa and spices	370	584	–214
Feeding stuff for animals	323	361	–38
Miscellaneous edible products	315	792	–477
Beverages	1,267	1,830	–563
Oil seeds and oleaginous fruits	50	105	–55
Oils and fats	173	380	–207
Grand total	5,810	10,865	–5,055
1998			
Meat and meat preparations	641	1,567	–926
Dairy products and birds' eggs	524	990	–466
Fish and fish preparations	657	279	378
Cereals and cereal preparations	1,011	912	99
Vegetables and fruit	315	2,747	–2,432
Sugars, sugar preparations and honey	189	242	–53
Coffee, tea, cocoa and spices	369	580	–210
Feeding stuff for animals	297	320	–23
Miscellaneous edible products	319	806	–486
Beverages	1,281	1,945	–664

UK trade in food, feed and drink with EU countries (1997–2001)

£ million

Description	Exports	Imports	Balance of trade
Oil seeds and oleaginous fruits	50	77	–27
Oils and fats	151	376	–225
Grand total	5,805	10,841	–5,036
1999			
Meat and meat preparations	562	1,693	–1,131
Dairy products and birds' eggs	515	1,034	–518
Fish and fish preparations	622	297	325
Cereals and cereal preparations	907	881	26
Vegetables and fruit	343	2,622	–2,279
Sugars, sugar preparations and honey	168	245	–77
Coffee, tea, cocoa and spices	366	589	–223
Feeding stuff for animals	254	298	–44
Miscellaneous edible products	336	839	–503
Beverages	1,346	2,065	–719
Oil seeds and oleaginous fruits	39	46	–7
Oils and fats	117	387	–270
Grand total	5,577	10,997	–5,420
2000			
Meat and meat preparations	551	1,872	–1,322
Dairy products and birds' eggs	483	1,053	–570
Fish and fish preparations	574	311	263
Cereals and cereal preparations	888	855	33
Vegetables and fruit	294	2,567	–2,273
Sugars, sugar preparations and honey	159	257	–98
Coffee, tea, cocoa and spices	352	571	–219
Feeding stuff for animals	236	334	–98
Miscellaneous edible products	330	681	–351
Beverages	1,311	1,832	–521
Oil seeds and oleaginous fruits	18	57	–39
Oils and fats	87	334	–247
Grand total	5,283	10,725	–5,442
2001			
Meat and meat preparations	373	2,124	–1,751
Dairy products and birds' eggs	446	1,122	–676
Fish and fish preparations	610	338	272
Cereals and cereal preparations	770	972	–202
Vegetables and fruit	301	2,614	–2,312
Sugars, sugar preparations and honey	166	291	–125
Coffee, tea, cocoa and spices	362	550	–188
Feeding stuff for animals	214	341	–127
Miscellaneous edible products	372	671	–298
Beverages	1,359	1,876	–517
Oil seeds and oleaginous fruits	10	91	–81
Oils and fats	99	347	–248
Grand total	5,082	11,335	–6,253

UK trade in food, feed and drink with USA (1997–2001)

£ million

Description	Exports	Imports	Balance of trade
1997			
Meat and meat preparations	9	13	–5
Dairy products and birds' eggs	11	4	6
Fish and fish preparations	17	65	–48
Cereals and cereal preparations	29	63	–34
Vegetables and fruit	9	226	–217
Sugars, sugar preparations and honey	59	10	49
Coffee, tea, cocoa and spices	42	12	30
Feeding stuff for animals	6	173	–167
Miscellaneous edible products	23	37	–15
Beverages	511	132	379
Oil seeds and oleaginous fruits	0	111	–111
Oils and fats	14	19	–4
Grand total	729	866	–137
1998			
Meat and meat preparations	9	10	–1
Dairy products and birds' eggs	14	5	9
Fish and fish preparations	21	67	–46

UK trade in food, feed and drink with USA (1997–2001)

£ million

Description	Exports	Imports	Balance of trade
Cereals and cereal preparations	33	81	–48
Vegetables and fruit	7	222	–215
Sugars, sugar preparations and honey	57	13	44
Coffee, tea, cocoa and spices	51	12	39
Feeding stuff for animals	10	136	–126
Miscellaneous edible products	22	46	–23
Beverages	482	169	312
Oil seeds and oleaginous fruits	0	92	–92
Oils and fats	17	17	–1
Grand total	724	870	–147
1999			
Meat and meat preparations	7	8	0
Dairy products and birds' eggs	18	8	10
Fish and fish preparations	42	64	–22
Cereals and cereal preparations	32	68	–36
Vegetables and fruit	7	201	–194
Sugars, sugar preparations and honey	74	13	61
Coffee, tea, cocoa and spices	52	12	40
Feeding stuff for animals	9	119	–110
Miscellaneous edible products	34	54	–20
Beverages	515	161	355
Oil seeds and oleaginous fruits	0	38	–38
Oils and fats	7	14	–7
Grand total	798	758	39
2000			
Meat and meat preparations	7	8	–1
Dairy products and birds' eggs	15	12	4
Fish and fish preparations	36	55	–19
Cereals and cereal preparations	34	67	–33
Vegetables and fruit	8	172	–165
Sugars, sugar preparations and honey	77	10	67
Coffee, tea, cocoa and spices	56	13	44
Feeding stuff for animals	9	113	–104
Miscellaneous edible products	21	68	–47
Beverages	561	178	383
Oil seeds and oleaginous fruits	0	70	–70
Oils and fats	8	16	–8
Grand total	832	783	49
2001			
Meat and meat preparations	2	5	–4
Dairy products and birds' eggs	21	14	7
Fish and fish preparations	25	79	–54
Cereals and cereal preparations	36	71	–35
Vegetables and fruit	7	172	–165
Sugars, sugar preparations and honey	63	9	54
Coffee, tea, cocoa and spices	64	17	47
Feeding stuff for animals	8	120	–112
Miscellaneous edible products	17	72	–54
Beverages	547	216	331
Oil seeds and oleaginous fruits	0	52	–52
Oils and fats	9	27	–18
Grand total	799	854	–56

UK trade in food, feed and drink with all other countries (1997–2001)

£ million

Description	Exports	Imports	Balance of trade
1997			
Meat and meat preparations	123	565	–442
Dairy products and birds' eggs	262	139	123
Fish and fish preparations	96	858	–762
Cereals and cereal preparations	370	173	196
Vegetables and fruit	96	1,183	–1,086
Sugars, sugar preparations and honey	208	555	–347
Coffee, tea, cocoa and spices	265	665	–399
Feeding stuff for animals	64	278	–214
Miscellaneous edible products	187	66	121
Beverages	1,531	456	1,075

UK trade in food, feed and drink with all other countries (1997–2001)

£ million

Description	Exports	Imports	Balance of trade
Oil seeds and oleaginous fruits	12	165	−153
Oils and fats	75	243	−168
Grand total	3,288	5,345	−2,056
1998			
Meat and meat preparations	89	474	−386
Dairy products and birds' eggs	204	150	53
Fish and fish preparations	79	952	−873
Cereals and cereal preparations	288	160	128
Vegetables and fruit	80	1,202	−1,123
Sugars, sugar preparations and honey	224	522	−298
Coffee, tea, cocoa and spices	247	709	−462
Feeding stuff for animals	61	245	−184
Miscellaneous edible products	182	64	118
Beverages	1,134	509	625
Oil seeds and oleaginous fruits	8	149	−141
Oils and fats	73	207	−134
Grand total	2,669	5,344	−2,675
1999			
Meat and meat preparations	80	494	−414
Dairy products and birds' eggs	153	146	7
Fish and fish preparations	83	942	−859
Cereals and cereal preparations	270	185	85
Vegetables and fruit	83	1,311	−1,227
Sugars, sugar preparations and honey	133	484	−350
Coffee, tea, cocoa and spices	172	634	−463
Feeding stuff for animals	74	233	−158
Miscellaneous edible products	193	71	123
Beverages	1,170	628	542
Oil seeds and oleaginous fruits	22	117	−95
Oils and fats	72	214	−143
Grand total	2,506	5,459	−2,953
2000			
Meat and meat preparations	69	526	−457
Dairy products and birds' eggs	156	125	32
Fish and fish preparations	88	971	−883
Cereals and cereal preparations	340	176	163
Vegetables and fruit	82	1,240	−1,148
Sugars, sugar preparations and honey	125	445	−320
Coffee, tea, cocoa and spices	177	520	−343
Feeding stuff for animals	79	257	−178
Miscellaneous edible products	196	80	116
Beverages	1,207	697	510
Oil seeds and oleaginous fruits	1	98	−97
Oils and fats	58	184	−127
Grand total	2,588	5,321	−2,733
2001			
Meat and meat preparations	38	600	−562
Dairy products and birds' eggs	137	124	13
Fish and fish preparations	98	1,030	−932
Cereals and cereal preparations	270	194	76
Vegetables and fruit	81	1,331	−1,251
Sugars, sugar preparations and honey	128	485	−357
Coffee, tea, cocoa and spices	170	517	−347
Feeding stuff for animals	61	320	−259
Miscellaneous edible products	214	79	135
Beverages	1,341	809	532
Oil seeds and oleaginous fruits	1	163	−162
Oils and fats	32	181	−149
Grand total	2,569	5,832	−3,262

Note:

Above data do not include estimates for below-threshold trade.

Rural Enterprise/Vocational Training Schemes

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 8 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 732W, if she will list the schemes which attracted *(a)* rural enterprise scheme funding and *(b)* vocational training scheme funding indicating the (i) nature of the project and (ii) total funding for each project. [43323]

Alun Michael: I am writing to the hon. Member today with a list of the projects referred to in the answer of 8 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 732W, and a description of the nature of the project. The size of individual awards is commercially confidential.

Arable Stewardship Pilot Scheme

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) which of the options contained in the Arable Stewardship Pilot Scheme has now been applied across England; [43114]

(2) what assessment she has made of the Arable Stewardship Pilot Scheme; [43115]

(3) what the final cost to public funds is of the Arable Stewardship Pilot Scheme; [43116]

(4) if she will make a statement on financial penalties for breach of agreements between farmers and her Department in respect of the Arable Stewardship Pilot Scheme. [43122]

Mr. Morley: The Arable Stewardship Pilot Scheme opened in 1998 and closed to new applications in 2000, but some individual agreements under the scheme will run until July 2006. The total amount paid to farmers over the period 1998–2006 will be approximately £7.5 million.

In the third year of the pilot, ecological and economic evaluations of the scheme options were undertaken. Following this evaluation, seven new options were incorporated into the Countryside Stewardship Scheme from January 2002. The options are:

overwintered stubble followed by a spring crop;

overwintered stubble followed by a low-input spring cereal;

overwintered stubble followed by a spring/summer fallow;

conservation headlands with restricted insecticide and herbicide use;

conservation headlands with no fertiliser and restricted insecticide and herbicide use;

wild bird seed mixtures;

pollen and nectar mixtures.

Financial penalties for breaches of agreement under the Arable Stewardship Pilot Scheme are the same as those for the Countryside Stewardship Scheme. Payments made may be withheld or reclaimed with interest. In addition, a 10 per cent. penalty may be imposed where appropriate. In certain circumstances, the agreement may also be terminated and the agreement holder banned from entering a new agreement under any Rural Development Regulation scheme for up to two years.

Water Industry

Ian Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the progress of the Government's Review of competition in the water industry in England and Wales. [44725]

Mr. Meacher: I informed the House on 30 March 2001, *Official Report*, column 832W, that the Government had decided to boost the opportunities for competition in

public water services in England and Wales. We proposed that the incumbent companies would remain vertically integrated statutory undertakers, while new entrants would be licensed for production and retail activities. Since then, DEFRA has undertaken further detailed work on the future framework, in close collaboration with other Government Departments, the National Assembly for Wales, and the three principal regulators of the water industry; Ofwat, the Drinking Water Inspectorate and the Environment Agency.

Competition can deliver benefits for customer through keener prices, more innovation and improved service quality. But competition must be consistent with the Government's wider policy objectives for the water industry. It is important for the framework and scope of any further competitive activity to be tailored to the particular circumstances of the industry and the needs of its customers.

After thorough consideration, we propose to extend competition for non-household customers that use large quantities of water. Market entrants will be authorised to enter into common carriage agreements with statutory undertakers to supply premises which use more than a specified threshold of water per year. We propose that this should be set initially at 50 megalitres, based on the evidence currently available. Work is under way to assess the likely effects of lower threshold levels, both in terms of increasing competitive opportunity and the Government's wider policy objectives for the water industry. Views will be invited on the threshold in a forthcoming consultation paper. This further analysis, the views received in response to consultation, and consideration of the implications for all customers, will inform any final decisions on the initial threshold to be introduced in England and Wales.

Any subsequent lowering of the initial threshold will be considered once we have the benefit of practical experience to draw on. We would consult publicly on any proposed change and the same considerations would apply as in the case of the initial threshold. From the outset, new entrants to the industry will be expected to co-operate with the statutory undertakers in preparing and implementing water resource, security and emergency planning.

We have considered very carefully whether to introduce competition now for household customers. We have concluded that extending competition to the domestic water sector, while at the same time seeking to ensure that the Government's public health, social and environmental objectives continued to be met, would require a complex and costly regulatory regime, which would still leave substantial uncertainties. The added complexity would militate against effective competition and the extra costs would have to be borne mainly by customers. In our view, these drawbacks are likely to outweigh the potential benefits.

Household and other customers can continue to rely on the present system of comparative competition operated by Ofwat, to encourage water companies to improve efficiency and their services. Average household customers are now paying 13 per cent. less than in 1999, a reduction of £33 in real terms.

We shall be publishing a consultation paper with further details of our proposals later this year. As previously announced, our intention is to introduce a Water Bill to bring these changes into effect. The draft Bill also contains proposals to put customers at the heart of the regulatory process, including setting up an independent consumer body to be the voice of consumers.

EU Water Framework Directive

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when her Department expects the EU Water Framework Directive to come into force in the United Kingdom. [43600]

Mr. Meacher: The Water Framework Directive came into force in all European Community member states on 22 December 2000. Article 24 of the Directive requires member states to bring into force the necessary laws, regulations and administrative provisions necessary to comply with the Directive by 22 December 2003.

Habitats Directive

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures she is taking to ensure the protection of sites designated as special areas of conservation under the Habitats Directive; and if she will make a statement. [43213]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 14 March 2002]:* Special areas of conservation (SAC) under the Habitats Directive, special protection areas (SPA) under the Birds Directive and sites listed under the Ramsar Convention are accorded the highest level of protection available.

Article 6 of the Habitats Directive as transposed into UK law through the Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) Regulations 1994 requires that any new development proposal likely to have a significant impact on a SAC or SPA is assessed for its implications on that site. If that assessment concludes that the project would have an adverse effect on the integrity of the site it can only proceed, in the absence of alternatives, in the overriding public interest.

Guidance to local planning authorities and other public bodies on how that protection should be delivered is given in the current Planning Policy Guidance on Nature Conservation (PPG9). In addition the Government Statement of May 1998 on the Birds and Habitats Directives gave extensive guidance on the application of Article 6 of the Habitats Directive and relevant factors to be weighed when making judgments about overriding public interest.

Parental Leave Directive

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the *(a)* financial costs and *(b)* benefits to her Department of the Parental Leave Directive. [42489]

Mr. Morley: The Parental Leave Directive which introduced parental leave entitlements (along with increased maternity benefits and time-off to care for dependants) was introduced into UK law by the Employment Relations Act 1999. The Act has had a neutral financial effect and limited benefit on this Department and the Pesticides Safety Directorate,

Veterinary Medicines Directorate and Rural Payments Agencies, because the leave is without pay and because prior to the introduction of the legislation the Department already had in place contractual terms which were generally more favourable to staff though they did not specifically cover unpaid time-off for parental leave. As part of its overall 'family friendly' provisions this Department continues to establish arrangements which allow staff to establish a proper work/life balance. The statutory rights which have now been incorporated into staff terms and conditions provide staff with basic entitlements in the event that they fall outside the contractual entitlements. So far there have been few requests for unpaid parental leave.

Responsibility for such matters within the Central Science Laboratory Agency, the Veterinary Laboratory Agency and the Centre for Environmental, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science Agency has been delegated to Agency Chief Executives and I have asked them to reply direct.

Flexible Working

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many and what proportion of the staff of her Department are *(a)* job sharing, *(b)* term working and *(c)* engaged in another form of flexible working. [42432]

Mr. Morley: Of those employed in my Department, 83 are job sharing (1.03 per cent.) and 14 are block ("term") working (0.17 per cent.). A total of 724 work part-time (8.96 per cent.) and 80 are on unpaid leave (0.99 per cent.).

The Department also operates a flexible working hours scheme. This allows an individual to play a full part at work while enabling them to arrange their working hours to fit in with social and domestic arrangements. It also allows line managers to deal sympathetically with any requests for time off if the individual has particular needs.

It is departmental policy, as an equal opportunity employer, to meet requests for all types of flexible working wherever the nature of the work allows. This includes: maternity, paternity and parental leave (over and above legal requirements); flexible working hours; part-time work and job sharing; leave to care for sick children/carer's leave; home-working; term-time contracts; annual hours contracts; child care allowances; career break schemes; paid/unpaid leave. The flexibility of the working pattern is decided in conjunction with local management to suit an individual's need and the needs of their work. Managers are encouraged to welcome applications from people working different patterns, where the nature of work allows.

The Department sees flexible working arrangements as important in the promotion of diversity and equal opportunities policies, in the recruitment and retention of staff and for the creation of a better work/life balance.

Energy Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on energy costs incurred by her Department in each of the last 10 years. [42439]

Alun Michael: Information for the each of the last 10 years is not readily available, and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. In addition, the Machinery of Government changes do not allow for easy comparison. However, information on energy costs for DEFRA's predecessor and other Government Departments for the years 1996–97 to 1999–2000 is available in the Green Ministers reports which can be found at: http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/greening/minister/grmin.htm. Copies are available in the Library of the House.

For your convenience these data, without the footnotes, for English Government Departments is reproduced.

Energy costs for 2000–01 will be published in the next Green Ministers report in autumn 2002.

Energy expenditure by Government Departments—as published in Green Ministers reports

£

	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*
MAFF	1,607,392	1,196,306	1,270,719	1,155,485
MAFF Labs	1,195,120	2,010,656	1,877,991	1,880,441
Cabinet Office	723,587	693,234	717,622	767,895
DCMS	82,888	121,916	106,634	122,991
HM Customs and Excise	3,476,954	2,414,356	2,370,071	2,431,032
DfEE	1,337,963	1,347,403	1,056,810	1,111,660
Employment Service	5,341,147	4,848,133	4,946,793	4,960,622
DETR	4,095,629	4,099,099	3,993,520	3,473,024
Health and Safety Executive	667,458	668,883	582,679	570,336
QE2 Conference Centre	291,715	347,200	324,614	305,739
FCO	920,989	990,362	921,380	1,033,203
DoH	722,641	738,355	786,383	758,908
Home Office	2,051,873	1,792,543	1,911,139	2,378,335
HM Prison Service	24,257,826	23,868,557	20,016,907	22,310,050
Inland Revenue	8,256,246	8,192,613	8,138,451	8,772,679
DfID	212,935	225,513	209,602	183,574
Lord Chancellors Department	5,301,610	5,258,187	5,282,774	5,021,175
DSS	15,684,969	13,805,000	11,474,213	11,327,417
DTI	2,250,288	2,312,915	1,847,819	2,117,249
HM Treasury	612,651	336,547	316,314	337,396

Note:

In a few cases figures were revised from one report to another. The figures here are the latest published.

Rio Earth Summit (Implementation)

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps have been taken by the Government since the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 to *(a)* set goals on environmental protection and *(b)* improve eco-efficiency and resource productivity relating to coastal zone issues; and what these (i) goals and (ii) improvements have been. [44348]

Mr. Meacher: Among the actions contributing to sustainable development and relating to coastal zone management are work on species and habitat action plans under the Biodiversity Convention, and work within OSPAR on the strategies on hazardous substances and biodiversity.

Our policy on promoting sustainable development of the marine environment, including the coastal zone will shortly be set out in the forthcoming Marine Stewardship Report.

Civil Servants

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will set out for each Civil Service grade within her *(a)* Department and *(b)* Department's executive agencies the (i) total number of staff employed, (ii) number aged (A) 16 to 25, (B) 26 to 35, (C) 36 to 45, (D) 46 to 60 and (E) over the age of 60 years, (iii) number of registered disabled and (iv) number of ethnic minorities. [39177]

Mr. Morley: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend, the Parliamentary Secretary Cabinet Office (Mr. Christopher Leslie) on 13 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 1073W.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many staff left the service of her Department and its agencies in the year ended 31 March 2001; how many left before attaining the formal retirement age of 60 years; and in respect of how many her Department and its agencies assumed responsibilities for making payments until retirement age. [37553]

Mr. Morley: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend, the Parliamentary Secretary Cabinet Office (Mr. Christopher Leslie) on 13 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 1072W.

For part (c), in the year ended 31 March 2001 the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and its agencies assumed responsibility for making payments until retirement age (60) for 11 of these staff.

Engineers

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many chartered engineers there are in her Department; and what grades they hold. [43582]

Mr. Morley: The specific information requested is not held centrally by the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Government Action Plan (Organic Sector)

Ms Drown: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when her Department will start work on the development of the Government action plan for the organic sector announced in October. [44098]

Mr. Morley: An announcement about the Organic Food and Farming action plan will be made soon.

Objective 1 (Funding)

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 29 January, if she will ensure that the Cornwall and Isles of Scilly objective 1 funds will be fully restored. [35292]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 12 February 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given on 14 February 2002, *Official Report,* column 653W.

Flood Defence

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what funds have been allocated to coastal communities for flood defence work per capita in each of the past 10 years; and if she will make a statement. [39400]

Mr. Morley: The table details DEFRA grant to the Environment Agency (EA) and local authorities (LAs) for capital works to provide tidal river and sea defences and protection against coastal erosion in each of the last 10 financial years.

£ million

	EA Sea/ Tidal River	*LA Sea/ Tidal River*	*LA Coast Protection*
1991–92	24.6	0.1	19.5
1992–93	29.6	0.5	12.2
1993–94	26.7	0.4	18.6
1994–95	30.6	0.1	24.2
1995–96	38.1	0.2	31.3
1996–97	41.2	0.7	34.7
1997–98	34.0	0.8	24.2
1998–99	27.4	0.1	24.1
1999–2000	21.3	0.9	24.7
2000–01[1]	17.5	1.2	12.0

[1] In 2000–01 LAs under-achieved on coast protection works compared to their plans. They have recognised the need to improve project planning and the reliability of their forecasts.

Further funds are spent by the EA and LAs to cover non grant aided works, such as maintenance and flood warning. I regret I am unable to provide the above figures on a per capita basis without incurring disproportionate cost.

Abandoned Vehicles

Mr. Boris Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she plans to act upon the results of the consultation on reducing the number of abandoned vehicles; and if she will make a statement. [43501]

Mr. Meacher: My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State, expects to make an announcement shortly.

Recycling

Mr. Salter: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what new recovery and recycling targets for packaging waste for 2002 have been decided; and if she will make a statement. [45054]

Mr. Meacher: New business recovery and recycling targets for packaging waste in 2002 under the Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging Waste) Regulations 1997 (as amended) have been agreed by the Government. Subject to the approval of Parliament, these are as follows:

Recovery 59 per cent.

Material-specific recycling 19 per cent.

The Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging Waste) Regulations 1997 were made to enable the UK to meet its obligations under the EC Directive on Packaging Waste, in particular the recovery and recycling targets in Article 6 of that Directive. The first targets that we and other member states had to achieve, in 2001, under the Packaging Waste Directive were that at least 50 per cent. of packaging waste be recovered, at least 25 per cent. recycled and 15 per cent. of each packaging material recycled.

On the assumption that the UK met these targets last year (and final figures are not yet ready), the targets I am proposing today should allow almost five million tonnes of packaging waste to be recovered in 2002.

My Department has, as was indicated in the recent consultation paper on targets for 2002, reviewed the figures that were used to develop the targets for 2002 in that paper and in light of the changes in the amount of packaging data reported by businesses obligated under the packaging Regulations, and the estimates for the tonnages expected to be obligated in 2002, the Government have decided on a recovery target of 59 per cent. and a material-specific target of 19 per cent.

As in previous years, the national targets for next year need to be seen as leading on to higher targets and the ones proposed by the Government should allow the UK to plan a smooth upward curve towards higher recovery and recycling targets over the next few years.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent measures have been introduced to encourage businesses to recycle waste. [43042]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 18 March 2002]:* We have introduced or are planning to introduce a range of measures to encourage businesses to recycle by both regulatory and voluntary producer responsibility schemes.

The EC Directive on Packaging and Packaging Waste—94/62/EC—was implemented in Great Britain by the Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging Waste) Regulations 1997 (as amended). In order to comply with the requirements in the Directive, recovery and recycling targets for 2001 under the packaging Regulations were 56 per cent. for recovery and 18 per cent. for material specific recycling of packaging waste.

The Regulations place obligations on certain businesses to recover and recycle specified tonnages of packaging waste. Their obligation is calculated by using three factors: the amount of packaging handled by the business, the national business recovery and recycling targets for the year and the "activity obligation" associated with the activity the business carries out on packaging. Businesses can also reduce their obligation by using less and reusing packaging whenever possible. By increasing the amount reused, producers are able to reduce the tonnages of packaging waste they are required to recover and so lessen their costs of compliance.

We are transposing the EC Directive on End-of-Life Vehicles and the proposed Directive on Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment is expected to be adopted by the EC later this year.

A voluntary agreement is in place with the Newspaper Publishers Association to increase the recycled content of newsprint to target levels over a period of years up to 2006 and we are currently talking to the producers of direct mail and promotions with the aim of agreeing recycling targets for this material.

Hazardous Waste (Shoreham Harbour)

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what hazardous waste has been handled through Shoreham Harbour in the last two years; and what licences were issued. [43791]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 15 March 2002]:* Shipments of hazardous waste enter the UK under a system of prior written notification and consent rather than licensing. These controls are set out by Council Regulation (EEC) No.259/93 on the supervision and control of shipments of hazardous waste. The UK does not designate specific ports of import for hazardous waste. The Environment Agency, which controls the import of waste, would not, therefore, necessarily know which port is being used for a shipment.

However, the Environment Agency area office believes that there has been one shipment of 60 tonnes of redundant pesticides and agrochemicals imported via Shoreham in the last two years. This arrived in 2002.

Hazardous Emissions (Shoreham Harbour)

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what action has been taken to monitor dust emissions from HGVs using Shoreham Harbour on port related business. [43705]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 15 March 2002]:* Local authorities have a duty under part IV of the Environment Act 1995 to assess air quality against objectives set out in the Air Quality Regulations 2000, including an objective in respect of particulate matter (PM10). If the air quality objectives are likely to be exceeded by relevant deadline in areas where the public are likely to be exposed, then local authorities have to declare an air quality management area.

Adur District Council has produced a stage III local air quality management review and assessment report. This report refers to the fugitive dust emissions from Shoreham Harbour, and is available from the Housing and Environmental Services Department at Adur District Council.

An air quality modelling exercise was carried out that indicates that concentrations of PM10 from these fugitive dust sources is unlikely to exceed either the annual mean or 24-hour mean air quality objectives at locations where

the public are likely to be exposed. The modelling results have been compared to a limited period of monitoring in the Port area. The local authority's report states that it was not possible to undertake extensive monitoring of PM10 in the area of the Port. In September 2000 a cascade impactor was installed for four weeks. The overall conclusion of the report was that no exceedence of the PM10 objective would occur within Adur's District Council boundaries, and this conclusion has been accepted

Local authorities will be required to produce a further review and assessment report in the second phase of local air quality management by end of 2003.

Waste Incineration

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 12 March, ref. 42321, when she expects the Environment Agency to publish its research on the "Human Health Review of Incineration and Combustion Techniques". [44228]

Margaret Beckett: The "Human Health Review of Incineration and Combustion Techniques" research is expected to be published in August 2002.

Fly Tipping

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what proposals she is considering to strengthen the powers of *(a)* local authorities and *(b)* the Environment Agency in dealing with fly tipping; and if she will make a statement. [42556]

Mr. Meacher: Local Authorities and the Environment Agency already have wide powers to tackle fly tipping under section 59 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. Under this Act, local authorities and the Environment Agency have the power to remove fly tipped waste and recover the cost of collection on those who committed the offence. They also have the power to prosecute the perpetrator, and successful prosecution can lead to heavy penalties including an unlimited fine and up to two years in prison.

As part of the local public service agreement initiative, some local authorities have argued that to assist their ability to combat fly tipping, they should be given the power that the Environment Agency has to require companies and individuals to provide the Agency with copies of the duty of care paperwork which these companies and individuals are required to maintain. The Government have asked the fly tipping stakeholders' forum to consider this issue and make recommendations. We are currently awaiting the forum's views.

Sellafield

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what matters in respect of the future management and repatriation of German radioactive waste arising from reprocessing at Sellafield were discussed with her counterpart in Germany on her recent visit. [32288]

Margaret Beckett: None.

Ilsham Valley Pumping Station

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will determine the outcome of the inquiry into the compulsory purchase order of Ilsham Valley pumping station, Torquay. [43140]

Mr. Meacher: After considering the inspector's report resulting from the public inquiry, the Secretary of State decided that the order should be confirmed. The Department wrote to the parties concerned on 8 March 2002 informing them of the decision. The order as confirmed is subject to special parliamentary procedure and will be laid before both Houses.

Aquatic Pursuits

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 4 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 77W, if she will introduce new performance indicators to help judge the success of efforts to improve access for canoeists by the Environment Agency's Angling and Canoe Liaison Group. [42386]

Alun Michael: The Government have no plans to introduce performance indicators, but will continue to encourage the Environment Agency's Angling and Canoe Liaison Group to look for ways of improving access to the water for recreational use.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 4 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 77W, if she will make Environment Agency funding dependent on improving access to water for canoeists. [42385]

Alun Michael: The Government have no plans to make any Agency funding dependent on improving access to water for canoeists, but will continue to encourage the Environment Agency to look for ways of improving access to the water and land it manages for recreational use, as appropriate.

Navigation Rights

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make Government grants to landowners who own navigation rights on fast moving inland water dependent on their granting navigation rights for non-powered craft. [43328]

Alun Michael: We recently published the findings of research about water-based sport and recreation. One possibility raised in the report was for the introduction of revised funding arrangements for riparian owners in targeted locations to allow public access to their waterspace.

Officials recently met the other sponsors of the research (British Waterways, the Countryside Agency, the Countryside Council for Wales, the Environment Agency and Sport England) and other interested Government Departments to consider what action to take in the light of the report's findings. I shall be considering the outcome of the meeting with my ministerial colleagues. I shall also be interested to hear the hon. Member's views when we meet later this month.

Ministerial Meetings

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she last met representatives of the NFU. [7729]

Mr. Morley: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State last met representatives of the NFU on Thursday 14 February 2002.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she next intends to meet representatives of the National Farmers Union. [35878]

Mr. Morley: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will next meet representatives of the NFU on Thursday 21 March 2002.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) if she will list the official visits to *(a)* Paris and *(b)* Brussels made by each Minister in her Department in 2001 and the mode of travel used; and what guidance is provided to Ministers in her Department on the choice of mode of travel for such visits; [38154]

(2) if she will list the official visits within the UK outside London made by each Minister in her Department in 2001, giving for each *(a)* the origin and destination and *(b)* the mode of travel used; and what guidance is provided to Ministers in her Department on choice of mode of travel for official visits. [38190]

Mr. Morley: Since 1999 this Government have published an annual list of all visits overseas undertaken by Cabinet Ministers costing £500 or more during each financial year. The Government have also published on an annual basis the cost of all Ministers' visits overseas. Details of travel undertaken since 1 March 2001 will be published as soon as possible after the end of the current financial year. Copies of the lists are available in the Libraries of the House.

All travel is undertaken fully in accordance with the rules set out in the Ministerial Code and Travel by Ministers, copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House.

The additional detailed information requested in respect of UK travel is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Beekeepers

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many beekeepers were known to the National Bee Unit in *(a)* Essex and *(b)* England in each of the last four years. [42376]

Mr. Morley: The number of beekeepers in Essex and England identified on the National Bee Unit's (NBU) database in each of the last four years is as follows.

	Essex	*England*
1998	824	19,346
1999	832	19,607
2000	787	19,068
2001	540	17,884

The database is used to maintain records of statutory inspection programmes. It is not a definitive register of beekeepers.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Stolen Equipment

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 22 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 834–5W, on stolen equipment, what criminal proceedings have been undertaken for cases of theft against his Department, stating in each case *(a)* whether the proceedings (i) led to a criminal conviction and (ii) were unsuccessful, *(b)* the cost incurred by his Department in pursuing a conviction and *(c)* the value of items recovered; and if he will make a statement. [41507]

Angela Eagle: *[holding answer 18 February 2002]:* For the year 1997–98, detailed records are not available of the action taken for equipment stolen.

For the three years 1998–99, 1999–2000 and 2000–01 in all cases but one the culprit was not identified. In the one single case the culprit was dismissed without prosecution and the amount of the loss was recovered (£100).

Accountancy Contracts

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the contracts agreed by his Department with the five largest accountancy firms since May 1997; and what was the total value of contracts with each. [42107]

Angela Eagle: The available information on the contracts agreed with the Home Department with the five largest accountancy firms since May 1997 are as follows:

Company/contracts

Ernst & Young—Total: £1,952,828
- corporate planning facilitation
- project feasibility study
- youth inclusion programme
- Departmental review
- study of National Agency for confiscation of criminal assets

Pricewaterhousecoopers—Total: £7,572,321
- quantum
- preparation of in house bid
- immigration & nationality directorate consultancy
- support of preparation of in house bid
- development of prisons cost model
- wider markets review
- advertising costs to recruit the Director of Police Standards Unit
- technology review for Criminal Records Bureau
- development of Police Standards Unit programme of work
- recruitment of Director General of Resources and Performance
- development of resource accounting

Deloitte & Touche—Total: £145,800

consulting on VAT and tax implications for the new police training organisation

productivity review

KPMG—Total £382,729

bench marking of court escorts

implementations of National Audit Office recommendations

review of involvement in inspection of prisons

development of financial systems

Note:

The Home Office has not awarded any contracts to Anderson for the period in question.

Rail Journeys (Staff)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy that rail journeys undertaken by staff in his Department should ordinarily be on standard class tickets. [40451]

Angela Eagle: Section 8 of the Civil Service Management code requires Departments and agencies to ensure that staff use the most efficient and economic means of travel in the circumstances taking into account any management benefit or the needs of staff with disabilities.

Home Office staff below Senior Executive Officer level are normally required to travel standard class on rail journeys. The details, including exceptions to the general policy, are contained in the Departmental Travel and Subsistence Manual. The policy is to encourage staff to use public transport rather than cars, in accordance with the Government's policy on "Green Transport".

Senior staff are entitled to travel first class on official journeys where facilities are available to enable working on official papers on route. The policy is kept under review, but there are no current plans to change the arrangements. A new contract from 1 April will ensure additional discounts are available.

Capita

Mr. Boris Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many contracts the Department has with Capita; and how much they are worth. [38378]

Angela Eagle: I can confirm that the Home Department has current contracts with Capita which are valued at £403 million. This includes a 10 year contract with the Criminal Records Bureau which is estimated to be worth £400 million over the term of the contract.

Refurbishment

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 22 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 844W, what the cost of refurbishing each ministerial private office was in each year since May 1997. [37891]

Angela Eagle: We do not have the desegregated information available and could obtain this only at disproportionate cost.

Non-departmental Government Bodies

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many non-departmental Government bodies were operating in each of the last 10 years. [42801]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 12 March 2002]:* The number of Home Office non-departmental public bodies operating over the last ten years are set out in the table.

	Executive	*Advisory*	*Tribunal*	*Other*
1992	11	14	10	1
1993	11	14	10	1
1994	11	14	11	1
1995	11	14	10	1
1996	9	12	11	1
1997	11	11	11	1
1998	12	10	10	1
1999	13	10	12	1
2000	13	12	12	1
2001	9	9	9	1

Non-governmental Organisations

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list non-governmental organisations operating in the south-west region that receive public funds from his Department; and what amount of annual funding they received in the most recent year for which figures are available. [39185]

Angela Eagle: In this reply, "non-governmental organisation" means an organisation working within the voluntary or charity sector. The available information is set out in the table.

The Home Office does not generally record this information by region. It is therefore possible that other organisations in the south-west region, which are not listed, have received support from the Home Office.

In addition, funding awarded to national organisations may have been used to support work in the south-west region. It would be a matter for the organisation concerned how they chose to allocate such resources and the Home Office would not hold that information.

£

Organisation	*Payment in financial year 2000–01*
Awaz Utaoh (Bristol)	40,825
Barnardo's South West	18,313
Barne Barton Community	10,500
Barne Barton Estate Project (Plymouth)	15,000
Black Development Agency	58,000
Black Development Agency—'Three in One Project'	30,000
Bournemouth CVS—Resource Link	42,000
Bristol Racial Equality Council	40,150
Community Projects Trust—South West	30,000
Conduit Street Community Centre (Gloucester)	193,891
Crime Concern'	700,975
Eastbourne Community Network	199,154
Fairbridge	17,684
Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens	50,000
Home-Start Bournemouth	61,863
Honicknowle Commnet Ltd	2,800
Include	11,227
Jamaican Community Centre (Gloucester)	32,142
Kerrier Phoenix Project	150,000
KHAAS (Bristol)	19,105
Mediation UK	90,000

£

Organisation	Payment in financial year 2000–01
National Playbus Association	30,230
Plymouth and District Racial Equality Council	25,120
Portsmouth Community Safety	55,600
Portsmouth Community Services Project	25,125
Quest Trust	20,000
Social Software	7,050
Somerset Youth Voluntary Network	125,000
Society of Voluntary Associates (SOVA)	16,267
Swindon Business Education Partnership	78,900
The South West Forum	58,000
The Xcentre (Exeter)	196,500
Youth Action Scheme	11,038
Youth Support Services	20,355
Voluntary First (Bath and north-east Somerset)	122,491
Womanise Rape and Sexual Abuse Centre (mid and north Cornwall)	77,444

[1] Crime Concern have their national headquarters in Wiltshire (in the south-west region). This payment includes £33,000 given to Crime Concern for the roll-out of 'Driving the Action' seminars to a number of regions including the south-west region.

Crime and Disorder Partnerships

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many crime and disorder partnerships there are in England. [41364]

Mr. Denham: There are 376 crime and disorder reduction partnerships in England and Wales, 354 of these are in England and 22 in Wales.

Antisocial Behaviour Orders

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many antisocial behaviour orders have been issued, broken down by local authority areas, in each calendar year since their introduction. [42369]

Mr. Denham: Antisocial behaviour orders (ASBOs) are community-based civil orders, which can be applied for by the police or local authority in consultation with each other, against an individual or several individuals whose behaviour is antisocial. Applications are currently made to the magistrates court acting in its civil capacity. ASBOs were introduced from 1 April 1999.

Data on the total number of ASBOs issued between 1 April 1999 to 31 May 2000 was collected by police force area only.

From 1 June 2000 official statistics on the number of ASBOs issued are based on quarterly returns from Magistrates Courts Committees (MCCs) which from 1 April 2001 were all aligned with police force areas. These returns are not presently designed to give figures below MCC level. Available information, up to 30 September 2001, by police force/MCC area is given in the table.

Number of anti-social behaviour orders issued as from 1 April 1999 to 30 September 2001 by police force area/Magistrates Courts Committees (MCC)

Police force area/MCC	From 1 April 1999 to 31 May 2000[1]	From 1 June 2000 to 31 December 2000[2]	From 1 January 2001 to 30 September 2001	Total
Avon and Somerset	9	3	16	28
Bedfordshire	0	0	2	2
Cambridgeshire	5	1	2	8
Cheshire	0	0	0	0
Cleveland	1	4	5	10
Cumbria	1	1	0	2
Derbyshire	3	7	2	12
Devon and Cornwall	1	0	9	10
Dorset	0	2	2	4
Durham	0	4	6	10
Essex	0	0	0	0
Gloucestershire	0	1	3	4
Greater Manchester	10	2	12	24
Hampshire	1	2	1	4
Hertfordshire	1	1	7	9
Humberside	0	9	2	11
Kent	0	3	12	15
Lancashire	5	5	6	16
Leicestershire	1	4	0	5
Lincolnshire	0	0	1	1
Merseyside	8	3	6	17
Metropolitan Police'/Greater London Magistrates Courts Authority	9	19	12	40
Norfolk	6	0	11	17
Northamptonshire	0	2	1	3
Northumbria	8	5	2	15
North Yorkshire	4	0	6	10
Nottinghamshire	1	4	11	16
South Yorkshire	3	1	2	6
Staffordshire	0	4	6	10
Suffolk	3	0	2	5
Surrey	0	2	2	4
Sussex	3	4	0	7
Thames Valley	1	1	5	7
Warwickshire	0	1	2	3
West Mercia	5	7	35	47
West Midlands	11	23	31	65
West Yorkshire	4	2	9	15

Number of anti-social behaviour orders issued as from 1 April 1999 to 30 September 2001 by police force area/Magistrates Courts Committees (MCC)

Police force area/MCC	*From 1 April 1999 to 31 May 2000*[1]	*From 1 June 2000 to 31 December 2000*[2]	*From 1 January 2001 to 30 September 2001*	*Total*
Wiltshire	0	0	0	0
Dyfed Powys	0	0	0	0
Gwent	0	0	1	1
North Wales	0	1	0	1
South Wales	0	1	1	2
England and Wales	104	129	233	466

[1] Total figures only available from police force areas for period 1 April 1999 to 31 May 2000.
[2] As from 1 June 2000 data collected centrally by Magistrates Courts Committee (MCC) area by quarter.
[3] Including City of London

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will introduce guidance to authorities which successfully apply for ASBOs for individuals, on other rehabilitative measures which should be implemented at the same time. [41365]

Mr. Denham: Revised guidance on Anti-social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) will be issued once the legislative changes introduced into the Police Reform Bill are available. The revised guidance will include information on agencies providing rehabilitative measures.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which authority is responsible for meeting the cost of applying for anti-social behaviour orders. [38329]

Mr. Denham: *[holding answer 27 February 2002]:* The cost of an Anti-social Behaviour Order (ASBO) is usually met by the lead agency making the application—this will either be the local authority or the local police force. In some areas there are local arrangements where the costs are divided between the two agencies.

Independent Schools Council

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he proposes to respond to requests made in September 2000 by the Independent Schools Council about the visa regime for students from Commonwealth countries who take up temporary employment in independent schools. [41870]

Angela Eagle: The Joint Entry Clearance Unit of the Home Office and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office replied to the Independent Schools Council (ISC) on 21 September 2000 outlining the routes open to independent schools seeking to engage teaching assistants from outside the European Economic Area.

The ISC has expressed an interest in the planned amendment, to reflect the National Minimum Wage Act, of a concession, outside the immigration rules, which facilitates the entry of voluntary workers from overseas. The ISC will be advised of the details of the amendment shortly.

Miscarriages of Justice

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what psychiatric aftercare is given to victims of miscarriages of justice. [38361]

Mr. Keith Bradley: *[holding answer 5 March 2002]:* In order to obtain psychiatric aftercare, a victim of a miscarriage of justice will first need to contact their own GP for an assessment of their individual requirements. Having due regard to their patient's current needs, and previous medical history, the GP will then refer the case for any appropriate specialist treatment.

A working group was set up to look at the support and assistance that may be needed for prisoners who have successfully appealed against conviction. The group has not yet concluded its work but expects to put recommendations to Ministers shortly.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what training psychologists, who have been charged to treat the problems of the victims of miscarriages of justice, are given. [38362]

Mr. Keith Bradley *[holding answer 5 March 2002]:* Individuals who have suffered from a miscarriage of justice, and have a need for psychological support, will first need to approach their own GP for a referral. In making such a referral, the GP will have regard to both relevant experience and training before selecting an appropriate psychologist.

A working group was set up to look at the support and assistance that may be needed for prisoners who have successfully appealed against conviction. The group has not yet concluded its work but expects to put recommendations to Ministers shortly.

Visas (Romania)

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to abolish visa requirements for visiting students from Romania; what discussions he has had with that country's Government on the abolition of the requirement for UK students to have visas when visiting Romania; and if he will make a statement. [41914]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* A visa regime will normally be imposed where there is evidence of sustained abuse of our controls. All visa regimes are kept under review, and are only maintained where they contribute to effective immigration control. There continue to be large numbers of Romanian nationals seeking asylum or being found here illegally. In the circumstances there are no plans to lift the visa requirement for Romanian nationals. United Kingdom citizens do not require visas to visit Romania, but any who wish to study there will need to fulfil the requirement of the Romanian immigration regulations. We have had no discussions with the Romanian government on the conditions they attach to United Kingdom students studying in Romania.

Asylum Accommodation Centres

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will begin the local consultations on the proposed asylum accommodation centres. [41934]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* Home Office officials are currently in the process of holding meetings with local authorities in all eight locations. Those meetings will include making arrangements for a consultation exercise in each area.

Yarl's Wood

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he had on the insurance arrangements in case of riot at Yarl's Wood Detention Centre at the time of the making of the contract between Group Four and his Department for the operation of the Centre; and if he will make a statement. [38783]

Angela Eagle: The contract with Group 4 Amey Immigration Limited requires the Contractor to effect and maintain or procure in full force and effect insurance in the joint names of the contractor and the Crown in respect of a full range of insurance.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether persons suspected of arson and attempted arson were transferred to Yarl's Wood detention centre prior to the major fire there; and if he will make a statement. [39524]

Angela Eagle: There is at present no specific evidence that such persons were held at Yarl's Wood removal centre. However, it must be remembered that the overseas background of an individual—including any criminal activities—will not usually be known at the time of their detention.

Individuals detained under Immigration Act powers who are known or assessed to present a serious control or security risk, or those who have served a prison sentence of more than 12 months, would normally be held in prison rather than a removal centre pending the resolution of their immigration status or, if appropriate, deportation. The Immigration Service has taken steps to identify high risk individuals held in removal centres and have made arrangements for them to be transferred to prison.

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what training personnel received for managing Yarl's Wood removal centre; and if he will make a statement. [41150]

Angela Eagle: Section 155 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 requires that custodial functions at removal centres be performed by certified Detainee Custody Officers. A certificate of authorisation to act as a Detainee Custody Officer will not be issued unless my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is satisfied that the applicant is (a) a fit and proper person to perform the functions to be authorised and (b) has received training to such standard as the Secretary of State considers appropriate for the performance of those functions. In addition to these statutory requirements, contracts to operate removal centres require the contractor to implement a full training programme for all staff, supervisors and managers in a range of appropriate skills and procedures.

European Excellence Model

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the European Excellence Model scores were for each of the probation areas, including the National Probation Service, during the recent evaluation; and if he will make a statement. [41153]

Beverley Hughes: A table containing the scores achieved by the local probation areas and by the National Directorate is set out in the table. The scores across the 42 operational areas ranged from 150 to 330 and the average was 243. The National Directorate score was 100. This was to be expected from an organisation that was only created on 1 April 2001 and is still building its capacity and introducing first time business processes. The maximum achievable score is 1,000. In order to achieve an excellence award an organisation would need to score 600–700.

Region/area	*Total*
West Midlands	
Staffordshire	285
Warwickshire	270
West Mercia	275
West Midlands	290
Regional average	280
North East	
County Durham	180
Northumbria	200
Teeside	240
Regional average	207
East	
Bedfordshire	255
Cambridgeshire	320
Essex	220
Hertfordshire	205
Norfolk	205
Suffolk	290
Regional average	249
North West	
Cheshire	190
Cumbria	210
Greater Manchester	230
Lancashire	185
Merseyside	234
Regional average	210
East Midlands	
Derbyshire	302
Leicestershire	235
Lincolnshire	230
Northampton	220
Nottingham	282
Regional average	254
Yorkshire and Humberside	
Humberside	254
South Yorkshire	225
North Yorkshire	270
West Yorkshire	285
Regional average	259
South East	
Hampshire	190
Kent	225
Surrey	170
Sussex	175
Thames Valley	150
Regional average	182

Region/area	Total
South West	
Avon and Somerset	215
Devon and Cornwall	275
Dorset	294
Gloucestershire	275
Wiltshire	320
Regional average	276
London	211
Wales	
North Wales	285
Gwent	330
Dyfed-Powys	230
South Wales	290
Regional average	284
England and Wales average	243
National Directorate	100

Assisted Prison Visits

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether eligibility for the Assisted Prison Visits scheme includes the travel costs of foreign nationals to visit relatives held in prison in the United Kingdom from overseas. [28367]

Beverley Hughes: Applicants for assistance under the Assisted Prison Visits scheme for England and Wales are required to demonstrate that they meet the scheme's low income criterion. Relatives who are living overseas will not meet the criterion as this is based on United Kingdom awards. These are income support and job seeker's allowance (income based); a health certificate two or three issued by the Department of Health; working families tax credit or disabled person's tax credit where the amount of credit withdrawn is £70 or less.

Regulatory Impact Unit

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many members his Department employs in its Regulatory Impact Unit; and if he will make a statement. [42935]

Angela Eagle: Home Office departmental responsibility for regulatory impacts is located in the Performance, Delivery and Strategy Unit which employs one person to co-ordinate the work on regulatory impacts across the Department.

He works closely with the officials responsible for developing policies within the Home Office and with the Cabinet Office Regulatory Impact Unit.

Sex Offenders

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what additional resources are made available to receiving authorities for known sex offenders who are allocated to areas other than those of their known offending. [42191]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* Sex offenders are subject to statutory supervision by the National Probation Service until any supervision period expires. In some cases the length of sentence or the provisions of earlier legislation mean that a period of supervision in the community does not apply.

Statutory supervision enables the National Probation Service to exercise a control over the location of an offender. The needs and wishes of the victim and/or the requirements of specialist accommodation may lead to a placement out of area which will be negotiated with the receiving area.

In all circumstances, under the provisions of the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000, the police and probation services have a joint responsibility to assess risk and to formulate a management plan for those who pose a high risk of harm. This is discharged through multi-agency public protection panels (MAPPPs).

A convicted sex offender not or no longer subject to supervision is free to choose his location but in most cases will be subject to the requirements of the Sex Offender Act 1997. This means he will be required to register his home address with the police, and notify them of any change. The police will make every effort to monitor the whereabouts of those assessed as very high risk and to notify the receiving police area of the offender's movement. Where the police and other agencies have concerns about the offender's behaviour, they may apply for a sex offender order, restraining him from specified activities on pain of imprisonment.

General budgets for police and probation include provision for risk management activities; funds do not normally follow specific offenders.

The Government will be bringing forward proposals to strengthen further the protection afforded from sex offenders. The Halliday report on the structure of the sentencing framework includes proposals for a new special sentence for sexual and violent offenders that will bring increased supervision. We are also looking to strengthen the MAPPP process, including by bringing in a lay element at an appropriate level.

Travellers

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many eviction notices against groups of travellers have been served in each of the last five years; what assessment he has made of the proportion of evictions that have arisen from real and sustained nuisance; what representations on this subject he has received; and if he will make a statement. [41101]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 18 March 2002]:* Figures for the number of eviction notices served on travellers are not collated centrally.

The Home Office receives representations regularly on issues relating to travellers, particularly about unauthorised camping and disorder. We continue to keep the current powers to deal with problems associated with unauthorised encampments under review.

Agricultural Workers

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the review of the seasonal agricultural workers' scheme will take into account Cornish agricultural workers. [41808]

Angela Eagle: The White Paper, 'Secure Borders, Safe Haven: Integration with Diversity in Modern Britain', explains current routes of entry to the United Kingdom for work purposes and our proposals to augment and complement these routes in the light of the United Kingdom's economic needs.

In reviewing the Seasonal Agricultural Workers' scheme to see how it may better meet the needs of the agricultural sector, account will certainly be taken of the availability and skills of, and employment opportunities for, the existing workforce.

Road Accidents

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many road accidents involved police investigations which led to criminal proceedings in each of the last five years. [42183]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* The police investigate every accident which they attend, and they attend in the vast majority of cases where there is some level of injury. There were 233,729 such accidents in 2000. The police also attend and investigate many accidents involving damage to vehicles or property where there is no injury to people. Information about these is not recorded centrally.

Records of proceedings for road traffic offences do not describe the circumstances in which the offences were committed. It is therefore not possible to identify separately those proceedings which resulted from the investigation of an accident.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what advice his Department has given to police authorities in the last two years in relation to the nature of investigations into road accidents resulting in serious injury or death. [40785]

Mr. Denham: The Association of Chief Police Officers issued a manual of guidance to all forces in November 2001 recommending best practice in the investigation of fatal crashes, so as to promote a consistent approach across forces. The manual reflects the need to investigate road deaths so as to serve the needs of justice and to provide support for victims fairly, impartially and without prejudice. So far, trainers from about two thirds of police forces have taken part in training related to the guidance manual.

Wheelclamping

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what powers the proposed authority set up to control wheelclamping on private land will have under the Private Security Industry Act 2001 to control the towing away of vehicles parked on private land. [11218]

Mr. Denham: Wheelclamping is one of the activities to be regulated by the provisions of the Private Security Industry Act 2001. These activities are, however, limited to the immobilisation of a vehicle by the attachment of an immobilising device, and do not extend to the towing away of motor vehicles. The Security Industry Authority established by the Act will not, therefore, have any powers in this area. The Government are currently considering whether any action is required to deal with this issue.

Criminal Justice and Police Act

Mr. Fabian Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions have been brought under section 24(2) of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 paragraph (g) as amended by section 71 of the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001. [39806]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* Prosecutions are not brought under these statutes.

Section 24(2) of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act sets out those offences for which powers of arrest without warrant apply, and section 71 of the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001 simply adds two further offences to this section. They are kerb crawling and failure to stop and report an accident (in which personal injury is caused).

There were 812 persons proceeded against for kerb crawling in England and Wales in 2000, 6,165 persons for failing to stop after an accident and 1,907 for failing to report an accident within 24 hours. In the case of the latter figures, it is not known centrally, however, whether the offences involved personal injury or only damage to a vehicle, an animal or other property.

"Policing A New Century"

Andy King: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what responses have been received to "Policing a New Century". [45000]

Mr. Denham: I have today placed in the Library of the House a copy of a report which summaries the responses to the White Paper. Copies of the responses from organisations had already been placed in the Library in time for the Committee stage of the Police Reform Bill.

Police

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average cost was of employing a police constable for a year in *(a)* a provincial police force and *(b)* London in the last 12 months. [32735]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* The pay related and notional pensions costs are set out in the table.

£

	London forces		*Provincial*	
	Constable (a)	*Constable (b)*	*Constable (a)*	*Constable (b)*
Salary from September 2001 scales	19,842	25,095	19,842	25,095
London weighting	1,773	1,773	0	0
London Allowance	4,338	1,011	0	0
Housing/rent allowance	0	5,864	0	3,648
Earning Related National Insurance Contributions (ERNIC)	1,845	2,606	1,303	2,080

£

	London forces		Provincial	
	Constable (a)	Constable (b)	Constable (a)	Constable (b)
Notional pension costs (30 per cent. of salary)	5,953	7,529	5,953	7,529
Free travel	120	120	0	0
South East Allowance	0	0	[1]—	0
Total	33,871	43,998	27,098	38,352

[1] Figures do not include the South East Allowance paid since 1 April 2001 to officers appointed on or after 1 September 1994 who are not in receipt of a housing allowance. The allowance, including national insurance contributions, is £2,180 for officers in Thames Valley, Essex, Kent, Hertfordshire and Surrey and £1,090 for officers in Beds, Hants and Sussex.

Notes:

1. (a) new recruit (b) Constable: average cost, including rent allowance, after eight years service.
2. On commencing service, a constable's pay from 1 September 2001 was £17,733. The direct pay element for new police recruits increases after successful completion of 31 weeks' initial training to £19,842. The latter figure is included in (a) above.
3. The figures for the Metropolitan police and City of London police include London weighting and London Allowance and the cost of free travel.

Police Authority Funding

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will commit money that has been made available for providing civilians with conferred police powers in a manner that recognises the imbalance in funding between different police authorities. [37905]

Mr. Denham: No financial provision for operational work is made in advance of statutory approval. Police grant funding mechanisms take into account the relative needs of different police authorities.

Police Pensions

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received on the impact on police forces of the payment of pensions to retired officers out of operational budgets; and what plans he has to change the present arrangements. [41688]

Mr. Denham: During the consultation period for the 2002–03 funding settlement that was announced on 30 January 2002, seven police authorities referred to pensions in their letters of representation. We are aware of police authorities' concern over the increasing burden of the funding of pensions. We have increased revenue funding from 12.9 per cent. in 1997–98 to 14.5 per cent. since 1999–2000. It will remain at this level in 2002–03.

As we made clear in our recently published White Paper "Policing a New Century: A Blueprint for Reform", we are also aware of the need of police authorities and chief officers for a system which brings greater clarity about pensions obligations on individual police forces. The Home Office and Treasury are reviewing the options for a revised system of funding which would bring this about.

Metropolitan Police

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the approved number of officers in the Metropolitan police force is; and when that level was last reviewed. [39972]

Mr. Denham: The number of police officers in the Metropolitan Police service is the responsibility of the Metropolitan Police Authority within the budget set by the Greater London Authority (GLA).

The budget set by the GLA for 2002–03 provides for an increase in Metropolitan police strength of 1,000 officers.

Mr. Salter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which *(a)* members of the Metropolitan Police Authority, *(b)* business associates of those members and *(c)* companies in which such members have an interest have been in paid employment by the Metropolitan police service. [42740]

Mr. Denham: I am advised by the Clerk to the Metropolitan Police Authority that the Register of Members' Interests for members of the Metropolitan Police Authority is a public document available for inspection through the Clerk to the Authority.

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has set improvement targets for individual Metropolitan police basic command units; and if he will make a statement. [41612]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 8 March 2002]:* The Government have required all police authorities, including the Metropolitan Police Authority, to set targets for reductions in domestic burglary, vehicle crime and, in our major cities, robbery. Targets at basic command unit level are not set centrally.

The Police Standards Unit will monitor performance at basic command unit level in all forces and will work with basic command units to improve performance where appropriate.

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent discussions he has had with the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis about the level of crime in London; and if he will make a statement. [41616]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 8 March 2002]:* I have regular bilateral meetings with the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis where current issues about the policing of London are discussed.

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what targets he has set for the decrease in street robberies in the Metropolitan police force area. [41611]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 8 March 2002]:* The Metropolitan Police Service's target is to reduce street crime (covering robbery and theft from the person, irrespective of location) by 15 per cent. by March 2005 from a baseline of 1999–2000.

The Government are committed to increasing the size of the special constabulary and are working on a number of options designed to achieve this. These include improvements to the recruitment, training, conditions, management and deployment of specials—focusing their role on intelligence-led, high visibility patrolling and local crime reduction initiatives.

Special Constables

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many special constables there were, broken down by *(a)* police force and *(b)* local authority area, in each year since 1997. [42370]

Mr. Denham: The number of serving special constables in each police force area from September 1997 to September 2001 are set out in the table. Data showing the number of specials per local authority is not held centrally.

Police force	*September 1997*	*September 1998*	*September 1999*	*September 2000*	*September 2001*
Avon and Somerset	629	584	482	416	391
Bedfordshire	186	175	148	134	119
Cambridgeshire	336	308	293	214	197
Cheshire	491	416	358	307	233
Cleveland	157	136	108	122	98
Cumbria	184	210	193	167	125
Derbyshire	414	355	303	286	263
Devon and Cornwall	1,079	16	908	836	780
Dorset	325	303	287	278	258
Durham	178	159	169	155	146
Essex	641	590	528	478	413
Gloucestershire	287	245	221	197	153
Greater Manchester	657	567	498	408	355
Hampshire	681	747	720	541	444
Hertfordshire	306	267	232	214	177
Humberside	348	289	263	198	207
Kent	588	565	484	416	366
Lancashire	500	465	397	362	325
Leicestershire	402	350	303	202	155
Lincolnshire	273	233	218	179	160
London, City of	84	69	66	46	34
Merseyside	407	463	467	452	507
Metropolitan police	1,528	1,214	1,173	754	753
Norfolk	346	351	317	270	240
Northamptonshire	314	262	210	195	184
Northumbria	480	352	356	323	276
North Yorkshire	337	302	245	189	186
Nottinghamshire	597	530	405	411	281
South Yorkshire	295	266	236	193	189
Staffordshire	643	558	460	461	395
Suffolk	300	402	420	376	322
Surrey	231	226	205	168	176
Sussex	465	415	377	317	301
Thames Valley	694	587	514	463	377
Warwickshire	379	323	260	260	208
West Mercia	558	499	512	443	364
West Midlands	949	784	697	662	604
West Yorkshire	604	590	572	452	371
Wiltshire	150	176	182	172	160
Dyfed Powys	241	237	237	193	174
Gwent	149	114	110	131	148
North Wales	388	336	262	233	203
South Wales	362	360	331	254	250

Note:
Figures provided by Research, Development and Statistics

Firearms Consultative Committee

Andy King: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will lay before Parliament the eleventh annual report of the Firearms Consultative Committee. [44999]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: I have today laid before Parliament the eleventh annual report of the Firearms Consultative Committee, copies of which have been placed in the Library.

Mr. John Morris

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the findings were of the inquest into the death of Mr. John Morris in Luton in June 2001; how many persons have been prosecuted for offences connected with this death; and what the outcome was of criminal proceedings. [41105]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 18 March 2002]:* The inquest into the death was adjourned after charges of murder were brought against three suspects. One of these subsequently pleaded guilty to manslaughter and was sentenced to seven years' imprisonment. Another pleaded guilty to violent disorder and was sentenced to 21 months' imprisonment. The third was found not guilty of any of the charges brought against him. The coroner decided not to resume the inquest.

Drug Treatment Services

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the availability and quality of drug treatment services. [42895]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The Government are making substantial investment to increase the availability of drug treatment services, particularly for Class A drug users. Through the pooled treatment budget, we are increasing funding from £234 million in 2001–02 to £400 million by 2003–04 to improve services locally and reduce waiting times.

The Government set up the National Treatment Agency (NTA) last year with the clear objective of improving the quality and availability of drug treatment in England. Since then the NTA has:

1. Established challenging waiting time targets for drug treatment and will monitor these at local level
2. Piloted a system of delivery to integrate all the support services that someone undergoing treatment may require—including aftercare and housing, as well as clinical drug treatment.
3. Promoting a shared care approach to enable GPs to work more effectively with specialist services and drug users in their areas.

The Government's drug strategy calls for a doubling of the number of people in treatment in the 10 years from 1998 to 2008. The numbers of people in treatment in 2000–01 was 118,000, an increase of 16 per cent. over 1998–99.

Vetting Procedures

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many professionals working with children were screened in each of the past 10 years; how many people have been prevented from working with children after being screened in each of the past 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [38140]

Mr. Denham: Information is not available in the form requested. Pre-employment screening takes various forms, including taking up references, medical checks and inquiring about previous employment history.

Criminal record checks have been carried out by the police, principally of employees in the statutory sector in posts (of any nature) involving substantial unsupervised access to children. The table shows available figures for such checks conducted in the years shown under arrangements agreed at national level with the Association of Chief Police Officers:

Year to 31 March	
1993	654,472
1994	609,434
1995	607,573
1996	613,163
1997	657,036
1998	712,765
1999	769,515
2000	804,996

The following figures show the number of such checks that revealed convictions:

Year to 31 March	
1993	33,894
1994	38,162
1995	39,679
1996	38,809
1997	46,584
1998	49,786
1999	54,060
2000	53,044

Information is not available as to numbers refused employment.

The introduction of the Criminal Records Bureau will make such checks more widely available to employers and voluntary organisations.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Advertisements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the job advertisements placed by his Department in the last 12 months specifying where the advertisements were placed and the cost in each case. [39065]

Mr. Leslie: In the calendar year of 2001 there were a total of 58 adverts placed for 80 vacancies at a total cost of £205,303.00.

The adverts were published in a variety of media including the national press, local and specialist press, the civil service jobs gateway website and local job centres.

Litigation

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many cases *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its agencies have defended in (i) industrial tribunals and (ii) the courts in each year since 1997; how many were concluded in their favour; and what the total cost was to his Department of litigation in each year. [41117]

Mr. Leslie: The information is provided in the following table.

	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
(a) Cabinet Office Tribunals						
Number of cases	'1	0	0	0	0	'1
Cases won	1	—	—	—	—	1
Cost of litigation	£3,643	—	—	—	—	£1,307
Courts						
Number of cases	0	0	0	0	0	0
(b) Agencies' Tribunals						
Number of cases	0	0	0	3	0	0
Cases won	—	—	—	2	—	—
Cost of litigation	—	—	—	£15,453	—	—
Courts						
Number of cases	0	0	0	0	0	0

' Denotes same case.

Notes:

Figures given are for current Cabinet Office agencies and the year the case was settled.

The information for 2002 includes cases heard up to 28 February.

The figures are supplied by the Treasury Solicitor's Department, which is responsible for litigation on behalf of the Cabinet Office.

Staff Numbers

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many staff have been employed by his Department in each of the last 10 years. [42466]

Mr. Leslie: The figures are shown in a table, which has been placed in the Library of the House. They show the number of permanent staff in each Department/agency reported to the Cabinet Office at 1 April from 1992 to 2001. The figures include submissions from all Departments and agencies.

The figures for 1992 to 2000 were previously published in the annual civil service statistics publication, copies of which are in the Library of the House. The 2001 figures were published in the Press Notice about civil service staffing levels, released on 8 November 2001, a copy of which is also in the Library of the House.

The figures are calculated on a full-time equivalent basis, and are rounded to the nearest 10. It should be noted that, owing to rounding of figures there may be an apparent discrepancy between the totals and the sum of the constituent items.

Public Appointments

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment has been made of the percentage of *(a)* paid and *(b)* unpaid appointments to non-departmental public bodies made to women in each year since 1997. [44399]

Mr. Leslie: Information on the gender and remuneration of the chair and members of the board of public bodies is set out in the annual publication "Public Bodies", copies of which are in the Library of the House.

Government Office for London

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many whole time equivalent posts there were at the Government Office for London as at 1 April 1999 and in each subsequent year for which figures are available; and if he will set out for each Government Office for London directorate the changes in staffing levels since 1999–2000. [44203]

Mrs. Roche: The Government Office for London had approximately 390 whole time equivalent posts in April 1999, 370 in April 2000 and 240 in April 2001.

In 1999 GOL comprised three directorates; New London Governance with approximately 60 whole time equivalent posts, Transport and Corporate with 90 and Skills, Education and Regeneration with 240. By August 2000, the New London Governance directorate was wound up and GOL was then restructured into a single directorate.

PRIME MINISTER

Iraq

Angus Robertson: To ask the Prime Minister what discussions he has had with US President George W. Bush about seeking a new and specific United Nations Security Council mandate for any international offensive military action against Iraq. [44315]

The Prime Minister: I regularly discuss all aspects of Iraq policy with President Bush and the US Administration. My most recent discussions were with US Vice President Cheney in London on 11 March. I will have another opportunity to do so during my visit to the US next month.

Engineers

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Prime Minister (1) how many chartered engineers there are in the performance and innovation unit; and how many worked on the energy study published in February; [43463]

(2) how many people are employed in the performance and innovation unit; and how many have engineering and science qualifications at first degree level and above. [43464]

The Prime Minister: On 1 March 2002 there were 84 people working in the performance and innovation unit (PIU) based in the Cabinet Office. The PIU works on a range of projects at any one time, and the number of staff and their educational qualifications vary accordingly.

Five people worked full-time on the energy review from beginning to end. Four people transferred to the energy review from the separate resource productivity and renewable energy project halfway through the energy review. A further eight people provided part-time, advisory or administrative support as required by the main team.

None of the full-time members of the project team were chartered engineers. The team had access to scientific and engineering expertise through supporting consultants, members of the advisory group and from the organisations consulted during the course of the project. Full details are given in Annexes 2 and 3 of the Energy Review.

HEALTH

Departmental Staff

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many staff left the service of his Department and its agencies in the year ended 31 March 2001; how many left before attaining the formal retirement age of 60 years; and in respect of how many his Department and its agencies assumed responsibilities for making payments until retirement age. [37550]

Ms Blears: I refer the right hon. Member to the central answer provided by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister, on 13 March 2002.

Information in respect of how many staff in the Department and its agencies assumed responsibility for making payments until retirement age is shown in the table.

Departures between April 2000 and March 2001	
Health (excluding agencies)	[1]17
Medical Devices Agency	0
Medical Controls Agency	0
NHS Estates	1
NHS Purchasing and Supplies Agency	0
NHS Purchasing and Supplies Agency	0
Total	18

[1] Early retirement departures as a result of the closure the Glenthorne Youth Treatment Centre, Birmingham (GYTC) are not included

Source:
Paymaster billing sheet March 2001

Glivec

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) which health authorities are providing the cancer drug Glivec; how many people are receiving the drug, broken down by health authority; at what cost; and if he will make a statement; [38233]

(2) whether there is a mechanism for patients unable to receive the cancer drug Glivec from their own health authority to have the treatment in another health authority; and if he will make a statement; [38232]

(3) when he expects the NICE report on the drug Glivec for chronic myeloid leukaemia to be published; and if he will make a statement; [38410]

(4) which health authorities provide patients with the drug Glivec for chronic myeloid leukaemia; and if he will make a statement. [38412]

Yvette Cooper: Information on the provision and cost of Glivec by individual health authority is not available. The funding of treatment for patients is the responsibility of the health authority where the patient lives.

Once a drug is licensed in the United Kingdom it can be prescribed for use in the NHS for patients who meet the licensed criteria. As with all newly licensed treatments awaiting a NICE appraisal, the Department's advice is that funding authorities should consider the clinical evidence available for a specific treatment before making any decision.

Glivec received its UK licence last November and so can be prescribed for use in the NHS for patients with chronic myeloid leukaemia who meet the licensed criteria.

It is anticipated that NICE will issue guidance on the use of Glivec for chronic myeloid leukaemia in August 2002.

Nursing Care Payments

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) on what basis the Minister decided not to follow the recommendations of the Steering Group set up to look at the way free nursing care payments should be paid; [38057]

(2) what representations he has received since 1 October 2001 in favour of free nursing care payments being paid direct to nursing home owners; [38056]

(3) if he will offer care homes the option of clients being paid the free nursing care payments; [38227]

(4) if he will offer care homes the option of the free nursing care payments being paid directly to the clients as well as the nursing home; and if he will make a statement. [38058]

Jacqui Smith: I have received no such representations since 1 October.

The stakeholder group set up to oversee implementation of free nursing care did not recommend that payments should be made to individuals rather than to care homes.

The national health service traditionally provides services to patients or arranges for others, in this case independent care providers, to provide services to them.

Medicine Safety

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many appeals made against definitive decisions by the Committee on Safety of Medicines were heard by the *(a)* full committee of the Committee on Safety of Medicines and *(b)* Medicines Commission in each year since 1996. [37650]

Ms Blears: The number of appeals heard by the Committee on Safety of Medicines and the Medicines Commission between 1996 and December 2001 are shown in the following table:

	CSM	*Medicines Commission*
1996	14	3
1997	14	1
1998	11	3
1999	11	0
2000	12	3
2001	11	4

This information is published annually in the reports of the Medicines Act Advisory Bodies, copies of which are available in the Library. The report relating to the work undertaken by these committees during 2001 will be published later this year. The information can also be found on the website of the Medicines Control Agency at www.mca.gov.uk.

Catering Services

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the cost was of *(a)* in-house canteen and *(b)* other catering services provided by his Department in each of the last four years. [38920]

Ms Blears: The direct cost to the Department of *(a)* in-house canteen and *(b)* other catering services provided is shown in the table.

£

	(a)	(b)
1997–98	66,590	706,057
1998–99	63,760	1,002,184
1999–2000	73,737	1,063,325
2000–01	83,349	900,532

Civil Servants

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will set out for each Civil Service grade within his *(a)* Department and *(b)* Department's executive agencies the (i) total number of staff employed, (ii) number aged (A) 16 to 25, (B) 26 to 35, (C) 36 to 45, (D) 46 to 60 and (E) over the age of 60 years, (iii) number of registered disabled and (iv) number of ethnic minorities. [39149]

Ms Blears: I refer the hon. Member to the central answer provided by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister, on 13 March 2002.

Unlicensed Medicines

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the annual budget is for *(a)* 2000, *(b)* 2001, *(c)* 2002 and *(d)* 2003 for the Special Unit to investigate possible breaches of regulations on the internet set up within the Medicines Control Agency's Enforcement Group. [39019]

Ms Blears: The Special Enquiry Unit forms part of the Enforcement Group within the Medicines Control Agency. The budget for the Group is set at approximately £1,600,000 per annum.

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time members are in the Medicines Control Agency's Enforcement Group Special Unit to investigate possible breaches of regulations on the internet. [39020]

Ms Blears: Following the absorption of the Special Enquiry Unit into the main investigation area in 2001 the number of officers assigned to internet investigations, has varied according to the assessed public health risk.

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what *(a)* supporting and *(b)* co-ordinating activities have been undertaken by the Medicines Control Agency for the International Forum on Pharmaceutical Crime established in Ottawa in 1999 that relate to the sale of licensed and unlicensed medicines via the internet. [38819]

Ms Blears: There have been four meetings of the International Forum on Pharmaceutical Crime since its foundation in 1998 at Sunningdale, with subsequent conferences in Ottawa 1999, Holland 2000 and Washington 2001.

Medicines Control Agency (MCA) was the co-ordinator for the initial conference and provided the main co-ordination facility for the subsequent conferences.

Internet crime has been discussed by the Forum.

One of the last initiatives undertaken was an international internet sweep, for which the Office of Fair Trading was the United Kingdom's co-ordinator in February 2002. MCA was directly involved.

The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission are co-ordinating the global results. Relevant cases in breach of UK legislation will be forwarded to the MCA for further investigations.

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the Special Unit to investigate possible breaches of regulations on the internet was set up within the Medicines Control Agency's Enforcement Group. [39021]

Ms Blears: The Special Enquiry Unit of the Medicines Control Agency Enforcement Group, was originally set up in 1998 to investigate offences involving the sale and supply of Viagra. The unit then developed the necessary competence to investigate internet crime. After this initial phase the unit was absorbed into the main investigation area in October 2001. However, investigation of internet offences remains a high priority.

Epsom Riding for the Disabled Association

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the answer of 14 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 671W, if the district valuer has completed the work required for the Epsom Riding for the Disabled Association to take a final decision on the acquisition of the site. [39131]

Ms Blears: Negotiations with the Epsom Riding for the Disabled Association are at an advanced stage. It is hoped that these will be finalised shortly and that a sale to them can be concluded.

Repair and Maintenance Backlog

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the outstanding repair and maintenance backlog figures were *(a)* in each NHS region and *(b)* in England in each of the last five years. [39143]

Jacqui Smith: While backlog maintenance costs have risen since 1994–95 the bringing into use of new health care buildings resulting from the major capital investment programme within the NHS, in the order of £7 billion by 2010, should see a marked decrease in backlog maintenance costs. This is already evident in the smaller rate of change seen recently in backlog maintenance costs. It is estimated that the impact of this planned major capital investment, together with contributions from block capital issued directly to NHS trust should, if fully implemented, see the virtual eradication of most backlog maintenance costs within the NHS by 2010.

Combined SHA

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the benefit to Somerset of having a strategic health authority with Dorset. [38480]

Ms Blears: The benefits of creating a new Health Authority for Somerset and Dorset were set out in the consultation document "Modernising the NHS: Shifting the Balance of Power in Somerset and Dorset". This was the subject of public consultation last year by the South West Regional Office of the Department of Health. Following consideration of the responses received during the consultation exercise the boundaries of the new health authority were announced on 18 December 2001.

Non-Governmental Organisations

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list non-Governmental organisations operating in the south-west region that receive public funds from his Department; and what amount of annual funding they received in the most recent year for which figures are available. [39186]

Ms Blears: The information requested cannot be identified from information held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Asbestos

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to recompense hospitals who face major new expenditure, if the proposed new Health and Safety Executive regulations on asbetos come into effect. [39297]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 1 March 2002]:* Regulations to protect against the exposure to asbestos are already in existence. Under the Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations 1987, it is the duty of all employers to prepare risk assessments and make arrangements to protect workers and, in the case of the NHS, patients. The proposed new regulation, which will formalise and expand upon existing regulations, will better protect against the risks of exposure to asbestos by imposing more rigorous management arrangements on employers. The regulations will ensure that where there is evidence of asbestos, it is managed effectively and safely so as not to cause risk of harm to anyone.

Cost analysis of the proposed new regulation indicates that the financial burden on the NHS will not be major. Hospitals will be expected to pay for such work out of their normal running cost allocation budgets.

Waiting Time (Avon)

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average waiting times for people in need of orthopaedic surgery in the Avon health authority have been in each of the last five years. [40429]

Ms Blears: The average median waiting times, from the date of a decision to admit a patient for treatment for the trauma and orthopaedics specialty to the admission date, in Avon health authority are shown in the table:

	Median waiting time in days
1996–97	101
1997–98	112
1998–99	125
1999–2000	104
2000–01	117

Source:
Health Episode Statistics database

The figures are based on elective hospital in-patients admitted with a specialty code 110—trauma and orthopaedic. There is currently no separate specialty code for orthopaedics alone.

NHS Dentistry

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of people in *(a)* England and *(b)* each health authority were registered with an NHS dentist in (i) each year since 1997, (ii) 1979 and (iii) 1992. [40409]

Ms Blears: Arrangements are now in place to ensure that patients can gain access to NHS services simply by calling NHS Direct. This means that even if a patient chooses not to register with a dentist it will still be possible for that patient to access all forms of dentistry that are provided by the NHS.

The percentage of people registered with a general dental service (GDS) dentist per head of population by family health service authority is shown in table 1 for England at 30 September 1992.

The percentage of people registered with a GDS dentist per head of population by health authority is shown in table 2 for England at 30 September for each year since 1997.

Registrations were first introduced in October 1990, and therefore figures for 1979 are not available. From September 1996, the registration period was changed from 24 months to 15 months for adults, and from 12 months to 15 months for children. As a result of this, data held on registration numbers after 1997 is not comparable to earlier years. The data may also be affected by gradual improvements in the methods used for the removal of duplicate registration records, which were first employed by the dental practice board in 1993.

Table 1: general dental service: number of patients registered as a percentage of the population by family health service authority at 30 September 1992

Family health service authority	*Percentage*
England	59
Avon Health	66
Barking and Havering	51
Barnet	44
Barnsley	54
Bedfordshire	49
Berkshire Health Commission	56
Birmingham	60
Bolton	58
Bradford	59
Brent and Harrow	56
Bromley	42
Buckinghamshire	58
Bury	59
Calderdale	66
Cambridgeshire	60
Camden and Islington	59
Cheshire	65
City and East London	48
Cleveland	64
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	64
County Durham Health Commission	57
Coventry	63
Croydon Health	60
Cumbria	60
Derbyshire	56
Devon	66
Doncaster	63

Table 1: general dental service: number of patients registered as a percentage of the population by family health service authority at 30 September 1992

Family health service authority	*Percentage*
Dorset Health Commission	67
Dudley	56
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	55
East Sussex	64
Enfield and Haringey	53
Essex	55
Gateshead	55
Gloucestershire	67
Greenwich and Bexley Heath	56
Hereford and Worcester	61
Hertfordshire	63
Hillingdon	58
Humberside	57
Isle of Wight Health Commission	63
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	47
Kent	56
Kingston and Richmond	46
Kirklees	60
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham Health Commission	58
Lancashire	60
Leeds	63
Leicestershire	60
Lincolnshire	61
Liverpool	59
Manchester Health Commission	67
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	53
Hampshire	63
Newcastle upon Tyne	56
Norfolk	63
North Tyneside	62
North Yorkshire	64
Northumberland	53
Northamptonshire	57
Nottinghamshire	61
Oldham	59

Table 1: general dental service: number of patients registered as a percentage of the population by family health service authority at 30 September 1992

Family health service authority	*Percentage*
Oxfordshire	55
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	55
Rochdale	60
Rotherham	54
Salford	63
Sandwell	56
Sefton	64
Sheffield	61
Shropshire	66
Solihull Health	54
Somerset	67
South of Tyne Health Commission	56
St. Helens and Knowsley	61
Staffordshire	57
Stockport Health Commission	69
Suffolk	65
Sunderland Health Commission	55
Surrey	59
Tameside	59
Trafford	74
Wakefield	59
Walsall	51
Warwickshire	59
West Sussex	66
Wigan	62
Wiltshire	58
Wirral	64
Wolverhampton Health Executive	54

Notes:

1. Based on the number of registrations at 30 September 1992.
2. ONS mid year population estimates for 1992 are used to calculate the percentage of patients registered.
3. Registration rates reflect a 24 month registration period for adults whereas children's registrations lapsed at the end of the following calendar year. The basis of the later figures in table 2 are for a 15 month registration period for both adults and children.

Table 2: general dental service: number of patients registered as a percentage of the population by health authority at 30 September for the years 1997 to 2001

Percentage

Health authority	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
England	54	47	47	47	47
Avon	59	52	51	50	50
Barking and Havering	50	41	41	42	42
Barnet, Enfield and Haringey	47	39	37	37	39
Barnsley	58	52	52	53	53
Bedfordshire	46	39	40	40	40
Berkshire	45	38	39	38	35
Bexley, Bromley and Greenwich	45	39	38	38	38
Birmingham	57	50	49	48	47
Bradford	56	49	49	49	49
Brent and Harrow	57	45	46	46	46
Buckinghamshire	43	38	37	37	37
Bury and Rochdale	58	50	49	49	49
Calderdale and Kirklees	62	56	54	55	55
Cambridge and Huntingdon[1]	50	43	—	—	—
Cambridgeshire[1]	—	—	44	44	45
Camden and Islington	58	46	44	44	43
Cornwall and Isles Of Scilly	53	45	43	42	43
County Durham	56	50	50	51	50
Coventry	58	49	49	48	49
Croydon	54	44	43	43	42
Doncaster	65	59	56	58	58
Dorset	59	54	54	54	53
Dudley	52	47	47	47	47
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	53	43	40	41	42
East Kent	48	43	42	43	43
East Lancashire	57	50	50	49	45
East London and The City	44	34	33	33	32

Table 2: general dental service: number of patients registered as a percentage of the population by health authority at 30 September for the years 1997 to 2001

Percentage

Health authority	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
East Norfolk[1]	57	52	—	—	—
East Riding	51	46	46	47	47
East Surrey	49	43	39	41	40
East Sussex, Brighton and Hove	56	49	47	48	47
Gateshead and South Tyneside	60	53	54	54	55
Gloucestershire	44	38	38	38	36
Herefordshire	64	54	55	53	51
Hertfordshire	59	51	51	51	51
Hillingdon	57	48	47	46	45
Isle Of Wight, Portsmouth and South-east Hampshire	51	46	45	44	44
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	40	31	31	29	28
Kingston and Richmond	43	36	35	34	32
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	54	44	40	40	40
Leeds	57	52	52	52	51
Leicestershire	56	50	49	48	50
Lincolnshire	57	51	51	52	53
Liverpool	60	51	50	51	50
Manchester	62	51	52	51	50
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	50	41	39	41	41
Morecambe Bay	55	49	49	50	51
Newcastle and North Tyneside	59	51	53	53	52
Norfolk[1]	—	—	49	50	51
North and East Devon	54	48	50	53	53
North and Mid Hampshire	52	45	43	45	45
North Cheshire	60	51	51	51	51
North Cumbria	52	48	50	51	52
North Derbyshire	50	45	45	45	45
North Essex	54	48	49	50	49
North Nottinghamshire	60	56	57	58	59
North Staffordshire	47	41	42	43	43
North West Anglia[1]	46	42	—	—	—
North West Lancashire	60	54	55	54	52
North Yorkshire	58	53	52	53	53
Northumberland	56	51	51	52	53
Northamptonshire	58	49	52	53	53
Nottingham	62	56	54	56	55
Oxfordshire	39	34	34	37	38
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	54	46	45	47	46
Rotherham	56	50	49	51	51
Salford and Trafford	63	54	53	53	51
Sandwell	53	49	50	51	52
Sefton	65	60	59	56	55
Sheffield	62	56	56	57	56
Shropshire	51	44	43	43	41
Solihull	46	36	39	40	40
Somerset	60	53	51	53	51
South and West Devon	55	48	46	47	49
South Cheshire	60	48	49	50	51
South Derbyshire	51	48	47	49	48
South Essex	48	43	45	46	46
South Humber	56	51	52	53	53
South Lancashire	48	43	44	45	46
South Staffordshire	54	48	47	46	45
Southampton and South-west Hampshire	59	53	51	49	49
St. Helens and Knowsley	60	52	52	49	49
Stockport	66	60	60	60	59
Suffolk	60	54	55	55	55
Sunderland	58	50	51	51	52
Tees	67	59	59	60	60
Wakefield	64	56	55	55	54
Walsall	49	44	44	45	44
Warwickshire	53	46	43	43	45
West Kent	45	41	41	41	43
West Pennine	60	52	53	53	52
West Surrey	49	44	43	42	42
West Sussex	55	48	48	47	48
Wigan and Bolton	61	56	55	55	54
Wiltshire	48	40	43	44	44

Table 2: general dental service: number of patients registered as a percentage of the population by health authority at 30 September for the years 1997 to 2001

Percentage

Health authority	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Wirral	64	59	59	58	58
Wolverhampton	55	48	49	50	49
Worcestershire	56	50	49	49	49

[1] Three health authorities Cambridge and Huntingdon, East Norfolk and North West Anglia were replaced by two health authorities Cambridge and Norfolk in April 1999.

Notes:

1. Based on the number of registrations at 30 September each year.
2. ONS mid year population estimates for 1997 to 2000 are used to calculate percentage of patients registered.
3. Registration rates reflect a 15 month registration period.

Air Ambulances

Mr. Simmonds: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the further research commissioned by the Department regarding public funding for air ambulances will report; and who is conducting the research. [40461]

Ms Blears: The Department is commissioning a wide-ranging piece of primary research that will examine the role and effectiveness of air ambulance services in a modern national health service. The first stage is already under way and will provide an up-to-date review of existing evidence. This work is being undertaken by the medical care research unit at Sheffield University and will be completed by May 2002. No decision has been taken yet on who will undertake the next stage of research but it is intended that it will be completed by the end of 2003.

Arthritis

Mr. Pond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidelines his Department has given on prescribing medication to patients with arthritis. [40773]

Jacqui Smith: Health service circular 1999–176 advises national health service bodies to use their existing arrangements to determine local prescribing policies, using the publicly available evidence to inform their decision. Local policies may therefore reflect differing assessments and interpretations of evidence along with differing local circumstances and priorities.

The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) has been asked to appraise the use of infliximab (Remicade) and etanecerpt (Enbrel) in the treatment of rheumatoid arthritis for adults and etanercept only for juvenile idiopathic arthritis (JIA). Unless there are appeals, NICE expects to issue its guidance in March 2002 for etanercept for JIA and guidance on the etanercept and infliximab appraisal for adults in April 2002. NICE also has anakinra for rheumatoid arthritis on their appraisal work programme and guidance is expected in July 2003, providing there are no appeals.

Mr. Pond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the level of funding for arthritis treatments and medication was in each of the last five financial years for which records are available; and what level is estimated for *(a)* this and *(b)* the next financial year. [40772]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is not collected centrally as the drugs budgets of health authorities and primary care trust are not determined centrally. They receive unified allocations to cover the costs of hospital and community health services, discretionary funding for general practice staff, premises and computers and primary care prescribing.

The level of funding made available for arthritis drugs is therefore a local decision. It is for health authorities in partnership with primary care groups/trusts and other local stakeholders to determine how best to use their funds.

Cottage Hospitals

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans the Government have to develop local cottage hospitals. [40857]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 5 March 2002]:* The concept of care closer to home as identified by the National Beds Inquiry (NBI) underpins our plans for modernising the national health service. To this end maximum use needs to be made of cottage hospitals and primary care organisations in delivering and co-ordinating the local population's care. Cottage hospitals are working hard to develop their roles, for example in carrying out day surgery, minor procedures and caring for patients in the recuperative phases of recovery from illness or accident. They will be key players in meeting our target of introducing an additional 5,000 intermediate care beds—the bridge between hospital and home—by 2004.

Foster Carers

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures his Department has undertaken to ensure that fostering agencies are able to carry out police checks on prospective foster carers. [40848]

Jacqui Smith: Under the Foster Placement (Children) Regulations 1991, agencies are required to seek criminal record checks on prospective foster carers. Checks may be made through the Criminal Records Bureau, which began processing applications on 11 March 2002. The checks will also include information from the Department's Protection of Children Act List and Department for Education and Skills' List 99.

Kent Hospitals

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what the waiting times are for in-patients needing cancer care at Kent and Canterbury hospital; [40865]

(2) what assessment has been made of the cost of transferring in-patient cancer treatment from Kent and Canterbury hospital to Maidstone hospital; [40859]

(3) what the waiting times are for in-patient treatment for cancer at the Maidstone hospital. [40858]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 7 March 2002]:* The information requested is not collected centrally.

No assessment of costs for transferring patients to Maidstone hospital has been carried out as a decision on the future role of Kent and Canterbury hospital, resulting from the reconfiguration of acute services, has not been made.

If any changes to services are to be made, detailed plans would first be put in place to ensure other, appropriate facilities and services are available at the Maidstone hospital and other centres.

Residential Homes

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will list for each London borough the number of elderly residents who are placed in residential and nursing homes outside London; [43840]

(2) if he will list for each social services department the number of people from outside London who are placed in residential and nursing homes inside London. [43841]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 18 March 2002]:* The information requested is not available centrally.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many beds in residential and nursing homes for the elderly in Greater London there were on *(a)* 31 March 1997 and *(b)* the latest available date. [43894]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 18 March 2002]:* Information on the number of residential places and registered nursing beds for older people, in Greater London, at 31 March each year, is shown in the table.

Residential places and registered nursing beds for older people in Greater London at 31 March

rounded numbers

	1997[1]	*2001*
Residential care places for older people[2]	20,490	19,360
Registered nursing[3] beds for older people	10,600	11,440

[1] Nursing bed figures relate to the period 1 October 1996 to 31 March 1997.
[2] Includes residential care beds for older people who are mentally infirm people.
[3] Includes nursing care beds in private hospitals and clinics.
Source:
Department of Health's annual return.

Care Homes

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how long his Department estimates it has taken for care homes to be built from the initial application being submitted to the relevant planning department in the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [43901]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 18 March 2002]:* The information requested is not collected centrally.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures the National Care Standards Commission has at its disposal to enforce the minimum standard that relates to contracts between care homes and individuals. [43898]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 18 March 2002]:* The commission has the ability to take enforcement action in relation to the Care Homes Regulations 2001. The national minimum standards will be the basis for the commission to determine whether the regulations are complied with. In relation to contracts the relevant standards are standard 2 for care homes for older people, and standard 5 for care homes for younger adults.

Regulations will be mandatory and providers must comply with them. If a regulation is breached, the breach of which is an offence, providers will be given a notice setting out the regulation breached, how the service is considered deficient, what must be done to remedy the deficiency, and a time scale within which the deficiency must be remedied. If the deficiency is not remedied, proceedings for prosecution may follow. The breach of regulation 5 of the Care Homes Regulations 2001, which states that a service users' guide should include a standard form of contract for the provision of services and facilities by the registered provider to service users, is an offence.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he plans to reissue his Department's "Moving into a Care Home" leaflet; how many he plans to distribute; to whom; and by what means. [43896]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 18 March 2002]:* The Department has commissioned the production of a new booklet containing key information that individuals should have when they are moving into, or resident in, a care home. It will include the contributions that residents may make to care home fees and other financial aspects. The booklet is currently being finalised, and it will be made available in hard copy to all councils with social services responsibilities and a range of relevant voluntary and community organisations. Other means are being considered to ensure the widest possible circulation.

The new booklet will effectively replace "Moving into a Care Home".

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will issue a direction to require NHS bodies to use the central core contract for how NHS nursing contribution received by care homes is to be accounted for. [43895]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 18 March 2002]:* I have strongly recommended that national health service bodies use the Department's core contract, recognising that some flexibility will also be required to reflect particular local arrangements in any agreed contract.

Nursing Care

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to compensate those self-funding residents who are eligible and received payment for free nursing care but did not have the money passed on in a reduction in fees. [43899]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 18 March 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 19 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 172W.

Care Funding

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will set out the methodology underpinning the

distribution of the funding for extra intermediate care funding facilities for older people as described in his letter of 6 March to the hon. Member for Cheadle. [43903]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 18 March 2002]:* In November 2001, the Department's regional offices were invited to submit bids against £66 million of capital funding available for intermediate care. Bids were assessed against 10 criteria.

I announced allocation of the "first phase" of £46 million to 80 projects on 6 March 2002. A £20 million "second phase" will follow, after further developmental work in a number of localities.

Pharmacists

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to increase co-operation between general practitioners and pharmacists; and if he will make a statement. [43040]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 18 March 2002]:* Many of the initiatives in "Pharmacy in the Future—Implementing the NHS Plan"—our programme for pharmacy published in September 2000—will encourage greater co-operation between general practitioners (GPs) and pharmacists. These include repeat dispensing, medicines management and extending prescribing responsibilities. There are also many local initiatives where GPs and pharmacists are already collaborating to improve patient care, including prescribing advice, support for smoking cessation and anti-coagulant treatment monitoring.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will introduce measures to increase the role of the local pharmacy in treating minor ailments. [43041]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 18 March 2002]:* "Pharmacy in the Future—Implementing the NHS Plan"—our programme for pharmacy published in September 2000—sets out a number of measures for increasing the role of community pharmacists in treating minor ailments. Successive winter campaigns have reinforced the message that in many cases the best course of action is to "Ask Your Pharmacist". All NHS sites will be able to refer callers to their local pharmacy, where appropriate, by the end of 2002. We are also committed to the availability of a wider range of medicines over the counter.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 20 March 2002

DEFENCE

Service Personnel Memorial

Dr. Vis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made with the memorial to service personnel killed since the second world war; and if he will make a statement. [44480]

Mr. Hoon: A project team was appointed early last year to look at potential sites for the memorial and to consider the qualifying criteria for those to be commemorated. Extensive research was carried out on suitable sites both in and outside London. There has been wide consultation with the services and ex-service organisations on both the siting and eligibility criteria. There is general support for the proposals.

I am delighted to be able to confirm that the Armed Forces Memorial will be sited at the National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire. The names of those commemorated will either be engraved on the memorial or in Rolls of Honour that will be kept close by in the Millennium Chapel at the Arboretum. The design of the memorial will be decided following an architectural competition that will be held later this year.

The qualifying criteria for inclusion on the memorial are:

> "All those Service personnel who were killed on duty whilst performing functions attributable to the special circumstances and requirements of the Armed Forces, or as a result of terrorist attack, and all those who died whilst deployed on designated operations."

An additional part of the project will be to erect a memorial plaque in the cloisters of Westminster Abbey to those members of the armed forces killed in conflict since the end of the second world war. Finally, there will be Rolls of Honour recording the names of all members of the Royal Navy and the Army who have died in service during this period. These will be kept in suitable churches in London and will be similar to those for the Royal Air Force that are kept in the Church of St. Clement Danes.

Trustees of the Armed Forces Memorial trust will now be appointed to take this project forward. They will take on the ownership of the memorial and will be responsible for its funding and construction. Funds will be raised by public subscription.

This is a very important national project that will also provide a platform to help educate our younger generations about the value of our armed forces.

Strategic Defence Review

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* TA AMS field hospitals, *(b)* TA AMS medical squadrons and *(c)* TA AMS specialist units were required under the terms of the Strategic Defence Review; what plans he has to alter these requirements; what plans he has to ensure each category if fully recruited; and if he will make a statement. [38321]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 27 February 2002]:* There are no plans to alter the number of TA AMS field hospitals, TA AMS medical squadrons and TA AMS specialist units, which are currently as follows:

TA AMS Field Hospitals

201 Field Hospital (V)
202 Field Hospital (V)
203 Field Hospital (V)
204 Field Hospital (V)
205 Field Hospital (V)
207 Field Hospital (V)
208 Field Hospital (V)
212 Field Hospital (V)
243 Field Hospital (V)
256 Field Hospital (V)
306 Field Hospital (V)

TA AMS Medical Squadrons

144 Parachute Medical Squadron (V)
220 Medical Squadron (V)
222 Medical Squadron (V)
250 Medical Squadron (V)

TA AMS Specialist Unit

Ambulance Training Group (V)
381 Medical Supply Squadron (V)
Manpower Pool (V).

The TA AMS will continue to benefit from a national, targeted, recruitment campaign. Since the campaign was launched in 1999, we have seen the strength of health care professionals in the TA rising by a steady 5 per cent. per annum.

Depleted Uranium

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the monitoring systems he has put in place to check the levels of depleted uranium entering the ground water and food chain from the use of munitions containing depleted uranium at Eskmeals and Kirkcudbright training areas. [43415]

Dr. Moonie: Comprehensive environmental monitoring programmes have been in place at both Eskmeals and Kirkcudbright ever since the beginning of the DU munitions trials announced in the House in 1979. These programmes have focused on the collection and analysis of samples of soil, vegetation, freshwater, seawater, seaweed, molluscs and seabed and shoreline sediments. Faecal samples from domestic and wild animals have also been collected on an opportunity basis. This monitoring continues to show that DU does not pose a significant risk to members of the public or site personnel.

Other Government Departments with statutory health and safety and environmental protection responsibilities were consulted while these programmes were being established, and their successors, principally the Environment Agency and Scottish Environmental Protection Agency, continue to be advised of the nature and results of the monitoring activities. The local councils also

receive copies of the annual environmental monitoring reports for both sites. The Ministry of Defence also made a commitment on 13 May 1998, *Official Report*, columns 128–29W, to continue these monitoring activities for as long as the regulatory authorities consider necessary.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what clean up operations he has put in place on the Crown Estate relating to the use of munitions containing depleted uranium. [43422]

Dr. Moonie: As Eskmeals, depleted uranium (DU) rounds have been fired against hard targets and the resulting DU fragments and contaminated debris have been collected after each firing. The material has then been sent for disposal at the low-level radioactive waste repository at Drigg. Air filters from the target area have also been disposed of via this route. Some higher activity material, such as DU plate, which is not suitable for disposal at Drigg, remains in storage pending a national decision on future radioactive waste disposal strategies. Some steel targets contaminated with very low levels of DU are still stored at the site and options for the disposal of this material are currently being discussed with the Environment Agency.

At Kirkudbright, the trials require the DU rounds to be fired through very soft targets (such as hessian sheets) and to travel out to sea. In this case, remediation is required only if an experimental round malfunctions and contaminates the range area. When such impact points have been located, samples of soil and vegetation have been collected to assess the degree of contamination: clean-up is then carried out if pre-set action levels have been exceeded. Specially marked drums have been kept at each firing point for storing contaminated material and the Radiation Protection Adviser has provided disposal advice on a case-by-case basis.

At West Freugh, a small number of DU projectiles, weighing less than 25kg in total, were fired into the sea 2km below the low-water mark. There are no records of any DU projectiles accidentally striking the land in the region. The small number of DU rounds in the sea were not considered to pose a hazard which would warrant a clean-up operation.

Foulness had an indoor facility, in which small experimental DU projectiles were fired between 1982 and 1983. The building was designed to prevent any escape of particulate DU into the atmosphere. It is no longer in use and was decontaminated in 1997.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the conclusions of the Royal Society report on the health effects of depleted uranium munitions; and if he will make a statement. [44038]

Dr. Moonie: We welcome the publication of part II of the Royal Society report which is a valuable addition to the scientific knowledge on the risks from depleted uranium (DU) munitions.

Overall, the report's conclusions are very much in line with the Ministry of Defence's assessment that the risks DU poses to the health of UK Gulf veterans, peacekeepers in the Balkans and UK forces/civilians in current and future conflicts, are very low, in all but extreme cases. This is what we have always believed, and bears out the findings of research carried out by organisations such as the United Nations and World Health Organisation as well as ourselves.

The extreme circumstances mentioned in the report could affect individuals such as the crew of a vehicle that had been hit by a DU round of personnel who had worked for long periods, unprotected, in a vehicle which had been hit. I am pleased to say that no UK service personnel have been exposed in this way.

Nevertheless, there are a number of areas where we believe that further research is desirable to enhance the database on which to make judgments weighing the potential loss of life arising from not using DU munitions in battle against any potential longer term impact on human health and the environment resulting from its use. On 14 March 2002, I released details of the MOD research programme which contains elements that address this subject. The full details of our proposals have been placed in the Library of the House. They have also been published on the MOD website.

Porton Down

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his policy is regarding the selection of films held in the archive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down to be transferred to the Imperial War Museum for permanent preservation; and what plans he has to change this policy. [43454]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 9 May 2001, *Official Report*, column 196W. Films held in the archive at Dstl Porton Down are gradually being transferred to the Imperial War Museum in accordance with Ministry of Defence policy. The final decision on which films should be preserved for permanent preservation rests with the Imperial War Museum. There are currently no plans to change this procedure.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what dates since 1 January 1999 the Independent Ethics Committee overseeing human experiments at the Chemical Defence Establishment, Porton Down has discussed the long-term effects of nerve gas on humans during its meetings. [43453]

Dr. Moonie: The Independent Ethics Committee overseeing the conduct of the Service Volunteer Programme at Dstl Porton Down has not discussed the possible long term effects of exposure to nerve agents during its meetings since 1 January 1999.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library a copy of the report produced by the Chemical Defence Establishment, Porton Down in 1973 entitled "The effects of a chemical agent on the eyes of aircrew". [43444]

Dr. Moonie: Yes.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many films are held by the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down, of its biological warfare trial known as Operation Ozone which was conducted in 1954 off the Bahamas; and if he will place a list of the titles and dates of these films in the Library. [43456]

Dr. Moonie: Dstl Porton Down holds two canisters of 16 mm film entitled Operation Ozone 'Master' and Operation Ozone 'View' together with a videotape entitled "Operation Ozone—1954", which contains footage extracted from the 16 mm 'Master' shot during the trial.

However, the titles of the 1,200 films in the archive at Dstl Porton Down have not been catalogued and in many cases are not very informative. It would involve disproportionate cost to collate a compete list of films. It is not, therefore, possible to say if the two canisters of film and the videotape detailed above represents the sum total of Dstl Porton Down's film holdings in relation to Operation Ozone.

Overseas Territories/Sovereign Bases

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when *(a)* he, *(b)* a member of the Chief of the Staff and *(c)* a naval vessel last visited each of the (i) British Overseas Territories and (ii) sovereign bases. [44034]

Dr. Moonie: The information requested is as follows:

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence visited the Falkland Islands and Ascension Island in March 2002, Gibraltar in July 2001 and the sovereign base areas (SBAs) on Cyprus in July 2001. He has not visited any other Overseas Territories.

Chief of the Defence Staff visited the Falkland Islands in January 2001 and Gibraltar in May 2001.

Chief of the General Staff visited Bermuda in November 2001.

Vice Chief of the Defence Staff visited the SBA in December 2001.

We have no records of visits by the Chiefs of Staff to any other Overseas Territories during the last five years.

The last visits by naval vessels were as follows:

Anguilla—June 2001

Bermuda—July 2001

British Antarctic Territory—March 2002

British Indian Ocean Territory—November 2001

British Virgin Islands—November 2001

Cayman Islands—August 2001

Falkland Islands—March 2002

Gibraltar—March 2002

Montserrat—November 2001

Pitcairn Islands—September 2000

St. Helena—December 2001

Ascension Island—July 2001

Tristan Da Cunha—January 2002

South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands—February 2002

Turks and Caicos Islands—July 2001

Sovereign base area, Cyprus—March 2002.

Incapacitated Personnel

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what action he is taking to facilitate the continuing employment by the armed forces in *(a)* a military or *(b)* a civilian capacity of those who become incapacitated to serve in front-line units. [44268]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence is pursuing initiatives to reduce the numbers who are temporarily unfit for operational purposes because of injury. These initiatives include measures aimed at prevention of injury, for example, improvements to the physical fitness training programmes for new entrants. The measures also include swifter assessment and better treatment of those who are injured, especially through the creation of additional rehabilitation facilities. These steps are expected to lead to a reduction in the numbers of personnel who are medically downgraded, including a reduction in the numbers who are invalided as a consequence of injury.

Any personnel developing a permanent condition which degrades their functional capacity may require to be permanently downgraded or invalided as appropriate. The recommendation will be made in accordance with the service's medical boarding procedures. A Medical Board may recommend that an individual's medical condition is compatible with continued service in a permanently reduced medical category but the final decision will be made by the employing authority, taking into account the ability for the service to continue to employ an individual with the relevant restriction. If, despite efforts to the contrary, this turns out not to be practicable, the individual will be invalided.

In the case of officers invalided from the service, subject to meeting the health requirements laid down, eligible individuals may apply for employment under the MOD Retired Officer scheme. Alternatively, there are no restrictions on disabled people being employed in civilian jobs in the MOD. The Department complies fully with the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and was one of the first Departments to achieve the Employment Service two-tick "Positive about disabled people" symbol in May 1995. The MOD also has its own Disability Fund to pay for specialist equipment and training to help disabled employees develop their full potential at work. The Department is a member of the Employers' Forum on Disability and currently funds three disability bursaries through the Cabinet Office scheme. Around 5 per cent. of the civilian workforce of the MOD has a declared disability. This percentage is broadly in line with the estimated numbers of economically active disabled people in the working population as a whole.

Finally, the Veterans Agency will run an integrated website and free-phone helpline from 2 April 2002 to provide the first point of contact for veterans and their dependents seeking advice and information.

Medical Staff

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the establishment of *(a)* doctors by specialty, *(b)* nurses and *(c)* technicians required by (i) field hospitals of the TA AMS, (ii) medical squadrons of the TA AMS and (iii) TA AMS specialist units, stating in each case the number of (A) doctors by specialty, (B) nurses and (C) technicians serving in each category; and if he will make a statement. [38319]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 27 February 2002]:* The answer to this question consists of an extensive set of tables, which I will place in the Library of the House.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the operational deployments of each *(a)* TA AMS field hospital, *(b)* TA AMS medical squadrons and *(c)* TA AMS specialist units in each of the last five years,

stating in each case the number of (i) doctors by specialty, (ii) nurses and (iii) technicians deployed; and if he will make a statement. [38320]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 27 February 2002]:* We do not have centrally collated records for 1997, but in the four years since 1998 no TA AMS field hospitals, TA AMS medical Squadrons or TA AMS Specialist units have been deployed on operations. Individual members of the TA AMS have, however, been deployed on operations as follows:

Profession	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*Operational theatre*
Anaesthetist	0	5	2	5	Balkans
Surgeon	0	3	6	2	All Balkans[1]
Nursing Officer	9	17	15	16	Balkans
Medical Officer	0	14	10	4	Balkans
Technicians	14	46	31	32	Balkans

[1] Except one to Sierra Leone in 2001

Property Fraud

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many of his Department's property managers there are; how many have attended fraud awareness training sessions; and if he will make a statement; [43010]

(2) what fraud awareness has been included in his Department's housing training sessions; and if he will make a statement. [43011]

Dr. Moonie: The Defence Housing Executive (DHE) has 20 Property Manager posts, two of which are vacant. Of the 18 staff in post, 17 have attended the DHE's own Property Managers' course, which includes a fraud awareness module. The remaining individual, a new entrant, will attend the next available course, which all DHE Property Managers are mandated to attend. In addition, there are wider Ministry of Defence fraud awareness seminars for property management and estate and finance staff, at which attendance may include appropriate DHE personnel.

War Pension Scheme

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the cost has been of running the war pension scheme appeals process in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [44019]

Dr. Moonie: Records are not maintained by the War Pensions Agency of the costs of preparation of war pension appeals.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many claims for war pensions there have been in each of the last five years; how many were successful on their first application; how many have failed and then been agreed on appeal; how many have been refused on appeal; and if he will make a statement. [44021]

Dr. Moonie: For each of the last five years, the following numbers of first claims to war disablement pension were made.

	Claims
1996–97	27,660
1996–98	17,201
1998–99	14,072
1999–2000	11,810
2000–01	11,015

However, data on claims for war pension are not recorded in a format which can provide information on the success or failure of those claims or the numbers against which an appeal was lodged.

Golden Jubilee

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much the Department has spent on the Queen's Jubilee in each of the past three years; how it was allocated; and if he will make a statement. [44584]

Dr. Moonie: Her Majesty the Queen requested that additional expenditure on her Golden Jubilee be kept to a minimum. The armed forces are organising a royal visit which will take place in Portsmouth in late June and the Ministry of Defence will fund the cost of providing a Golden Jubilee medal to eligible service personnel. Wherever possible any expenditure on these two projects will be from its existing financial allocation. There was no identifiable expenditure on the Golden Jubilee in financial year (FY) 1999–2000. In FY 2000–01 there was an estimated £31,500 associated with planning for the Golden Jubilee and thus far in FY 2001–02 a further £1,155,000 has been spent, including the costs of supplying and issuing about 40,500 Golden Jubilee medals. Additional expenditure is anticipated in the coming FY.

Courts Martial

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to amend the Armed Forces Discipline Act 2000. [41098]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 18 March 2002]:* The Armed Forces Discipline Act 2000 amended the Army and Air Force Acts 1955 and the Naval Discipline Act 1957 (the Service discipline Acts), primarily to provide for the judicial supervision of pre-trial custody and to introduce a right of appeal against findings and sentences imposed summarily.

All discipline procedures are kept under review. We shall be considering whether any changes will be required to the aspects dealt with in the 2000 Act when the Service discipline Acts are replaced by a single piece of discipline legislation covering all the Services. We are also assessing whether any modifications may be necessary as a result of the judgment of the European Court of Human Rights in the case of Morris *v.* the United Kingdom, although that judgment was directly concerned with court martial procedures rather than the areas covered by the 2000 Act.

Territorial Forces

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of staff of his Department are members of the Territorial forces; and if he has a strategy to encourage members of staff to become members of the Territorial forces. [44072]

Dr. Moonie: Details of those civil servants within the Ministry of Defence with a Reserve Forces liability are not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

An important element of the MOD's ongoing campaign to strengthen and encourage the Reserve Forces is to highlight the development benefits that Reserve Forces' training and experience can offer to individuals and, consequently, their employers. These benefits are highlighted within my own Department and staff are encouraged to consider a whole range of volunteering activities, including the Reserve Forces, as part of their personal and career development. Managers within the MOD are required to support those with reserve commitments and by so doing we aim to set a positive example to other employers.

Warship Modernisation Project

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether funding is available to undertake the transfer of HM naval bases to the three bidding contractors under the Warship Modernisation Project; and if he will make a statement. [44736]

Mr. Ingram: Should partnering proceed, we would not be transferring the ownership of the Naval Bases. They would remain within the control and ownership of the Ministry of Defence. We would be transferring only the delivery of certain outputs of the Naval Bases to the potential partners. Any costs arising from this would be funded from existing provision.

Stolen Equipment

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 31 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 498W, on stolen equipment, whether the computer equipment stolen from his Department was *(a)* new and unused and *(b)* used; and what was the nature of the data stored on such items in each case. [42638]

Dr. Moonie: Reported cases of theft are held centrally on a summary basis only. They relate to items suspected of being stolen and so it cannot be assumed that theft actually applies in every case. The provision of comprehensive details relating to age, utilisation and nature of data stored in respect of each item of computer equipment suspected of being stolen could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Iraq

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he is taking to ensure that Iraq does not have the capability to use *(a)* nuclear, *(b)* chemical and *(c)* biological weapons of mass destruction. [44311]

Mr. Bradshaw: I have been asked to reply.

For 12 years now the UK has been at the forefront of efforts to persuade Iraq to comply with the relevant Security Council resolutions by dismantling its weapons of mass destruction capability, under the supervision of UN weapons inspectors. We have taken military action when Iraqi intransigence has left us with no other option. We have made clear that we would be prepared to do so again if necessary.

WALES

Public Relations Consultants

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much was spent by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* bodies for which it is responsible on external public relations consultants in each of the last four years. [27403]

Mr. Paul Murphy: This information is not readily available.

Departmental Website

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what the total cost of his Department's website was in real terms in each of the last four years; and how many hits it received in each of those years. [36206]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The total cost of the Welsh Office website between 1 April 1998 and 1 July 1999 was £7,867.

The Wales Office was not charged for the running of its website between 1 July 1999 and 1 September 2000.

The cost of running the website—including the development of a bilingual site—between 1 September 2000 and 31 August 2001 was £5,699.

Information relating to the number of hits is not held centrally.

Cynon Valley

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has had with the First Secretary of the National Assembly for Wales on levels of multiple social deprivation in the Cynon Valley; and what measures are being taken to provide a co-ordinated response to inequalities. [40534]

Mr. Touhig: My right hon. Friend and I meet regularly with the First Secretary and his Cabinet Colleagues, to discuss a range of issues affecting Wales.

I recognise that several parts of the Cynon Valley rank relatively highly in the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation.

The Government and the National Assembly are working in partnership to build a fairer and more inclusive society in which everyone can benefit from rising prosperity. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has already announced several measures aimed at increasing fairness for people and their communities. These include tackling child poverty, providing security in old age, rewarding saving and creating a fair and efficient tax system.

I understand that a number of projects in the Cynon Valley are being supported by the Assembly through various funding channels, including the Local Regeneration Fund.

Czech Republic

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the Welsh companies with fewer than 0.1 per cent. of their global work force employed in

companies in Wales which will be accompanying the Under-Secretary of State for Wales on his forthcoming visit to the Czech Republic. [41432]

Mr. Touhig: No companies with fewer than 0.1 per cent. of their global work force employed in Wales, accompanied me on my recent visit to the Czech Republic.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the companies accompanied by the Under-Secretary of State in his Department on the visit to the Czech Republic in the week commencing 11 March. [41433]

Mr. Touhig: The companies that accompanied me were:

Adams Consulting Engineers Ltd. (Mold, Flintshire);

Garner Southall Partnership (Llandrindod Wells, Powys);

HPA Property Ltd. (Gorseinon, Swansea);

Invest E Ltd. (Welshpool, Powys);

MIGs (Cardiff);

RPS Chapman Warren (Cardiff);

Y Faenol Cyf/The Vaynol Estate (Bangor, Gwynedd).

Dairy Crest

Tony Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assistance has been given to the Dairy Crest plants in Wales. [41869]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Since 1 July 1999, this is a matter for the National Assembly for Wales. Available records show no Welsh Office support to Dairy Crest plants prior to that date.

Stolen Equipment

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to the answer of 22 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 706–07W, on stolen equipment, whether the laptop stolen from his Department was *(a)* new and unused and *(b)* used; and what was the nature of the data stored on it. [42652]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I understand that this theft, which dates from the period of the former Welsh Office, was of ancillary cabling equipment for a laptop rather than the laptop itself. There was thus no loss of data.

Departmental Functions

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the functions of his Department that have been *(a)* market tested and *(b)* outsourced in each of the last five years, specifying the (i) money saving and (ii) percentage saving in each case. [42990]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Executive functions previously a matter for the Welsh Office have in general transferred to the National Assembly for Wales and so the Wales Office has undertaken no market testing or outsourcing since it was established in July 1999.

Between April 1997 and June 1999 the former Welsh Office undertook these exercises:

market testing of the valuation services being provided by the Valuation Office agency in 1996–97. This led to the award of a three-year contract to DTZ Debenham Tie Leung;

outsourcing of the Highways Directorate's property management function in South Wales in 1997–98. This was achieved by a three-year contract with Messrs. Darlows estate agents of Newport outsourcing on an interim basis;

outsourcing on an interim basis the work previously undertaken by Government property lawyers following their demise in 1999. This work was undertaken by Bissmire Fudge and Bond Pearce.

Figures for the savings achieved are not readily available as these contracts are now a matter for the National Assembly for Wales.

Ministerial Visits (National Assembly)

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many visits *(a)* he and *(b)* the Under-Secretary of State for Wales have made to the National Assembly for Wales in each month since July 1999. [43226]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I visit the National Assembly virtually on a weekly basis for meetings with the First Minister, Assembly Ministers and other meetings. My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary visits the Assembly on the same basis for meetings with Assembly Ministers and others.

PRIME MINISTER

Job Advertisements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the job advertisements placed by his Department in the last 12 months specifying where the advertisements were placed and the cost in each case. [39066]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my hon. Friend, the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office, on 19 March.

Flexible Working

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Prime Minister how many and what proportion of the staff of his office are *(a)* job sharing, *(b)* term working and *(c)* engaged in another form of flexible working. [42418]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by hon. Friend, the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office on Monday 18 March, *Official Report*, column 74W.

Manpower

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Prime Minister how many staff have been employed by his office in each of the last 10 years. [42465]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office on Tuesday 19 March.

Special Advisers

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the number and expected cost to his office of special advisers in *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03. [43277]

The Prime Minister: At 13 March, there are 27 special advisers in my office. On cost, I have already announced the introduction of a revised pay system for special

advisers based on individual job evaluation. The process of evaluation is currently under way. The cost will be provided once the process is completed.

US Nuclear Weapons

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Prime Minister what discussions he has had with the US Administration concerning the review of its policies on the use of nuclear weapons. [43809]

The Prime Minister: I discussed the US Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) with Vice President Dick Cheney, on his visit to London on 11 March. We welcome the in-depth review of deterrence and nuclear policy that the review represents and its main conclusion that the US can cut its operationally deployed strategic nuclear weapons by two-thirds to 1,700 to 2,200. We note US Administration comments that the NPR represents prudent conceptual thinking, not an operational plan, and that the US does not target any country on a day-to-day basis. We also welcome the US Administration's statements that there has been no change to US first strike policy.

Meetings

Mr. MacDougall: To ask the Prime Minister what recent discussions he has had with the Spanish Prime Minister; and if he will make a statement. [43868]

The Prime Minister: I talk to the Spanish Prime Minister frequently on a range of EU and foreign policy issues. Our most recent discussions were at the Barcelona European Council.

Gibraltar

Bob Spink: To ask the Prime Minister what plans he has to visit Gibraltar. [43934]

The Prime Minister: I have no immediate plans to do so.

Kyoto

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Prime Minister what discussions he had on the issue of climate change and Kyoto with the Australian Prime Minister during the recent Commonwealth talks; and if he will make a statement on climate change negotiations, with particular reference to Kyoto. [44051]

The Prime Minister: The issue of climate change was discussed at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting where the final communiqué stated "Head of Government expressed concern about the consequences of global warming and climate change, especially for the vulnerable small island states and other low-lying areas".

I firmly believe that the Kyoto Protocol remains the only workable basis to take forward international action to tackle climate change. We intend to ratify the Protocol in time for it to enter into force by the World Summit on Sustainable Development. A European Community decision to ratify Kyoto, which paved the way for the UK and the other EU member states to complete their own ratification procedures, was adopted on 4 March. On 7 March, the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs made a statement to the House setting in motion the process of UK ratification of the Protocol, which will be completed on or shortly after 19 April. UK And EU ratification of the Kyoto Protocol will send an important message to the world that we are committed to the Protocol and to tackling climate change.

Overseas Acquisitions

Adam Price: To ask the Prime Minister on how many occasions since May 1997 he, or his office, have *(a)* assisted and *(b)* issued an official communication to welcome an overseas acquisition by an individual or company. [44484]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him and the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) on 14 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 610–11W.

Iraq

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister what recent discussions he has had with the United States Administration on military action in Iraq; and if he will make a statement. [42219]

The Prime Minister: I regularly discuss all aspects of Iraq policy with President Bush and the US Administration. My most recent discussions were with US Vice-President Cheney in London on 11 March. I will have another opportunity to do so during my visit to the US next month.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Prime Minister if it is his policy that a new and specific mandate from the United Nations Security Council is an essential condition of *(a)* any international offensive military action against Iraq and *(b)* the deployment of UK forces in action against Iraq. [44314]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 19 March 2002]:* No decision has been taken to launch military action against Iraq, and so the question of whether authorisation is needed does not arise.

Government Loans

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Prime Minister when the Performance and Innovation Unit will publish its report on Modernising Government Loans. [37654]

The Prime Minister: The Performance and Innovation Unit's report "Lending Support—Modernising the Government's Use of Loans" is being published today. The key conclusions of the report are:

(i) It sets out a new framework with criteria that will help consistent judgments to be made on when loans are more appropriate to use than alternatives such as grants;

(ii) Most existing Government loans, and similar types of support, score well under these criteria;

(iii) The framework has been demonstrated by applying it to a number of illustrative case studies, such as the example of a Government loan for unemployed people who wish to set up in self-employment;

(iv) It announces a feasibility study looking into the longer-term opportunities offered by greater joining up of the administration of all forms of citizens' debts to Government and financial transactions more generally. This will report to Ministers who will decide whether or not to commission further work.

Copies of the report have been placed in the Vote Office and the Libraries.

TREASURY

Office for National Statistics

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will provide a disaggregated analysis of how the Office for National Statistics intends to spend the money granted by supplementary estimate for the various purposes listed on page 57 of HC 636. [44085]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Mr. Len Cook to Mr. David Liddington dated 20 March 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent question concerning how the Office for National Statistics intends to spend the money granted by supplementary estimate for the various purposes listed on page 57 of HC 636. (44085)

The requested information is on page 4 of the "Office for National Statistics, Spring Supplementary Estimate 2001–02" (Cm 5399), a copy of which has been placed in the House of Commons Library.

Stolen Equipment

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the answer of 22 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 704W, on stolen equipment, whether the computer equipment stolen from his Department was *(a)* new and unused and *(b)* used; and what was the nature of the data stored on such items in each case. [42651]

Ruth Kelly: *(a)* None.

(b) All. None of the items capable of storing data will have contained anything but unclassified material.

Public Sector Pay

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has for the payment of salaries to public sector workers which reflect the cost of living in London and the south-east. [44313]

Mr. Andrew Smith *[holding answer 19 March 2002]:* We are carefully considering pay issues, among others, in the Spending Review now under way with close regard to achievement of the Government's objectives for public services.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make an assessment of the pay structures in building societies to assist his consideration of public sector pay rates. [44318]

Mr. Andrew Smith *[holding answer 19 March 2002]:* We have no plans for any specific detailed assessment of pay structures in building societies. However, the Treasury keeps abreast of pay structures in the economy so as to ensure policy remains well informed.

Informers' Reward

Mr. Gray: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on how many occasions, prior to 31 March 2001, the Treasury has withheld consent to an informers' reward awarded by the Inland Revenue under section 32 of the Inland Revenue Act 1890; and on what grounds and statutory authority. [43905]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 18 March 2002]:* The Inland Revenue is not aware of any case in which the Treasury has withheld consent for it to make a reward payment.

Contributions Agency (Bills)

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the sending out of bills to people below the small earnings threshold by the Contributions Agency; and if he will make a statement. [43457]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 15 March 2002]:* The Department does not normally issue bills to people whose earnings are below the small earnings threshold.

Aggregates Tax

Mr. Drew: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress is being made on the definition of a green quarry for the purposes of an aggregates tax. [37470]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 26 February 2002]:* As announced in the pre-Budget report, the Government have decided not to pursue a differential rate scheme for so-called "green quarries" at the present time, because of difficulties in assessing environmental performance accurately and the prospect of setting up perverse incentives.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the timetable for the introduction of an aggregates tax; and if he will postpone its introduction. [37472]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 26 February 2002]:* As announced in Budget 2000, the aggregates levy will be introduced on 1 April 2002. The General Regulations will be made and laid this week. The draft Finance Bill clauses will be published very shortly.

The following technical amendments that the Government propose to make in this year's Finance Bill to facilitate the smooth functioning of the aggregates levy, and which were announced in the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Stevenage (Barbara Follett) on 12 March 2002, will be effective immediately from the introduction of the levy:

To amend the definition of aggregate to include rock that has not been subject to an industrial crushing process

To clarify the definition of dimension stone

To extend the exemption for processing waste arising from the extraction of coal to the processing waste of all industrial minerals

To clarify that for all mineral extraction, any aggregate contained in the overburden is taxable

To extend the exemption for aggregate won from forest or farm land and used in adjacent land, to its use in land occupied with that forest or farm

To extend the exemption for drill cuttings to include onshore drill cuttings

To introduce a number of minor technical amendments which clarify policy intention, close a potential loophole or bring the legislation into line with other taxes. These were detailed in Customs and Excise Business Brief number 17/2001 issued on 28 November 2001.

The proposed relief for aggregates used in processed products in Northern Ireland, will be backdated to 1 April 2002, on approval under European Community state aid rules, to ensure that no levy is paid on aggregate used to make these products in 2002–03.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it his policy to introduce a deminimis level for those affected by the aggregates tax. [37471]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 26 February 2002]:* The Government have no such plans.

Invest to Save Budget

Barbara Follett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress is being made on the Government's Invest to Save Budget. [45392]

Mr. Andrew Smith: I am pleased to announce that 75 bids from across the public sector have been successful in round 4 of the Invest to Save Budget, at a cost of £47 million in 2002–03, including consequential funding for the devolved Administrations, and £79 million in total over both years to 2002–04. The table describes the winners of this round.

Lead partner	*Title*
Central Government	
Cabinet Office	Embedding cross sector partnership working
Cabinet Office	Electronic free school means administration
DCMS Science Museum	Making the modern world online
DCMS English Tourist Council	RESTOUR (creation of an online tourism community to aid recovery of English tourism)
DEFRA	Online UK fishing vessel registration system
DEFRA	DEFRA fisheries—fishing portal
DEFRA	National grain sampling and analysis system
DEFRA	Severe weather and flooding warnings—informing the public
DEFRA	Electronic data delivery for the plant breeding and seed industry
DFES	Construction and engineering industry training board online levy returns
DFES	Early detection of dyslexia
DFES	Social Bank (savings gateway pilots)
DFES	Support for enterprising communities
DFES Prisoners Learning and Skills Unit	National technical IT skills linked to a prisoner resettlement programme
DFES/LA GM Connexions Partnership	E Pal (Electronic or virtual personal adviser)
DTI	Redundancy payments service—e-business project
DTLR	Transmit fire database electronically
DTLR	Electronic systems for highways (central notification of works project)
DTLR Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency	Electronic links between DVLA and local authorities
DTLR Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency	Electronic reporting of fitness to drive
DTLR Health and Safety Executive	Electronic health and safety tools for the business support network
DTLR Health and Safety Executive	Electronic risk assessment system for farmers
DTLR Northumberland County Council Fire Authority	Citizens' fire, safety and health academy
DWP	Performance framework for administering housing benefit and council tax benefit
DWP	Performance improvement action teams administering housing benefit and council tax benefit
DWP	Flexible employment service delivery—prisons pilot
DWP	Encouraging ex-NHS workers back to the NHS
DWP	Training older jobseekers as IT technicians in secondary schools
DWP	Assisting in processing claims and backlogs of work
Forestry Commission	IT/administration systems to deliver forestry grants and licences
Home Office Police	Creation of a national centre for applied learning technology in the police
Home Office Police	Abandoned vehicles and citizen information database
Home Office	Volunteering and training (joint project between the Prison Service and West Yorkshire Police
Home Office	Showcase hospitals (security/safety)
Home Office	Showcase schools (security/safety)
Home Office	Missing persons database and strategy
Home Office	Parenting involvement study
Home Office	Community merit awards
Home Office Passport Office	Direct electronic passports project
Home Office Passport Office	Key passport information access for staff in the UK and abroad
Home Office ACU	Online application and database of funding opportunities for voluntary and community sector bodies
Inland Revenue	Tax helpline for charities
Land Registry	Electronic conveyancing
LCD Legal Service Commission	Live and interactive expert system in west midlands
UK Hydrographic Office	Integrated coastal hydrography scheme
Health and local authorities	
Health Birmingham HA	Housing web for people with learning disabilities with forensic needs
Health North Cumbria HA	Online delivery of BSc (Hons) nurse practitioner course
Health North Notts HA	Re-engineering youth services in Bassetlaw
Basildon District Council	In your place (access to housing benefit claims)
Bradford	"ADL Smartcare" (re-engineering the provision of aids to daily living to elderly people)
Brighton and Hove City Council	Database for online accessing of direct payments for care and support
Cumbria County Council	Single information and ICT platform
Gateshead Council	E-power for Gateshead's third sector
Kent County Council	Kent Connects (comprehensive ICT-based infrastructure)
Kirklees Metropolitan Council	Development of E-procurement system

Lead partner	*Title*
Knowsley MBC	Business to council to community
Liverpool City Council	Intelligence-led Government (electronic service for all licences and permissions within local government)
London Borough of Barnet	Hand-held communications devices in community care and health services
London Borough of Bromley	Electronic booking portal
Manchester City Council	Eastserv.com (community portal)
Melton Borough Council	Welland contact centre
North East Derbyshire District Council	Online revenues and benefits system
Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council	Establish electronic access points to the Connexions Service
Salisbury District Council	Online Salisbury development portal
Somerset County Council	SomersetOnline virtual contact points
Southampton City Council	Data sharing between social landlords and welfare advice agencies
Warwickshire County Council	UTOPIA: Using technology for older people: information and action
West Sussex County Council	Drug action exchange
Wigan Council	Preventing crime and poor health by early intervention
Wokingham Council	School admissions online trial
Voluntary and community bodies	
City and Guilds	Delivery of online assessments, delivery of e-learning materials
Galleries of Justice	A website for young offenders (partially designed by ex-offenders with video-streamed advice)
Thames Valley Partnership	Socially-inclusive approaches to community safety
Sheffield Advice Centres Group	Single access point to Sheffield's excluded communities
The Asphaleia Project	Mentoring project for young asylum seekers

Valuation Office Agency

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many individuals have worked on secondment to the Valuation Office Agency since 1 January 1999; how long each individual worked on secondment; from which organisation each individual was seconded; what the names of each were; and what the responsibilities were of each individual while they worked at the Valuation Office Agency. [43469]

Ruth Kelly: The information is as follows:

Start	*End*	*Organisation*	*Division appointed to*	*Duties*
25 April 2000	24 June 2000	Hong Kong Rating and Valuation Department	Rating	Inspections and rating of non-domestic properties. Performed all duties of a valuer.
17 April 2001	17 August 2001	UKAEA	Land Service Team	Inspections, measurement and valuation of properties. Highway and health authority cases.

I do not have the permission of the secondees to release their personal details.

Child Poverty

Mrs. Irene Adams: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what measures he will introduce to reduce child poverty in the next four years. [43921]

Dawn Primarolo: This Government are committed to abolishing child poverty within a generation and halving it by 2010. As part of this commitment, we recently published a strategy document entitled 'Tackling child poverty: giving every child the best possible start in life' which will inform the Budget and Spending Review 2002. As a result of tax and benefit changes announced in the last Parliament, there are now 1.2 million fewer children in poverty than there would otherwise have been.

During this Parliament, the Government will continue to make progress towards its goals with the introduction of two new tax credits—the child tax credit and the working tax credit. The Government are also making substantial new investments in services for children. Over the four years to 2004, average real-terms annual growth in spending on education and training in England will be over 5½ per cent. In addition, extra funds have been made available for SureStart, Neighbourhood Renewal and the Children's Fund.

Tax Allowances (Pensioners)

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what charges there have been in *(a)* cash and *(b)* real terms in the age-related tax allowances for pensioners between 1998–99 and 2002–03. [44029]

Dawn Primarolo: Age-related personal allowances have been increased between 1998–99 and 2002–03 by £690 and £770 in cash terms, and by £150 and £210 more than statutory indexation over this period for those aged 65–74 and 75+ respectively.

NIRS2

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many National Insurance records are incomplete as a result of the problems with the NIRS2 computer; and how many records that were incomplete have been completed. [44092]

Dawn Primarolo: The information is not readily available and could only be supplied at disproportionate cost.

Retirement

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what tax incentives are in place to encourage individuals to invest for their retirement directly. [40249]

Dawn Primarolo: Contributions which individuals make to tax approved pension schemes, and the build up of those contributions, attract tax reliefs. Individual Savings Accounts (ISAs) may also be used to help provide for retirement and offer tax-free income and capital gains on the investments held in them.

Expenditure

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the companies from which his Department has obtained timber and wood products and the total spent with each firm over the last five years. [43405]

Ruth Kelly: The Treasury's main supplier of timber and wood products in Kinnarps (UK) Ltd who provide office furniture. The total spend for the past five years is as follows:

	£
1997–98	67,462
1998–99	102,845
1999–2000	207,670
2000–01	36,689
2001–02	107,138

This represents the major procurement of timber and wood products by the Department. There may have been other items purchased containing timber or wood but the information is not held centrally and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Lord of Appeal in Ordinary

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the cost to the Consolidated Fund of employing a Lord of Appeal in Ordinary was in 2001. [41844]

Mr. Wills: I have been asked to reply.

The full cost to the Consolidated Fund of employing a Lord of Appeal in Ordinary in 2001 was £219,757. The full consolidated fund costs are as outlined:

Salary—£158,004

Ernic—£17,502.

In addition notional pension contributions are assessed at 28 per cent. of salary which equates to £44,251.

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which public service agreement targets scheduled to be met in 2002 will not be achieved by the due date. [44815]

Ruth Kelly: Information about progress on PSA targets will be published in the Treasury's 2002 departmental report.

Public Services Productivity

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 13 March 2002, ref. 42949, on public services productivity, which units within the Treasury are working on the paper; and if he will make a statement. [44396]

Mr. Andrew Smith: I have nothing further to add to the reply given to the hon. Gentleman on 13 March 2002.

Women's Organisations

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which women's organisations have been consulted over proposed legislation by her Department during the *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02 parliamentary sessions; and if their responses have been published. [42917]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 14 March 2002]:* As is normal in the run-up to the Budget, the Government have received a number of representations from a variety of organisations. The Government's consultations generate a large number of representations. We are grateful to the many organisations that have taken the trouble to let us know their views. These ideas feed into the reforms that the Government have made to the tax system since 1997.

Secondment

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many officials from the Bank of England are on secondment to the Treasury; what work they are engaged in; and if he will make a statement. [40114]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 6 March 2002]:* The Treasury has for decades had regular exchanges of staff with the Bank of England. Currently there are three Bank of England officials working in the Treasury. They are engaged in:

Permanent Secretary support in PERM directorate;

Policy advice in Budget and Public Finance directorate;

Policy advice in Macroeconomic Policy and International Finance directorate.

Communications Costs

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the annual budget for communications activities, including press, public relations, marketing and internal communications, was for his Department for each financial year from 1997–98 to 2001–02. [39911]

Ruth Kelly: Figures for the annual budgets for the communications team at the Treasury are presented in the table.

	£
Financial year	*Total communication budget*
1997–98	869,956
1998–99	961,358
1999–2000	1,281,295
2000–01	1,569,494
2001–02	1,945,294

In addition, in 2001–02 there was a one-off spend on updating the Treasury's website. The cost of this one-off project is given in my answer to the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) on 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 321W.

Staff (Special Leave)

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many members of staff of his Department are members of the Territorial Forces; and if he has a strategy for his Department to encourage members of staff to become members of the Territorial forces; [44065]

(2) how many members of staff at his Department are justices of the peace; and if he has a strategy for his Department to encourage members of staff to become justices of the peace. [44557]

Ruth Kelly: Information on whether staff are members of the Territorial Forces or are justices of the peace is not held centrally. Staff are eligible for special leave with pay for attendance at annual training camps for Reserve Forces training. Where additional training is required unpaid special leave may be authorised. Staff who are justices of the peace are allowed paid special leave to undertake their duties.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Drug Dealing

6. **David Burnside:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the number of republican and loyalist terrorist organisations *(a)* involved in and *(b)* benefiting financially from illegal drug dealing in Northern Ireland. [42008]

Jane Kennedy: From his adjournment debate in December the member for South Antrim will be aware that those involved in both paramilitary activity and dealing directly in drugs are predominantly loyalists, but it is not their exclusive preserve. Organised crime gangs with no paramilitary links are also involved. We are responding firmly and robustly to the drugs problem through the organised crime task force. The hon. Gentleman will wish to join me in congratulating PSNI for their recent successes.

Belfast Agreement

7. **Mr. Lazarowicz:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps the Government are taking to implement all aspects of the Belfast Agreement. [42009]

Dr. John Reid: Enormous progress has been made. We have fully functioning institutions; a fundamental reform of policing is under way; we have rights protection arrangements that are second to none; and the normalisation of life continues as the conflict is put behind us, a transformation symbolised by the significant act of decommissioning last year. All those involved need to maintain their efforts in order to complete implementation of the Agreement, in a way that engages the commitment of all parts of the community in Northern Ireland.

Fugitives From Justice

8. **Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the number of fugitives from justice who are being sought in Northern Ireland. [42010]

Dr. John Reid: The figures requested are not readily available. I will write as soon as possible.

Police Service

9. **Helen Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many recruits to the police service of Northern Ireland are in training. [42011]

Jane Kennedy: Over 200 new recruits, appointed on a 50 per cent. Catholic, 50 per cent. non-Catholic basis, have now taken up training posts with the police service of Northern Ireland, and appointments are continuing. The first tranche of recruits will be attested as constables on 5 April 2002.

Amnesty

10. **Mr. Peter Duncan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on an amnesty for those who have committed acts of terrorism in Northern Ireland. [42012]

Dr. John Reid: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for the Isle of Wight.

Counterfeit Goods

11. **Mr. Joyce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress the Government have made in combating trade in counterfeit goods in Northern Ireland. [42013]

26. **Helen Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress the Government have made in combating trade in counterfeit goods in Northern Ireland. [42028]

28. **Mr. Miller:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent progress the Government have made in combating trade in counterfeit goods in Northern Ireland. [42030]

Jane Kennedy: In Northern Ireland we are seeking to tackle and confront the trade in counterfeit goods through the co-ordinated efforts of the Organised Crime Task Force which I chair.

The task force provides a multi-agency approach to tackling the range of organised criminal activity that exists in Northern Ireland and to optimise our approach members are drawn from HM Customs and Excise, PSNI and N10, as well as others.

Specifically to highlight and bring to the forefront of the Northern Ireland public's attention the major wrong of supporting those who trade illegally, Sir Reg Empey (Minister for Enterprise in the Northern Ireland Executive) and I paid a visit to shops and businesses in Belfast city centre before Christmas to visibly encourage the support of legitimate trade. We sought to highlight further the wrongdoing of supporting those who trade in counterfeit goods through articles by Sir Reg and myself in the task force's news-sheet entitled "Response", which receives a wide distribution within Northern Ireland.

I would pay particular tribute to the work of the police and other agencies who have recorded a number of successes in recent months against those trading in counterfeit goods. One such example relates to police operations at Nutts Corner market where in October 2001 £80,000 was seized and on 23 December 2001 £18,000 worth of counterfeit CDs and Playstation games were seized. Other recent successful seizures include £40,000 worth of counterfeit clothing at Kilkeel market and £60,000 worth of counterfeit CDs etc. following a house search in Jonesborough.

At the end of January I co-hosted with Sir Reg Empey an event at Hillsborough Castle which brought together leading Northern Ireland business leaders representing such organisations as the CBI, Institute of Directors, small businesses, the construction industry and banking, to name but some. The event was part of our on-going attempts to engage with the business community and enlist their support in the fight against organised criminal activity in its many forms. I will be continuing with this process of engagement in the months ahead.

Organised Crime

12. **Mr. Baron:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the level of criminal activity undertaken by paramilitary groups. [42014]

Jane Kennedy: The Organised Crime Task Force, which I chair, is continuing to tackle head on organised criminal activity in all its forms. In last year's threat assessment, published in March 2001, the Organised Crime Task Force identified 78 organised crime groups, involving around 400 individuals. About half of the groups have links to paramilitary groups.

However, the lines between terrorism and organised crime are blurred. Approaching terrorism as just terrorism, or organised crime as just organised crime, will inevitably overlook the common ground between the two. Both depend on a group of individuals operating together in secrecy with the same need to launder proceeds from racketeering, drugs, armed robberies etc. regardless of whether this is for personal gain or paramilitary purposes.

15. **Paul Farrelly:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assistance is being provided from the United States to assist in combating organised crime and gangsterism in Northern Ireland. [42017]

29. **Mr. Tony Clarke:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assistance is being provided from the United States to assist in combating organised crime and gangsterism in Northern Ireland. [42031]

Jane Kennedy: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint).

21. **David Cairns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the links between paramilitary organisations and organised crime gangs in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement. [42023]

Jane Kennedy: The Organised Crime Task Force published a threat assessment in March 2001, which identified 78 organised crime groups in Northern Ireland involving some 400 individuals. About half of the groups have links to the paramilitaries.

The next threat assessment and strategy will be published in May 2002.

Integrated Schools

13. **Mr. McWalter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress was made in increasing the number of integrated schools in the period 1998 to 2001. [42015]

Dr. John Reid: Responsibility for this subject has been devolved to the Northern Ireland Assembly and is therefore no longer a matter for the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Victims Liaison Unit

14. **John Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the operation of the Victims Liaison Unit. [42016]

Mr. Browne: The Victims Liaison Unit, established in 1998 to implement the recommendations of the Bloomfield Report is responsible for: the provision of core funding to victims support groups; management and provision of grant aid to the Northern Ireland Memorial Fund; prioritisation and allocation of central Government funding for victims; and ensuring that all victims' issues which fall within the excepted and reserved fields in Northern Ireland are addressed.

The unit works in close partnership with the devolved Administration's Victims Unit. This co-ordinated approach ensures the most effective support to victims of the troubles.

Electoral Fraud

16. **Mr. Michael Jabez Foster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to use national insurance numbers as a means of combating electoral fraud in Northern Ireland. [42018]

19. **Jean Corston:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to use national insurance numbers as a means of combating electoral fraud in Northern Ireland. [42021]

22. **Mr. Ben Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent discussions he has had with the Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland on measures to combat electoral fraud. [42024]

Mr. Browne: Government amendments to the Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Bill in the House of Lords enable national insurance numbers to be used in the electoral process in Northern Ireland.

A person applying to the electoral register in respect of an address in Northern Ireland will be required to give their national insurance number (or to make a statement that they do not have one). A person's name will be removed from the register in respect of any address if they return an application for registration in respect of that address without their national insurance number (or without a statement that they do not have one). Any person who provides false information on registration shall be liable on summary conviction to imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months; or a fine not exceeding level five on the standard scale, or to both.

An application for an absent vote will be granted only if it states the applicant's national insurance number (or states that the applicant does not have one) and if the Chief Electoral Officer is satisfied that the national insurance number or statement on the application corresponds with the number or statement which the applicant gave on their application for registration.

The Chief Electoral Officer will be able to check the information given to him concerning an elector's national insurance number with the authority responsible for them (currently the Department for Work and Pensions).

Paramilitary Violence

17. **Mr. Connarty:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps he is taking to reduce the incidents of punishment beatings and harassment of citizens by paramilitary organisations. [42019]

Jane Kennedy: These attacks are completely the opposite of what the Belfast Agreement was about. Those who sanction them and carry them out are the enemies of a transition to a peaceful society in Northern Ireland. Police investigate all such attacks but their investigations into these offences are often hampered, as the victims generally decline to make a formal complaint. Regrettably therefore prosecutions are therefore extremely rare.

The Government continue to support the police providing them with the resource they require, but it is also important that members of communities from which the perpetrators of these attacks emanate pass on relevant information to the police. This can be done in strict confidence using the Crimestoppers line.

Anti-drugs Campaigns

18. **Mr. Hendrick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what anti-drugs campaigns the police service in Northern Ireland runs in schools; and if he will make a statement. [42020]

24. **Phil Sawford:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what anti-drugs campaigns the police service of Northern Ireland runs in schools; and if he will make a statement. [42026]

Jane Kennedy: The PSNI has developed the Citizen and Safety Education Programme (CASE), in an attempt to establish close links between the police and school community. Health education, which is one of the five elements of the CASE Programme, is delivered to Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 pupils, and focuses specifically on alcohol and the law, drugs and the law and solvent abuse.

In relation to the area of drugs and the law, students are provided with information on the various names that are given to drugs, the appearance of drugs through the use of a "Drugs Toolkit", which drugs are legal and illegal, the different categories of drugs, the effects that certain drugs can have on the body and which drugs are addictive. Students are also made aware of the penalties incurred for possession, production and/or trafficking of drugs.

Victims

20. **Mr. Tom Harris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent discussions he has had with victims of terrorist violence in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement. [42022]

23. **Mr. Woodward:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent discussions he has had with victims of terrorist violence in Northern Ireland on Government support for them; and if he will make a statement. [42025]

Mr. Browne: Since taking up my post as Northern Ireland Victims Minister I have met victims' groups on average twice a month. I am continuing my programme of visits to groups and I also meet regularly with practitioners and academics in the field.

Terrorism (Financing)

25. **Mr. Anthony D. Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent discussions there have been with the Irish Government on tackling the financing of terrorism in Northern Ireland. [42027]

Jane Kennedy: Ministers and officials meet regularly with their counterparts in the Irish Government to discuss issues of mutual concern including the financing of terrorist organisations.

Decommissioning

27. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he expects the process of decommissioning of illegal weapons and explosives to be completed. [42029]

Jane Kennedy: The Independent International Commission on Decommissioning reported, on 23 October 2001, that it had witnessed an event, which it regarded as significant, in which the IRA had put a quantity of arms completely beyond use.

We now want to see further decommissioning by the IRA, and decommissioning by all other terrorist groups. The timing of any future decommissioning events is a matter for the IICD.

Police Manpower

30. **Mr. Laurence Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the manpower strength is of police in Northern Ireland. [42032]

Jane Kennedy: At 15 February the full-time manpower strength was 9,296 officers. This includes 7,004 regular officers (plus 87 seconded to UN duty in Kosovo etc.) and 2,205 full-time reserve officers. In addition there were 1,014 part-time reservists.

Castlereagh Police Complex

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what action he intends to take in relation to the breach of security at Castlereagh police complex. [45326]

Dr. John Reid: I refer my hon. Friend to the statement I made in reply to the private notice question earlier today.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Unauthorised Pupil Absences

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many unauthorised absences there were *(a)* in absolute terms and *(b)* as a proportion of all absences, in (i) secondary and (ii) primary schools, broken down by local authority since 1997–98. [43301]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Tables showing the half days missed due to unauthorised absences in *(a)* absolute terms and *(b)* as a proportion of all absences in (i) maintained secondary schools and (ii) maintained primary schools by each local education authority in England since 1997–98 have been placed in the Library.

Pupil Information

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) whether her Department obtained the agreement of the Data Protection Commissioner for *(a)* the Pupil Level Annual Schools Census and *(b)* the Connexions Service's information gathering; [42132]

(2) under what powers the Pupil Level Annual Schools Census seeks to record the ethnicity of each pupil; and for how long that information may be recorded other than in aggregated form; [42141]

(3) to which *(a)* Government and *(b)* other agencies information in the Pupil Level Annual Schools Census may be passed (i) with and (ii) without the agreement of the individual data subject or his parents; [42142]

(4) what right individual pupils and parents have to decline to provide information to schools which may be passed on through the Pupil Level Annual Schools Census; and whether sanctions may be taken by *(a)* her Department and *(b)* local education authorities against schools which failed to obtain information from parents; [42144]

(5) which organisations she consulted on the introduction of PLASC; [42331]

(6) to what extent data subjects, their parents, have the right *(a)* to access to their information, *(b)* to correct that information and *(c)* to control access to that information on (i) PLASC and (ii) the Connexions databases; [42333]

(7) what information on *(a)* PLASC and *(b)* the Connexions national database is intended only for use by technical staff; [42335]

(8) if she will give instructions that ethnicity data on PLASC-originated database for all those whose ethnicity is identified as Jewish will be deleted on those pupils leaving school. [43350]

Mr. Timms [holding answer 11 March and 14 March 2002]:

Pupil Level Annual Schools Census (PLASC)

All information in PLASC about individual pupils, including their ethnicity, is collected from schools under Regulations laid under section 537A of the Education Act 1996, as amended by section 140(1), paragraph 153 of Schedule 30 to the School Standards and Framework Act 1998.

PLASC information will be used by the Department solely for statistical purposes. It remains of statistical value after pupils have left school—for example to monitor patterns of progression from school into further education and training, higher education and the labour market, and how these patterns vary between different groups of pupils, including different ethnic groups. In order to be able to derive such statistics PLASC information will be retained indefinitely on an individual pupil basis, as allowed by section 33 of the Data Protection Act 1998.

With respect to pupils' ethnicity, the ethnic groups used for PLASC in January 2002 were based on those from the 1991 national population Census, and from January 2003 will be based on those from the 2001 Census. In neither case is Jewish identified as a separate ethnic group, nor is there any other information in PLASC that identifies pupils as Jewish.

Relatively little of the information in PLASC is provided by pupils or parents—much of it will be known by the school from its own interactions with pupils, or will be received from other sources. The main items that are provided by pupils or parents (in addition to name, date of birth and home postcode) are ethnic group and first language. Schools should seek this information, but pupils or parents have the right to withhold it. Most schools already obtain this information routinely.

The White Paper "Excellence in Schools", published in July 1997, highlighted the need for much better pupil level information to be available throughout the schools sector in order to support the drive to raise standards, and also for a national system of "unique pupil numbers" (UPNs) to enable this information to be collated accurately on a pupil by pupil basis. A consultation document was issued in December 1997 with detailed proposals (including PLASC, UPNs and a central pupil database) addressing the issues raised by the White Paper. This document was sent to LEAs, teacher associations, church and religious organisations, governors' and parents' organisations, the Data Protection Registrar (as she was then), leading civil liberties organisations (Liberty and Charter 88), and a range of other interested organisations (including the Commission for Racial Equality). A summary of the document was also sent to all schools.

Before and after this consultation exercise the Department had meetings with the Data Protection Registrar and her officials, and a series of measures were agreed in respect of the issuing of UPNs, and their use in the collection and collation of pupil level data. These measures aimed to ensure compliance with the Data Protection Act, and minimise any possible threat to the privacy of pupils. The Department continues to discuss the use of UPNs and pupil level information with the Information Commissioner's Office as and when issues arise, and is also planning to discuss with her Office security arrangements for the forthcoming central pupil database.

The Department has no interest in the identity of individual pupils as such. Pupil names and UPNs are collected to enable PLASC information to be linked, pupil by pupil, with Key Stage and examination results which are collected separately, and from one year to the next. Technical staff engaged in this data linking will, for that purpose, need to have access to pupil names and UPNs. The linked data (without pupil names and UPNs) will then be used to carry out statistical analyses of attainment levels, and how these vary according to the various pupil attributes identified in PLASC.

Pupils, or in certain circumstances their parents or guardians, will be able to see the information held about them in the central database, and to ask for correction of any inaccurate data. Details of other organisations or individuals who may, subject to certain conditions, have access to data with pupil names were provided

in my answer on 28 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 109–11W to the hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington). Pupils and parents will not be able to control such access except in the case of the Connexions Service, where access will not be allowed if the pupil or their parent (depending on the pupil's age) has instructed that they do not wish it to happen, and in certain circumstances in the case of access by research organisations.

Connexions

The Department is in discussion with the Office of the Information Commissioner about the collection of information for Connexions.

There is as yet no national Connexions database containing information about individual young people. Connexions is delivered through local Connexions partnerships, of which 15 are operating at present. Each of these is responsible for the information it holds about young people in its area, and provides information to the Connexions Service National Unit in aggregate form only. We are examining what national approaches will be appropriate to support the work of local Connexions partnerships. Feasibility testing is at an early stage.

Young people have the right to see all information held about them by Connexions, and are able to request correction of any inaccurate data. They are not able to control access to Connexions partnerships' databases, but partnerships must ensure that all processing of information about young people complies with data protection principles.

Stolen Equipment

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to the answer of 22 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 818–19W, on stolen equipment, whether the computer equipment stolen from her Department was *(a)* new and unused and *(b)* used; and what was the nature of the data stored on such items in each case. [42641]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Of the computer equipment stolen from the Department for Education and Skills since 1997, all but two were used. The remaining two new and unused were laptops stolen from a storeroom and were awaiting issue. None of the data on the computers was of a sensitive or personal nature.

Specialist Schools

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when she expects to announce the schools which have been successful in their bids for specialist school status in the bidding round which involves bids being submitted before the 15 March deadline; and if she will make a statement. [43992]

Mr. Timms: We expect to announce the names of successful applicants in each of the eight specialisms from the March 2002 specialist school competition in early July.

Congestion Charging

Kate Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimate has been made of the effects of congestion charging on the recruitment of teachers in schools within the congestion charging zone in London. [44373]

Mr. Timms: No estimate has been made. We do not collect any information about the number of teachers who travel to work by car.

Kate Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimate she has made of the cost to a teacher over a year of the extra costs of congestion charging in London if they use a car to drive to work. [44374]

Mr. Timms: If a teacher were subject to congestion charging, the total cost over a full academic year would be £975.

Kate Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will allow teachers affected by congestion charges to be reimbursed the extra costs. [44375]

Mr. Timms: The School Teachers' Pay and Conditions document already allows schools and LEAs to make payments to teachers for travel expenses incurred in connection with their journey to and from work.

Public Services

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what meetings she has had, and representations she has received from Members of the National Assembly for Wales and the Welsh Assembly Executive regarding the increased use of private sector funding in delivering public services, broken down by date and subject. [43228]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: My Department has not met with representations from the Welsh Assembly Executive or Members of the National Assembly for Wales regarding the increased use of private sector funding in delivering public services.

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the Public Service Agreement targets which have been revised and those which have been introduced since the publication of the 2001 departmental report. [43264]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: None of our Public Service Agreement targets have been revised, nor further ones introduced, since the publication of the 2001 departmental report. However, employment related targets have passed to the Department for Work and Pensions following machinery of Government changes last year.

Employment and Social Policy Council

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the outcome was of the Employment and Social Policy Council held in Brussels on 7 March; what the Government's stance was on each issue discussed, including its voting record; and if she will make a statement. [42706]

Malcolm Wicks: I have been asked to reply.

I represented the UK at the Employment and Social Policy Council in Brussels on 7 March, together with the Minister of State for Employment Relations and the regions, my hon. Friend, the Member for Hull, West and Hessle (Alan Johnson).

The main business of this council was a debate in preparation for the forthcoming European Council in Barcelona. The Spanish Presidency issued its own conclusions. The UK supported the key themes of improved co-ordination of economic and employment policy and the importance of aligning the new European employment strategy with the Lisbon goal of full employment. Member states recognised the need to integrate disadvantaged groups, particularly older workers, into the labour market to achieve this goal and acknowledged the vital role played by life long learning in achieving the Lisbon targets.

Council also held an open debate on violence against women which formed the basis of Presidency conclusions for Barcelona. There was consensus on the need for a multi-disciplinary approach to this issue with broad agreement on the use of good practice guides and annual awareness raising campaigns at a European level. The forthcoming Danish Presidency will take forward this work in the context of the council's annual follow-up of the member states' implementation of their commitments under the Beijing Platform for Action, including discussions on the necessity for, and potential scope of, indicators in this field.

The Presidency sought an outline position on the proposal for a directive updating the existing directive on the protection of workers from the risks of exposure to asbestos, pending the adoption by the European Parliament of its First Reading opinion. After a debate, which hinged on a proposal to include a general ban on asbestos within the directive, the dossier was remitted to COREPER for further work.

The Council also heard a progress report on negotiations for the draft directive supplementing the proposed regulation for a Statute on a European Co-operative Society in respect of employee involvement. Work will continue on this dossier in COREPER.

Among the other agenda items discussed, the Council approved the work programmes for the Employment Committee and the Social Protection Committee for 2002.

The Presidency noted that the UN 2nd World Conference on Aging would be held in Madrid in April. A Commission communication will be produced as a contribution shortly.

The Presidency reported on a series of seminars and events that have taken place since the beginning of their Presidency.

No votes were taken at this Council.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Gipsy Sites

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he will announce the results of the latest round of the gipsy site refurbishment grant. [45475]

Ms Keeble: 86 bids were submitted by local authorities for round 2 of the gipsy site refurbishment grant. I can today announce approval for the 57 bids. Funding for the successful bids totals £6.1 million.

The existing network of local authority owned gipsy sites represents a valuable resource for gipsies. This injection of funding, following on from round 1 of the programme, will further help local authorities extend the useful life of sites, bring them into full use and improve the quality of life for residents.

I have arranged for a list showing the successful and unsuccessful bids to be placed in the Library of the House.

Disabled Facilities Grants

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to exempt disabled facilities grants for children from the test of resources. [43944]

Ms Keeble: We have no plans to change the present arrangements where the disabled facilities grant test of resources is applied to the person or persons responsible for a child or young person.

Liquid Petroleum Gas

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what the average cost is in the UK of a liquid petroleum gas conversion kit for vehicles; [43092]

(2) how many vehicles registered in the UK run on liquid petroleum gas; [43091]

(3) what training is *(a)* available and *(b)* required for people wishing to convert their cars to run on liquid petroleum gas using LPG conversion kits. [43093]

Mr. Jamieson: All vehicles converted to run on LPG must comply with the requirements of the Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations 1986. Conversions which result in significantly reduced emissions are eligible for Government grants under the Powershift programme, which is administered by the Energy Saving Trust. To be eligible for a grant, conversions must be done by Powershift approved converters, whose competence is tested by the trust. The DTI has recently announced a new £1 million programme, called "LPG Boost", to further enhance the uptake of LPG, including grants to help additional conversion specialists undertake the technical training and meet the competencies for becoming Powershift approved converters, and so increase the network of approved converters.

The additional cost of converting a vehicle to run on LPG is typically between £1,500 and £2,000.

DVLA statistics record 26,694 vehicles as running on gaseous fuels. DVLA statistics do not distinguish between liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) and natural gas vehicles, but most of the vehicles are LPG-fuelled cars—natural gas is used mainly in heavy goods vehicles, and the numbers are smaller. The DVLA figure is also an underestimate, since not all motorists notify DVLA of

their vehicle's conversion. There are currently estimated to be around 65,000 LPG vehicles in the UK. Motorists are converting to LPG at an increasing rate, with the number expected to increase by about 35,000 for 2002 and 50,000 in 2003, prompted by the Government grants available, and the fact that low-cost LPG fuel is now available in all areas of the country.

Stolen Equipment

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to the answer of 29 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 182 and 184W, on stolen equipment, whether the computer equipment stolen from his Department was *(a)* new and unused and *(b)* used; and what was the nature of the data stored on such items in each case. [42648]

Dr. Whitehead: The information requested is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. It is the policy of the Department that thefts of computer equipment should be reported to the police. The Department also records such thefts in the Incident Reporting and Alert Scheme (UNIRAS) at the National Infrastructure Security Co-ordination Centre (NISCC) and encourages its agencies to do likewise.

Management Consultants

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the cost was to his Department and its predecessor of management consultants in *(a)* 1997–98 and *(b)* 2000–01. [43629]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 15 March 2002]:* My Department does not hold information specifically on management consultants. To do so would incur disproportionate costs.

Age Discrimination

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what his Department's policy is towards age discrimination. [42579]

Dr. Whitehead: Discrimination on the grounds of age is not permitted under the Department's equal opportunities policy.

British Seafarers

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what impact *(a)* the Support for Maritime Training Scheme and *(b)* the Tonnage Tax have had on the training and employment of British seafarers, and by what performance indicators that impact is measured. [44053]

Mr. Jamieson: Since the introduction of the Support for Maritime Training scheme (SMarT) in 1998, approximately 480 cadets a year have received training under the scheme. The forecast for the financial year 2001–02 is 500. In addition a significant of seafarers were also involved in gaining second Certificates of Competency or revalidations.

To date, 58 groups of companies, including the 50 approved by the Inland Revenue for entry into tonnage tax, have received approval by the DTLR of their training commitments. This equates to about 508 training places.

Harbour Boards

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions by what means nominations were sought for places on harbour boards on the Isle of Wight; how many appointments he has made to such bodies since 1997; who the appointees were; and what were their terms of office. [43353]

Ms Keeble *[pursuant to her reply, 14 March 2002, c. 1203W]:* my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is not responsible for any appointments to harbour boards on the Isle of Wight. Vacancies on the boards of trust ports are advertised in the local and regional press.

Tonnage Tax Scheme

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the terms and conditions of foreign seafarers being switched to the red ensign under the tonnage tax scheme. [44401]

Mr. Jamieson: For ships joining the UK Shipping Register the Maritime and Coastguard Agency checks crew agreements to ensure that they comply with the International Labour Organisation (ILO) convention on articles of agreement, and also comply with relevant UK Merchant Shipping legislation. Guidance is set out in Marine Guidance Note 148.

Maritime Assets

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many national maritime assets have been sold since 1997. [43964]

Mr. Jamieson: The Maritime and Coastguard Agency has disposed of 28 properties, including cottages, redundant garages and small parcels of land since 1997. The total receipts from the sales came to £500,000.

Fishing Boat Accidents

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what investigations his Department has carried out following the two fishing boat accidents in the Irish sea on 31 January and 14 February; what the results have been of those investigations; and what further action will be taken to ensure that action plans are in place in fishing ports to address similar accidents in the future. [44478]

Mr. Jamieson: The Marine Accident Investigation Branch (MAIB) was informed that the first fishing vessel had had an accident on 30 January and initiated an investigation the following day. The branch became aware that the second fishing vessel was missing on 15 February and, using an inspector who happened to be in Northern Ireland at the time progressing the first investigation, initiated inquiries the same day.

Both investigations are on-going. The MAIB aims to publish accident reports within nine months of the event. There is every expectation this will be achieved in the first accident but may well be longer in the second as there has been no sign of the missing vessel since she sailed. Without any direct evidence to explain what occurred, the investigation is likely to take longer.

The MAIB investigates about 3 per cent. of all accidents reported to it. When the decision has been taken to carry one out, inspectors will take whatever action they consider most suitable in the circumstances. This process has stood the test of time and there are no plans to make any substantial changes to the existing arrangements. All investigations result in a report being made publicly available.

It is not be possible to predict what recommendations will arise from the two investigations, but they will be made public.

EU State Aid

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the operation of EU state aid rules on the encouragement of national flag shipping and seafarer employment. [43594]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government have made an assessment which will shortly be submitted to the European Commission as part of their consultation on revising the state aid guidelines.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on how EC state aid can be released to benefit regeneration initiatives in renewal areas. [43488]

Ms Keeble: Nearly £130 million of European funding has this week been awarded to large scale regeneration projects in the West Midlands with a further £33 million earmarked for projects in Staffordshire and the north Black Country, once proposals can be worked up.

Regeneration projects—drawn up by local authorities, Advantage West Midlands and various local partners—have been clustered together into "packages", to ensure a co-ordinated, strategic approach to the regeneration of the West Midlands.

Two of the packages—for the north Black Country/south Staffordshire and for north Staffordshire—have had £16.5 million and £16.9 million earmarked for them respectively, while RDA Advantage West Midlands and consultants working on behalf of GOWM help the partnerships get the proposals into final shape.

Additionally, some £30 million of European funding has been approved outside the regeneration packages. This is currently under offer to enable projects to get under way.

Short Sea Shipping

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps his Department plans to take to support the United Kingdom short sea shipping sector. [43592]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government recognise that operators in the short sea trades are at a disadvantage compared with those in the deep sea sector. They are, therefore, considering a proposal by the industry for a short sea shipping employment grant to encourage employment in the short sea sector.

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment has been made of the effects of introducing a short sea shipping employment grant. [43591]

Mr. Jamieson: Ministers have considered a proposal for the introduction of short sea shipping employment grant. The parties involved have been requested to forward more information on how such a grant would help to generate more UK seafarer employment.

Crew Relief Costs

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proposals he has to extend the crew relief costs scheme. [43593]

Mr. Jamieson: We are committed to extending the crew relief costs scheme to cover European ports. This will be implemented by legislation when parliamentary time is available.

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the need to extend seafarer income tax concessions and the crew relief cash scheme. [43648]

Mr. Jamieson: Seafarer income tax concessions are a matter for the Chancellor. We are committed to extending the crew relief costs scheme to cover European ports. This will be implemented by legislation when parliamentary time is available.

Transport Grant

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what level of transport grant he had set for the Greater London Authority for 2001–02. [45268]

Mr. Spellar: GLA transport grant is determined annually, and may be varied from time to time, after consultation with the Mayor of London under section 101 of the GLA Act 1999. The Secretary of State has today redetermined the level of grant for 2001–02 at £720,053,000. This represents an increase of £5,665,000.

Local Transport Plans

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of individual PTAs' effectiveness in consulting local communities and key stakeholders on development of the objectives and strategies of their LTPs. [44376]

Ms Keeble: Local transport plans (LTPs) for the metropolitan areas in England outside London are produced jointly between the Passenger Transport Authority and the relevant metropolitan district authorities.

Our guidance to authorities on LTPs sets out a range of detailed criteria against which each LTP is assessed. Within the detailed criteria on objective setting and strategy development, we asked authorities for evidence that the public were fully involved in the development of the plans objectives and strategies. We also make clear in

our guidance on LTP annual progress reports that authorities should report on their proposals for consultation on the detailed implementation of their LTPs.

We are satisfied that the LTPs for all the metropolitan areas have followed the requirements of our guidance and have involved the public in both the development and implementation of their plans.

Golden Jubilee

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what initiatives he will take to influence the public to travel via mass transit into London during Her Majesty the Queen's Golden Jubilee weekend; and if he will make a statement; [44601]

(2) what steps will be taken to increase the operation of *(a)* buses, *(b)* trains and *(c)* other forms of mass transport in the week of Her Majesty the Queen's Golden Jubilee; and if he will make a statement. [44600]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government are currently discussing with public transport providers, including those providing services into London, their plans for Her Majesty the Queen's Golden Jubilee weekend. Further information will be announced nearer the time, including any advice to travellers that may be appropriate.

London Underground

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what progress London Underground Ltd. has made in addressing the safety issues the Health and Safety Executive has raised with LUL concerning their proposed railway safety case for the running of London Underground under the proposed public private partnership. [44603]

Mr. Jamieson: I understand that the Health and Safety Executive has received London Underground Ltd.'s formal response on the issues raised. Under the safety case regime, which is an iterative process, HSE will take the time it needs to determine whether the issues have been satisfactorily closed out.

Rail Tracks

Dr. Pugh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what information the DTLR holds on the fault and repair reporting procedures in place for the various grades of rail track; [44357]

(2) what information the DTLR holds on the inspection procedures currently followed for the various grades of rail track. [44356]

Mr. Jamieson: These are operational matters for Railtrack plc in Railway Administration, which remains subject to regulation by the Health and Safety Executive in respect of health and safety; and by the Rail Regulator in respect of its network operation, maintenance and renewal practices.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the Government's responsibilities are with regard to ensuring rail track safety; and if he will make a statement. [44604]

Mr. Jamieson: Railtrack plc (in Railway Administration), as the infrastructure dutyholder, has responsibility for ensuring track safety. The Health and Safety Executive's Railway Inspectorate secures compliance with health and safety legislation. Railtrack's network licence, issued by the Office of the Rail Regulator, requires it to use best practice in its maintenance of track safety on the network.

Railway Research

Dr. Pugh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions who is responsible for initiating railway research programmes. [44354]

Mr. Jamieson: The Directions and Guidance to the Strategic Rail Authority issued in draft by my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State in June 2001 would require the authority to "encourage and as appropriate commission research related to its purposes and objectives." We expect to issue the final version of the Directions and Guidance very shortly.

Trans European Network

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the bids, and their value submitted from Britain to the European Union since 1997 for funding as part of the Trans European Network for *(a)* road and *(b)* rail projects. [43048]

Mr. Jamieson: Information on UK bids for funding under the trans-European Network grants regime is commercially sensitive. The attached table shows the amount of grant that has been allocated to the UK since 1997, for the improvement of road and rail infrastructure.

UK TENS allocations

euro million

	1997 award	*1998 award*	*1999 award*	*2000 award*	*2001 award*	*Total*
Rail projects						
Channel tunnel rail link	24.000	25.000	29.500	30.000	15.000	123.500
West coast main line	9.000	10.000	13.000	16.000	7.000	55.000
Felixstowe to Nuneaton upgrade study and works	—	—	—	—	1.000	1.000
Trans-Pennine and north Wales—improved links to Manchester airport	—	—	—	—	1.500	1.500
Improved rail links to Stansted airport study	—	—	—	—	1.000	1.000
Kings Cross—Heathrow airport new rail links	—	—	—	—	1.000	1.000
Cross London routes study	—	—	—	—	1.000	1.000

UK TENS allocations

euro million

	1997 award	*1998 award*	*1999 award*	*2000 award*	*2001 award*	*Total*
Trans-Pennine freight upgrade study	—	—	—	—	3.500	3.500
Total	33.000	35.000	42.500	46.000	31.000	187.500
Road projects						
Ireland -UK-Benelux road link (Studies in England)	1.700	—	—	—	—	1.700
Traffic management studies—Wales	0.400	—	—	—	—	0.400
A75 The Glen improvement	1.300	—	—	—	—	1.300
Trans-Pennine strategic environmental assessment study	0.145	0.100	—	—	—	0.245
RDS-TMC[1] implementation in the UK	—	0.400	—	—	—	—
Telematics and traffic management on the TERN[2]	—	1.000	—	—	—	1.000
Stranraer area integrated transport package	—	1.000	—	—	—	1.000
N. Ireland—Larne to Newry studies	—	—	—	0.500	—	0.500
A120 Stansted—Braintree upgrade	—	—	—	—	5.000	5.000
Total	3.545	2.500	0.000	0.500	5.000	11.145

[1] Radio data system—traffic message channel.
[2] Trans-European road network.

National Air Traffic Services

Mr. Pound: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to the answer of 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 807W, if he will make a statement on financial support to National Air Traffic Services. [45557]

Mr. Byers: A short-term loan facility for National Air Traffic Services has now been agreed. It is for a maximum of £60 million over the period to 30 September 2002, £30 million of which is to be provided by the Government and the other £30 million by a group of four lending banks. Each party will lend on the same commercial terms. Its purpose is to relieve NATS' cash-flow position until arrangements are put in place to secure the long-term financial stability of the company following the unprecedented events of 11 September 2001.

Air Passenger Flights

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many civil passenger flights have taken place to and from each airport in the United Kingdom in *(a)* 2001 and *(b)* each of the preceding four years; and who the (i) owners and (ii) operators of each such airport were. [43863]

Mr. Jamieson: Details of civil passenger flights to and from each airport in the United Kingdom in 2001 and each of the preceding four years is contained in Table A which has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

The Department does not hold information about UK airport owners and operators going back over the previous four years. This could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Table B, which has also been placed in the Libraries of the House, reflects our understanding of the current position, based on data compiled from a wide variety of sources.

Airports (Landing Charges)

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what landing charges *(a)* are imposed and *(b)* have been imposed in each of the preceding four years for each civil airport in the United Kingdom operated by (i) BAA and (ii) each of the other airport operators. [43861]

Mr. Jamieson: Those airports subject to economic regulation by the Civil Aviation Authority notify CAA of the different airport charges levied at their airport. Landing charges are one of these. However, they vary for different categories of aircraft (eg by aircraft noise); by aircraft weight categories and sometimes by time of day. They may also include airport navigation charges. The resources required to process and collate the information on landing charges data for all airport operators, and in a form which would allow useful comparisons between airports, would be disproportionate and not show the level of the total airport charge.

The revenue from airport charges is published for about 30 airports by the Centre for the study of Regulated Industries (CRI) in their statistical series "Airport Statistics". This publication also includes passenger number so it would be possible to derive the annual revenue from airport charges per passenger for these airports.

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what factors the Civil Aviation Authority is required to take account of when considering applications from airport operators for increases in landing charges. [43864]

Mr. Jamieson: There are three categories of airport in respect of airport charges.

Airports with more than one million passengers each year are subject to economic regulation by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) and require their permission to levy charges. Below this threshold, airports are able to levy airport charges without permission. For the 'designated' airports of BAA's London airports and for Manchester airport, this permission is also subject to conditions regarding the maximum amounts that may be levied.

For the non-designated economically regulated airports with permission to levy charges, CAA are notified of the airport charges to be levied by the airport operator but they do not play a part in determining these.

For the designated airports of BAA's London airports and of Manchester airport, the conditions imposed by CAA are the result of an extensive process every five years to set the maximum annual airport charge for the following five years. In doing this, CAA take account of their statutory objectives listed in Section 39 of the 1986 Airports Act. This price cap has been expressed in terms of the average revenue from airport charges per passenger (revenue yield). Provided the annual airport charges set each year by the airport operator would not be expected to result in the price cap being exceeded, CAA are not involved in their determination.

English Partnerships Review

Geraint Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he proposes to announce the outcome of stage one of the review of English Partnerships; and if he will make a statement. [45052]

Ms Keeble: Today we are announcing the outcome of the first stage of the current review of English Partnerships (EP), together with appointment of the new chair of the organisation.

The new chair of English Partnerships is to be Margaret Ford. She has extensive experience in economic development and of working with Government organisations within the UK and internationally. She has particular experience of leading organisations though periods of considerable change. We are confident that Margaret Ford is the right person to lead EP into its new role.

EP will become the Secretary of State's expert adviser on brownfield regeneration, managing a national portfolio of strategic sites, and managing demonstration projects. EP will work with national, regional and local partners, especially the RDAs, and the private sector, to identify strategic brownfield land, prioritise and facilitate its development. There is a continuing remit for EP as a national public sector body and as a vital component of the Government's programme for achieving an Urban Renaissance.

To sharpen the organisation's focus on brownfield regeneration, we intend EP progressively to transfer their non-strategic Commission for the New Towns (CNT) landholdings to other appropriate bodies, for example the local authority.

In the spirit of the two Green Papers we published last year setting out fundamental changes to local government and the planning system, EP will relinquish the use of their planning powers in the former new town areas, bringing control over the development of these areas under the democratic control of their local councils. This will be a staged process.

As part of stage two of review, we want to resolve the problems that have arisen in the past from the dual statutory function of the former Urban Regeneration Agency and the Commission for the New Towns. This will give EP a common purpose and help them in taking forward their changed agenda.

I am today placing in the Library of the House the report on stage one of the review, including the KPMG consultation report and key areas to be addressed in stage two. There is still important work to be done and we will continue to listen to and work with the widest range of interested organisations.

Brownfield Sites

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proposals he has to promote the development of brownfield sites. [40355]

Ms Keeble: The development of brownfield sites is a key priority for my Department. It underpins our policy for the revival of our towns and cities and for achieving more sustainable patterns of development.

We are radically overhauling the planning system so it helps promote economic prosperity by delivering land for development in the right place at the right time. Our planning policy guidance for housing (PPG3) sets out an "urban brownfields first policy" as we want to conserve greenfield land.

Planning Policy is directing private sector development towards brownfield land, and measures are in place within the development control and local plan system to ensure this. For instance, local authorities must reassess greenfield sites that have been previously identified in their local plans for development, and they must thoroughly re-appraise applications for the renewal of planning permission on such sites. Regional and local planning strategies are expected to focus new housing development where brownfield sites are available. The Department is also promoting a greater use of Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPOs) to assemble brownfield sites that are in multiple ownership.

The public sector also has a direct role to play, and in this respect the Department has a Public Service Agreement target under which it aims to:

". . Ensure that brownfield land will be reclaimed at a rate of over 1,100 hectares per annum by 2004 (reclaiming 5 per cent. of current brownfield land by 2004 and 17 per cent. by 2010)"

The reclamation of over 1,100 hectares is specifically for the Regional Development Agencies and English Partnerships to achieve. With a forecast output of 1,200 ha for this year, they are on course to exceed it.

Within the Corporate Planning process, an annual target for brownfield land reclamation is being agreed with each RDA. DTLR officials will be monitoring and encouraging progress.

There are many examples of RDA involvement in the successful redevelopment of brownfield sites. For instance, the South East RDA is continuing the earlier work of English Partnerships in redeveloping the former Royal Naval Dockyard at Chatham Maritime in Kent, with a sustainable mixed development at this 140 ha site. The North West Development Agency is to develop a high quality business park in North Manchester, thereby bringing 25 ha of brownfield land back into use. Dursley and Gloucester Docks are sustainable mixed-use developments being undertaken by the South West of England RDA.

The Government are aware that the withdrawal of the Partnership Investment Programme, and its replacement with schemes of a more limited application, has restricted RDAs and EP in their ability to use the private sector in

delivering brownfield land regeneration. To improve the flexibility of Government agencies in this regard, the Government:

Have made significant extra resources available to RDAs to take sites into public ownership and develop them directly

Have recently notified to the European Commission a new scheme for involving the private sector in housing schemes

Is engaged in discussions with the Commission and other member states about brownfield regeneration within the context to State Aid rules.

Housing

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to the answer of 13 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 1082W, on housing, what assessment he has made of whether Birmingham city council's assessment of likely future demand, the rate at which properties will be re-let and proposals for new build is sufficiently robust to ensure that homelessness in the city will not rise as a result of proposed demolitions. [44423]

Ms Keeble: This formed part of the assessment of Birmingham city council's application for a place on the housing transfer programme.

Subsidence (London)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent assessment he has made of the threat to buildings and subterranean structures in London posed by sinking ground levels. [43811]

Ms Keeble: The intensity of subsidence reported in the press is very minor and is unlikely to cause damage. It is several orders of magnitude less than that experienced in the coalfields and damage is much more likely to occur from shrinking and swelling of clay subsoils in London than from subsidence at the level reported.

Subsidence from tunnelling operations is well known and it is taken into account in the design of tunnelling operations. Where necessary, such operations include mitigation measures to reduce the effects of subsidence to below the level likely to cause damage. The levels reported from the Jubilee Line extension are consistent with those recorded by monitoring subsidence during and after construction.

Right to Buy

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will place in the Library copies of the responses to the Housing Green Paper "Quality and Choice: A Decent Home For All" that made reference to the right to buy. [44452]

Ms Keeble: Details of responses to the Housing Green Paper are set out in "Quality and Choice: A decent home for all. Summary of Responses". This is already available in the Library or can be freely downloaded from the DTLR website at the following address: http://www.housing.dtlr.gov.uk/information/consult/responses/summary/pdf/greenpap.pdf.

168 responses made reference to the right to buy. Arrangements are being made for copies of these responses to be collated and placed in the Library, except where the authors requested that their comments should not be released.

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many former local authority properties sold to tenants under the right to buy scheme have subsequently been bought back by those local authorities in each Government Office region *(a)* in each year since 1980 and *(b)* in each quarter since April 1999. [44454]

Ms Keeble: Information reported to the Department on the repurchase of ex-council properties is presented as follows. Information prior to 1995–96 was not collected centrally.

Local authority dwellings repurchased by local authorities—Exchange sales scheme

	1995–96	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*
Government office region	—	—	—	—
North East	0	0	0	0
North West	0	0	0	0
Yorkshire and the Humber	0	0	0	0
East Midlands	0	0	0	0
West Midlands	0	0	0	0
East	0	0	0	0
London	0	2	7	1
South East	0	0	0	0
South West	0	0	0	0
England	0	2	7	1

Local Authority dwellings repurchased by local authorities—Buyback scheme

	1998–99	*April to June 1999*	*July to September 1999*	*October to December 1999*	*January to March 2000*
Government office region	—	—	—	—	—
North East	8	5	2	1	0
North West	9	4	1	0	5
Yorkshire and the Humber	26	2	1	12	4
East Midlands	0	0	0	0	0
West Midlands	3	0	0	0	5
East	10	3	0	0	8
London	15	4	3	3	5
South East	15	5	1	13	2
South West	14	0	2	3	7
England	100	23	10	32	36

Local Authority dwellings repurchased by local authorities

	April to June 2000	*July to September 2000*	*October to December 2000*	*January to March 2001*	*April to June 2001*	*July to September 2001*
Government office region	—	—	—	—	—	—
North East	0	0	1	20	1	1
North West	0	1	4	0	0	1
Yorkshire and the Humber	28	9	37	20	1	13
East Midlands	0	0	0	2	1	1
West Midlands	1	1	0	14	0	4
East	1	24	2	2	0	0
London	3	4	7	9	8	15
South East	3	10	5	5	7	3
South West	0	2	5	1	1	1
England	36	51	61	73	19	39

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the Local Authorities (Capital Finance) (Amendment) Regulations 1999 (S.I. No. 501) in encouraging local authorities to buy back properties previously sold to tenants under the right to buy scheme. [44455]

Ms Keeble: The incentive is voluntary, and involves agreement being reached between landlords and owners/ leaseholders. We are monitoring the use made by local authorities of the incentive offered by these regulations. Our figures indicate that last year (2000–01) local authorities in England bought back just over 200 properties.

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what information his Department has collated on the number of ex-local authority properties in London in which the leaseholder is a tenant who originally purchased the lease under the right to buy scheme. [44453]

Ms Keeble: The Department does not collect this information on its regular statistical returns. However, results derived from the 2000–01 Survey of English Housing indicate that some 62,000 householders in flats in London had purchased their present property since 1981 under the right to buy scheme from the local authority.

A303

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the timetable is for the laying of orders, planning procedures and construction in respect of the A303 (T) relating to *(a)* Winterbourne Stoke Bypass, *(b)* the Amesbury to Berwick Down improvement scheme, *(c)* the Countess Roundabout flyover and Stonehenge Visitors Centre access and *(d)* the Folly Bottom interchange. [44429]

Mr. Jamieson: The Highways Agency is planning to publish draft orders for the A303 Stonehenge Improvement in December 2002. This scheme, formerly known as the Amesbury to Berwick Down Improvement, incorporates a bypass of Winterbourne Stoke and a flyover at Countess Roundabout. Subject to the making of statutory orders, it is intended that construction will start in the spring of 2005.

The agency proposes to publish the made orders for the Folly Bottom interchange in April 2002. Preliminary works are expected to start in June 2002 and the main works in September 2002.

The Stonehenge Visitors Centre is the responsibility of English Heritage who will in due course be discussing access arrangements with the Highways Agency.

M42

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the concrete sections of the M42 will be covered with low noise road surfacing. [44076]

Mr. Jamieson: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency, Tim Matthews, to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Mr. Tim Matthews to Mr. Brian Jenkins, dated 20 March 2002:

The Transport Minister, David Jamieson has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about resurfacing the concrete sections of the M42 with low noise material.

There are three remaining lengths of concrete surfacing on the M42: junctions 2 to 3A, junctions 9 to 10 and junctions 3A to 4.

The Government's Ten Year Plan for Transport said that all concrete roads would be resurfaced with quieter surfacing materials by 2010 and in line with that we aim to resurface the road between Junctions 2 and 3A early in 2003 and between 9 and 10 in 2004/05.

Resurfacing the road between junctions 3A and 4 will be done after we have introduced the Active Traffic Management Project in 2004. I am afraid I cannot give you a precise date.

If you would like any further information, the Agency's Route Manager for the M42, David Nock, would be pleased to help. He can be contacted at the Agency's office at Broadway, Broad Street, Birmingham, B15 1BL or by telephone on 0121 678 8362.

Buses

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what regulations there are on the installation of *(a)* radio, *(b)* alarm and *(c)* CCTV systems into buses; [43963]

(2) what steps is he taking to prevent assaults against bus crews on public services; and if he will make a statement; [43960]

(3) what guidance is given to bus operators on offering employees professional counselling after they have suffered work-related violence; [43957]

(4) what requirements are placed on bus operators to keep in good order bus radio and alarm systems; [43962]

(5) what guidance he has issued on risk assessments to be carried out by bus operators on the risk of violence to bus crews. [43955]

Ms Keeble: The Secretary of State will shortly issue guidance to bus operators and other interested parties on reducing crime against passengers and crew, on buses and at stops and interchanges. This will update existing guidance on protecting bus crews and guidelines to operators on personal security on public transport. The new guidance will include advice on the installation, maintenance and repair of on-board equipment, which could help prevent crime. Professional counselling of employees is a matter for the operating companies.

Mobile Phones

Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what measures he plans to take to encourage greater awareness among the motoring public of the dangers of using mobile phones when driving. [44609]

Mr. Jamieson: To reinforce the message in the Highway Code, the Department is currently preparing new publicity to be launched this spring, as part of its "Think!" campaign, to raise awareness of the dangers of using mobile phones when driving.

Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he plans to review the legislative framework regarding the use of mobile phones when driving. [44608]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government are satisfied that current legislation provides the police with sufficient powers to enable them to prosecute irresponsible drivers. However, in accordance with our Road Safety Strategy "Tomorrow's roads—safer for everyone", we will keep the need for new legislation under review.

Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what assessment he has made of the dangers relating to driving when using *(a)* hand-held and *(b)* hands-free mobile phones; [44614]

(2) what research his Department is undertaking into the dangers relating to the use of mobile phones when driving. [44615]

Mr. Jamieson: The Department is satisfied that there is clear evidence of an increased risk of an accident when using any type of mobile phone while driving. International research has established that the increased risk of an accident arises from the distracting effects of holding a telephone conversation rather than from just driving with one hand on the wheel. Further research, commissioned within the Mobile Telecommunications and Health Research Programme towards the end of last year, is under way to measure the distraction from hands-free phones in comparison to other common driver distractions such as talking with passengers or tuning the radio.

BAC Limit

Dr. Ladyman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to change the legal BAC limit for motorists. [45267]

Mr. Jamieson: There are no plans to make a change in the foreseeable future. The limit will stay at 80 milligrams of alcohol per 100 millilitres of blood. The Government consulted on this in 1998 and waited upon proposals from Europe before considering the matter further. No firm legislation was forthcoming from the European Union although the European Commission produced a Recommendation which, among other measures, recommended community wide harmonisation of the legal blood alcohol content (BAC) limit for motorists at 50mg. We have now considered whether it would be desirable to make such a change and concluded that we should maintain emphasis on enforcement and publicity. In reaching this decision the Government were mindful of the fact that our penalties are among the toughest in Europe. But we remain committed to combating drink-driving and support more research and collaboration at a European level.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Criminal Damage

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the cost has been of criminal damage to her Department's buildings in each of the last four years. [44833]

Ms Hewitt: My Department does not keep a separate record of the cost of criminal damage to its buildings. The information requested could be produced only at disproportionate cost.

European Bank for Reconstruction and Development

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she last met *(a)* the President and *(b)* the UK Director of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. [40375]

Ms Hewitt: I have had no meetings with the President or UK Director of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

Post Office

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what powers she has to extend the Postcomm consultation on the opening of bulk mail delivery to competition beyond 15 March; and what the policies of other European Union member states are on the opening of bulk mail delivery to competition. [40554]

Mr. Alexander: The timetable for Postcomm's consultation on its document proposals for effective competition in UK postal services is a matter for Postcomm. On 13 March Postcomm announced that it had decided to extend—to Friday 12 April—the date for comments on its proposals.

The policies of other EU member states on market opening are a matter for them, providing they are acting in accordance with EU legislation.

Small Business Service

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry following the recommendation of the Small Business Council report, what plans the Government have for the reallocation of resources *(a)* to and *(b)* within the Small Business Service. [36978]

Nigel Griffiths: The Government, in their 2002 Spending Review will consider the level of resources, and broad internal allocation, for the SBS for the period from April 2003 to March 2006. The Spending Review will be informed by the Government's review of services for small business. The allocation of resources within the SBS for 2002–03 is being considered as the Business Plan for this year is developed.

Timber

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the companies from which her Department has obtained timber and wood products and the total spent with each firm over the last five years. [43410]

Ms Hewitt: All Departmental furniture is currently purchased through suppliers approved by the Office of Government Commerce. As part of their service level agreement with my Department the OGC undertake that all their approved suppliers comply with all relevant public procurement regulations and directives. More detailed information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Non-Governmental Organisations

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 8 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 592W, what information she collates on the funding of non-Governmental organisations by her Department, with particular reference to those operating on a regional basis; and if she will make a statement. [43917]

Ms Hewitt: My Department does not hold information centrally on the amount of funding it provides to the charitable or voluntary sectors by region.

Overall information on Government funding of the voluntary sector can be found in the Home Office research publication "Central Government Funding of Voluntary and Community Organisations 1982–83 to 1999–2000", copies of which are in the Libraries of the House. This includes information on the proportion of that funding provided by my Department.

Patent Office

Derek Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what targets she has set the Patent Office, for 2002–03. [45051]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I have set the Patent Office the following targets for 2002–03:

Patents

1. To increase performance year on year so that 90 per cent. of search reports are issued within six months of request by 2005–06.

2. To grant 90 per cent. of patents within three years of request.

Designs

3. To register 90 per cent. of correctly filed design applications, to which no substantive objections have been raised, within three months of the date of application.

Trade Marks

4. To register 90 per cent. of processed trade mark class applications, to which no substantive objections are raised or oppositions filed within nine months of application.

5. To reduce to an average of 39 weeks the time taken to issue a decision in trade mark inter partes cases once the case is ready.

Policy

6. To publish details of progress towards key milestones in UK and international policy development in the annual report and on our website.

Efficiency Targets

7. To increase output in relation to current expenditure by an average of at least 2 per cent. per annum over the period 1998–99 to 2002–03.

In addition to these key targets:

Customer Service Standards

To meet our customer service standards as shown in the annual report and on our website at www.patent.gov.uk

Finance

The Office will pay 100 per cent. of bills within 30 days of receipt of goods or services or a valid invoice, whichever is the later.

Questions delegated to the Chief Executive

The Chief Executive will reply within 10 working days to all letters from Members of Parliament delegated to her for reply.

Stolen Equipment

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 24 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 1071W, on stolen equipment, whether the computer equipment stolen from her Department was *(a)* new and unused and *(b)* used; and what was the nature of the data stored on such items in each case. [42639]

Ms Hewitt: The following table identifies whether the IT equipment identified as stolen from my Department in my previous answer was new or used. In addition and where known, the table also shows the nature of the data held on the stolen equipment.

Date	*Description*	*New/used*	*Data status*
1997			
20 May	Laptop	Used	Powerpoint presentation
22 May	Laptop	Used	Notes of meetings
6 June	Laptop	Used	Routine data
16 June	Laptop	Used	Routine notes
21 August	Modem	Used	Device does not store data
2 September	Modem	Used	Device does not store data
27 September	Laptop	Used	Non DTI equipment
14 November	Network analyser	Used	Non DTI equipment
8 December	Laptop	Used	Routine data
18 December	Psion	Used	Routine data
1998			
9 January	Monitor	Used	Device does not store data
19 January	PC base unit	Used	No DTI data
10 February	Laptop	New	Unused—no DTI data
31 March	PC base unit	Used	No DTI data
1 May	Server[1]	Used	Device does not store data; merely holds list of IP addresses in volatile memory
13 May	2 printers	Used	Devices do not store data
9 June	Laptop, printer	Used	No DTI data on laptop—printer does not store data
9 October	Laptop	used	Restricted data
13 November	Laptop	Used	No DTI data
1999			
23 February	Laptop	Used	No DTI data
16 March	Laptop	New	Unused—no DTI data
22 March	Printer	Used	Device does not store data
24 June	PC	Used	No protectively marked data
8 July	Psion	Used	Name and address
10 August	PC	New	Unused—no DTI data
21 October	Laptop	Used	Non DTI equipment
1 November	Laptop	Used	Non DTI equipment
3 November	Modem	Used	Device does not store data
29 November	Ethernet hub	Used	Device does not store data
13 December	PC	New	Unused—no DTI data
2000			
10 January	Laptop	Used	Non DTI equipment
26 July	2 laptops	Used	Non DTI equipment
14 March	Laptop	Used	Non DTI equipment
10 December	Flat screen	Used	Device does not store data
21 December	Flat screen	Used	Device does not store data
27 December	Flat screen	Used	Device does not store data

[1] The "server" was a PAC server. This device acts as an interface for web based browsing and held a look-up list of users who were permitted internet access in non-permanent memory (with a 24 hour back-up battery).

Unitas report for 1 April 2001 to January 2002	*New/used*	*Data status*
5 MURA laptops	3 new	No DTI data
	1 used	Test system; no live data present
	1 used	Data encrypted including temporary work areas
1 other laptop	—	Non DTI equipment
3 PCs	2 new	No DTI data
	1 used	No DTI data stored locally; all held on servers
Flat screen	Used	Device does not store data

Where the equipment is shown as not belonging to DTI, it would have held software and data belonging to the owning company rather than DTI.

Scientific and Engineering Institutions

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to review her Department's funding support to the scientific and engineering learned institutions; and if she will make a statement. [43580]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 19 March 2002]:* My Department provides an annual grant in aid to both the Royal Society and the Royal Academy of Engineering from the science budget, mainly for fellowships and international exchanges. This funding is reviewed, together with the other components of the science budget, at each Government Spending Review.

My officials also meet the Executive Secretaries and other members of staff of each body approximately quarterly to review progress in respect of grant in aid funded programmes, and to discuss other matters of common interest.

Broadly comparable arrangements cover funding to other learned societies from the Research Councils. However, the sums involved are small, and do not come directly through the science budget. Examples of these would include the Institute of Physics and the Royal Society of Chemistry, which receive funds from the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council for workshops, summer schools, and conferences.

My Department is also considering a programme of support for funding projects to be undertaken by the Engineering and Technology Board.

Engineers

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many chartered engineers there are in her Department; and what grade they hold. [43578]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 19 March 2002]:* The number of chartered engineers recorded on the Department's personnel database is listed by grade in the table.

Range	*Number*
Senior civil service	1
Range 11	3
Range 10	10
Range 9	3

The figures do not include any chartered engineers who may be working in the Department who are not currently in the database. This includes staff in the Construction Industry Directorate whose full records have yet to be transferred from their previous Department.

UK Exporters (North and Central America)

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many inquiries were dealt with from potential United Kingdom exporters by the trade desks at United Kingdom embassies in *(a)* the USA, *(b)* Canada and *(c)* Mexico in the last 12 months. [41923]

Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* Overseas posts in the USA, Canada and Mexico do not record information on the number of initial inquiries for their markets from potential British exporters. However a new information system will record such information in future.

Individual Voluntary Arrangements

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many individual voluntary arrangements commenced in 2001. [43647]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 19 March 2002]:* There were 6,298 individual voluntary arrangements commenced in 2001.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Public-private Partnerships (Consultants)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the total external spending by her Department was on public-private partnership consultants in each of the last four years; how many full-time equivalent consultants were employed over this period; how many billed consultancy days there were per year; what the implied average cost of each PPP consultant was; how many consultancy firms were used by her Department over this period; and if she will make a statement. [43198]

Hilary Benn: DFID has engaged consultants to help on the public-private partnership with the Commonwealth Development Corporation. Annual spending and the number of consultancy firms are given in the table. The other information requested is not obtainable without disproportionate effort.

£

	1997–98	1998–99	1999–2000	2000–01	2001–02[1]	Total
Legal advice (two firms)	9,867	650,029	169,398	210,348	81,542	1,121,184
Financial advice (one firm)	—	702,851	452,050	354,681	152,750	1,662,332
Tax advice (one firm)	—	75,788	93,888	121,495	86,833	378,004
Accountancy advice (one firm)	—	—	—	100,815	—	100,815
Totals (five firms)	9,867	1,428,668	715,336	787,339	321,125	3,262,335

[1] Provisional

Belize

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development for what reasons she has decided not to grant debt relief under the Commonwealth Debt Initiative to Belize; when this decision was taken; for what reasons Belize has not met the criteria under the Commonwealth Debt Initiative; if she has scheduled further discussions between her Department and the Government of Belize on this issue; and if she will make a statement. [43472]

Hilary Benn: Belize was considered for CDI under the three basic CDI criteria—commitment to pro-poor policies, promotion of responsive and accountable government; and application of macro-economic policies to encourage sustainable development. Although some progress had been made in implementing commitments in relation to the first two criteria, on the third criterion my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development shared the concerns set out in the IMF Article IV report from April 2001, particularly in terms of significant increases in external commercial debt levels and the widening public sector deficit. Against this background she concluded that Belize had not fulfilled the CDI criteria. There is provision for a further review later this year.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will place in the Library a copy of the correspondence sent by her Department on 26 June 2001 to KPMG on its study commissioned by her Department of the regulation of offshore financial services in Belize and the effect of tax exemptions on pro-poor programmes; and if she will place in the Library a copy of the reply from KPMG. [43470]

Hilary Benn: There was no correspondence. The exchange between DFID and KPMG referred to in my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development's earlier answer took place on the telephone.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development on what dates since 3 August 2001 officials from her Department have held meetings with the Government of Belize to discuss the issue of Commonwealth Debt Initiative and the effect of tax exemptions and public investment companies on pro-poor programmes. [43471]

Hilary Benn: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development met with Prime Minister Musa in October 2001 as referred to in her reply to question 29276. DFID officials also met with Prime Minister Musa and Minister Fonesca in November 2001. A range of issues, including CDI, were discussed on both occasions.

HIV/AIDS (Africa)

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans she has to increase spending on tackling HIV/AIDS in Africa. [40663]

Hilary Benn: DFID spent over £55 million in Africa on HIV/AIDS programmes and related health systems strengthening in the financial year 2000–01.

So far this year (2001–02), we have committed an additional £180 million to tackle HIV/AIDS in Africa. A further $200 million (£140 million approximately) has been pledged by the UK to the Global Health Fund to fight AIDS, TB and malaria, of which half is expected to be spent on HIV/AIDS work.

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much money her Department is spending on tackling HIV/AIDS in each country in Africa. [40664]

Hilary Benn: The table shows the amount of money spent by DFID on HIV/AIDS in Africa in 2000–01, and the level of additional commitment for 2001–02, broken down by country.

HIV/AIDS spend (pounds sterling)—includes health systems strengthening and reproductive health programme spend

£000

Country	Total spent 2000–01	Additional projects 2001–02
Africa regional	1,782	23,898
Angola	106	—
Central Africa regional	62	—
Congo, Democratic Republic	—	379
Ethiopia	183	300
Ghana	112	25,000
Kenya	678	3,509
Malawi	4,609	29,835
Mali	25	—
Mozambique	6,395	12,739
Namibia	31	—
Nigeria	653	52,959
Rwanda	—	3,000
Senegal	—	250
Sierra Leone	306	1,850
Somali Democratic Republic	5	—
South Africa, Republic of	2,803	15,218
Southern Africa	15	—
Southern Africa Development Coordination Committee	594	600
Swaziland	72	—
Tanzania	4,647	—
Togo	173	—
Uganda	324	686
Zambia	28,219	169
Zimbabwe	3,298	12,915
Total	55,092	183,307

These figures represent direct project/programme costs and do not include our financial support to NGOs and international institutions such as UNAIDS and WHO, in support of HIV/AIDS work across Africa.

Health Strategies

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the effectiveness of intervention strategies in reducing maternal mortality and morbidity in developing countries. [43998]

Hilary Benn: Making an effective contribution to the Millennium Development Goal of reducing maternal mortality by three quarters between 1990 and 2015 is a key objective in my Department's Public Service Agreement.

WHO are the lead international agency and we are supporting their work to determine the most successful and cost-effective safe motherhood packages. DFID is funding research designed to identify the most effective interventions to help reduce maternal mortality and morbidity in the developing world, including trials of vitamin A supplementation and magnesium sulphate for pre-eclampsia. We are also looking to draw lessons from the large safer motherhood programmes we support in Nepal, Malawi, Kenya, Pakistan and Bolivia.

Evidence to date indicates that increasing and sustaining the quality of midwifery and obstetric services is very likely to result in reduced maternal mortality. Evidence also shows that strengthening health systems is also a key prerequisite for improving safe motherhood. DFID has committed over £1 billion to this work since 1997.

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps she takes to *(a)* analyse the methods and policies by which low income countries achieve good health outcomes in life expectancy and child mortality and *(b)* use these countries and the methodology they apply to health policy when formulating health strategies for other developing countries. [43999]

Hilary Benn: DFID attaches great importance to learning and sharing lessons form successful strategies in developing countries to improve health, particularly of the poor. DFID's ability to feed country experience into international policy making, using our network of in-country health experts, is widely recognised as one of its institutional strengths. We are further contributing to the international effort by:

- strengthening WHO's capacity to draw upon country level experience, in order to set standards and disseminate best practice;
- supporting knowledge programmes which examine the effectiveness of interventions and disseminate best practice; and
- supporting the recent work of the Commission on Macroeconomics and Health, which has assessed the global evidence of the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of interventions to improve health.

Lessons learned as a result of these efforts are used to help developing countries develop and refine their own multi-sectoral national programmes and plans for better health and poverty reduction. This is increasingly done in the context of Sector Wide Approaches and Poverty Reduction Strategies.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

CERRIE

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) if she will list the members of the Working Group established to take forward the Consultative Exercise on Radiation Risk from Interval Emitters; what the remit of CERRIE is; what resources are available to support CERRIE's work; and whether CERRIE meetings are held in public; [15575]

(2) when she expects to reply to written question 15575 on the establishment of CERRIE. [34541]

Mr. Meacher: The membership of the Committee Examining Radiation Risks of Internal Emitters (CERRIE), set up under the auspices of the Committee on the Medical Aspects of Radiation in the Environment (COMARE), has recently been finalized and is:

Chairman:

Professor Dudley Goodhead, MRC Radiation and Genome Stability Unit

Members:

Mr. Richard Bramhall, The Low Level Radiation Campaign

Dr. Chris Busby, Green Audit

Dr. Roger Cox, National Radiological Protection Board

Dr. Philip Day, University of Manchester

Professor Sarah Darby, ICRF Cancer Epidemiology Unit, University of Oxford

Dr. John Harrison, National Radiological Protection Board

Dr. Colin Muirhead, National Radiological Protection Board

Mr. Pete Roche, Greenpeace UK

Professor Jack Simmons, University of Westminster

Dr. Richard Wakeford, British Nuclear Fuels Ltd.

Professor Eric Wright, Ninewells Medical School, Dundee.

The Chairman of COMARE, Professor Bryn Bridges, will attend the meetings as an observer, as will officials from the Department of Health and DEFRA.

The remit of CERRIE is, "To consider the present risk models for radiation and health that apply to exposure to radiation from internal radionuclides in the light of recent studies and any further research that might be needed."

Consultants have been appointed to provide CERRIE with an independent secretariat. Other resources, such as accommodation etc, will be provided by the two sponsoring Departments, DEFRA and DH.

CERRIE's meetings are not held in public.

Environment Agency

Mr. Pond: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what progress has been made towards the completion of the first five-yearly Financial, Management and Policy Review of the Environment Agency. [45324]

Mr. Meacher: I am pleased to announce that the Department is today publishing the second and final stage of this review.

The findings of the review establish a basis for a new and strategic relationship between the Agency and its Sponsors; more effective business planning and performance review;

a sharpening of efficiency; and a wide range of actions by both the Agency and its Sponsors towards the improved delivery of environmental functions.

A copy of the report has been placed in the Library of the House.

Easter Eggs

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions she has had with the confectionery manufacturing industry regarding the amount of packaging waste generated by Easter eggs; and if she will make a statement. [43214]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 14 March 2001]:* None. The requirements of the Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging Waste) Regulations 1997 (as amended) apply to all packaging. The incentives to minimise and reuse packaging and the targets set for the recovery and recycling of packaging waste apply throughout the year.

Sellafield

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on what dates, and where, *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials in her Department have met the Irish Government to discuss the British Nuclear Fuels plant at Sellafield since 5 October 2001; and which Ministers and which Irish Government departments were involved in each meeting. [43473]

Margaret Beckett: Ministers and officials have been involved in a number of meetings since 5 October with Irish Ministers and officials at which the British Nuclear Fuel Plant at Sellafield was discussed, either as the main subject of the meeting, or as part of a wider agenda. The meetings, venues, and participants, were as follows:

Ministers

25 February 2002—British Irish Council meeting (Edinburgh, Scotland)—Michael Meacher, (Minister for the Environment) (Chair), Noel Dempsey TD (Minister for the Environment and Local Government, Ireland), and Joe Jacob TD (Minister of State, Department of Public Enterprise, Ireland)—plus Ministers from Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, the Isle of Man, Jersey and Guernsey. 4 March 2002—Environment Council (Brussels, Belgium)—Margaret Beckett, (Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs), Michael Meacher, (Minister for the Environment), Noel Dempsey TD (Minister for the Environment and Local Government, Ireland).

Officials

5 October 2001—OSPAR Arbitration meeting (London)—DEFRA, Other Government Departments, and Department of Public Enterprise (Ireland)

19 and 20 November—International Tribunal on the Law of the Sea (ITLOS) Hearing (Hamburg, Germany)—DEFRA, Other Government Departments, Department of Public Enterprise (Ireland) and Radiological Protection Institute of Ireland (Ireland)

11 December 2001—Compliance with ITLOS Provisional Measures (Dublin, Ireland)—DEFRA, Other Government Departments, and Department of Public Enterprise (Ireland) and Radiological Protection Institute of Ireland.

7 February 2002—British Irish Council pre-meeting (London)—DEFRA, Devolved Administrations, Department of Public Enterprise (Ireland), Isle of Man Government

15 February 2002—UK Ireland Contact Group on Radioactivity (London)—DEFRA, Other Government Departments, Devolved Administrations, Department of Public Enterprise (Ireland), Radiological Protection Institute of Ireland (Ireland), and the Isle of Man Government. This particular group of officials meets every six months.

15 February 2002—Discussion of draft Irish/Isle of Man paper on "Sellafield and Radioactive Waste" (London)—DEFRA, Other Government Departments, Devolved Administrations, Department of Public Enterprise (Ireland), Radiological Protection Institute of Ireland, and the Isle of Man Government.

Radioactive Waste (Irish Sea)

Colin Burgon: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what amount of radioactive waste was discharged into the Irish Sea, broken down between each radionuclide, in each year since 1979. [29244]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 22 January 2002]:* Annual radioactive discharge data, for nuclear sites in the UK, for the years in question, are contained in the following Government reports:

Aquatic Environment Monitoring Report, Radioactivity in Surface and Coastal Waters of the British Isles, MAFF. Annual Report, 1977–94

Radioactivity in Food and the Environment, Food Standards Agency and Scottish Environment Protection Agency. Annual publication, 1995–2001.

Copies of these publications can be found in the Library of the House.

Data, in the form requested, from these reports (updated and amplified from other sources for certain years and radionuclides) are reproduced in the tables, copies of which have been placed in the Library of the House. The timespans over which radionuclides have been measured at different contributory nuclear sites varies depending upon the discharge authorisations issued by the relevant UK regulator.

Copies of these publications can be found in the Library of the House.

Data, in the form requested, from these reports (updated and amplified from other sources for certain years and radionuclides) are reproduced in the tables. The timespans over which radionuclides have been measured at different contributory nuclear sites varies depending upon the discharge authorisations issued by the relevant UK regulator.

Fluoride

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs from which countries the UK imports fluoride. [42975]

Nigel Griffiths: I have been asked to reply.

According to information compiled by HM Customs and Excise, UK imported fluorides[1] from Germany, Spain, Sweden, Canada, Belgium, France, Japan, Italy, China, Netherlands, Brazil, India, Hong Kong, Irish Republic, Czech Republic, Slovenia, Norway and South Korea.

Note:

[1] Fluorides are defined by codes 282611, 282612 and 282619 of the Harmonised System.

Illegal Meat Imports

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what has been the role of her Department in checks on illegal meat imports at coastal ports in the last two years. [44212]

Margaret Beckett: The responsibility for sea ports lies with the local/port-health authority and not with DEFRA. Although we do have a presence in most ports and offer advice and support to the local authorities, it is their function to quality assure legitimate trade and to identify illegal imports.

I am chairing a high level forum on Thursday 21 March 2002 involving all stakeholders, to consider the next steps for intensifying our efforts and to agree further priorities and action. A number of other Government Departments and agencies plus the enforcement bodies will be participating.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 12 March, ref. 38842, on which dates members of the State Veterinary Service were involved in joint exercises at Heathrow. [44230]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 18 March 2002]:* Since April 2001, members of the State Veterinary Service have been involved in nine joint exercises at Heathrow. Dates include the 8, 15 and 29 April, 24 June, 30 October, 9 November 2001 and 12, 14 and 17 February 2002.

Winter Wheat/Winter Barley

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will estimate the total amount of sowings of *(a)* winter wheat and *(b)* winter barley for the year ending 2001; and what the comparable figures were for 2000. [44103]

Mr. Morley: The December 2001 survey of agriculture results for England were published on 7 March 2002 in DEFRA Statistics News Release 11/02 and are available on the DEFRA website at www.defra.gov.uk. Estimates for the areas of wheat and barley sown by 3 December 2001 are detailed in the table together with comparable figures for December 2000.

thousand hectares

	1 December 2000	*3 December 2001*	*Percentage change[1] December 2001–December 2000*
Wheat sown by survey date	1,271	1,868	+47.0
Barley sown by survey date	390	486	+24.4

[1] Based on unrounded figures.

Notes:

1. Includes estimates for minor holdings.
2. For 2000, areas sown by 1 December were affected by poor drilling conditions caused by wet weather.

* Based on unrounded figures

Fish Quotas (Shetland and Orkney)

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the total amount expended by the Shetland and Orkney Islands councils annually for the purchase of fish quotas was from 1995 to 2002. [44099]

Mr. Morley: I understand no moneys have been expended by the Shetland Islands council on the purchase of fish quotas but that £2 million was spent on quota purchase in 1998 by Shetland Leasing and Property Ltd. (SLAP), using moneys lent by Shetland Development Trust, and the Orkney Islands council spent £1.5 million in 1999.

Beam Trawling

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the restrictions are on the frequency with which a seabed may be beam trawled; and how such restrictions are enforced. [43880]

Mr. Morley: There are no restrictions on the frequency with which a seabed may be beam trawled.

Large beam trawls are prohibited within 12 miles of the coasts of the United Kingdom and Ireland under EC Fisheries Technical Regulations. Further restrictions have been placed on the use of beam trawlers by some of the 12 Sea Fisheries Committees who are responsible for managing fishing in the 0-six mile zone around England and Wales.

Quarantine Kennels

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will introduce statutory standards for animal quarantine kennels. [44258]

Mr. Morley: Under the Animal Health Act 1981 and the Rabies (Importation of Dogs, Cats and Other Mammals) Order 1974 (as amended) animal quarantine kennels are regulated with regard to disease security and isolation. There are standard requirements for the design, construction, operation and management of authorised quarantine premises, and it is the responsibility of the Veterinary Superintendent of the premises to ensure that these standards are met, and also to ensure the safe custody and strict isolation of each animal throughout its period of quarantine.

Currently, all approved quarantine premises have undertaken to abide by a Voluntary Code of Practice on the Welfare of Dogs and Cats in Quarantine Premises. But we are determined to improve the welfare standards of animals in quarantine. The Animal Health (Amendment) Act 1998 gives us the power to set statutory welfare standards in quarantine premises. In 2000 we consulted on a draft order which contained, among other things, such statutory welfare standards.

Work on the draft order was suspended during 2001 due to foot and mouth disease. We hope to introduce the legislation later this year.

Agrimonetary Compensation

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 8 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 741W, on

agrimonetary compensation, how much compensation has been paid to each county in each year since 1997. [43320]

Mr. Morley: The table sets out agrimonetary expenditure between 1997 and 2001, at county level.

£

	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
Avon	46,582.90	613,088.12	422,405.20	1,830,896.78	1,924,263.55
Bedfordshire	25,290.49	293,235.94	206,457.71	3,839,765.31	1,259,794.09
Berkshire	28,809.38	400,592.56	260,462.17	2,511,894.50	1,178,826.26
Buckinghamshire	100,094.62	1,255,101.58	853,874.65	4,388,599.35	2,092,800.55
Cambridgeshire	23,892.00	551,524.65	246,919.03	10,820,475.59	3,058,492.15
Cheshire	103,980.30	593,821.65	442,161.92	3,384,855.17	5,352,276.59
Cleveland	19,357.65	240,278.79	179,040.27	1,048,734.42	631,118.43
Cornwall	312,282.84	4,295,307.33	2,742,830.25	6,739,851.65	6,119,660.05
Cumbria	1,581,523.72	11,521,556.80	11,466,448.01	12,384,974.29	12,339,555.73
Derbyshire	254,718.03	2,502,485.44	1,905,839.31	4,463,025.68	4,020,015.53
Devonshire	962,388.98	9,361,751.91	7,646,831.69	13,638,895.19	12,607,153.67
Dorset	104,554.91	1,135,612.92	911,914.98	5,044,705.36	4,203,644.04
Durham	365,091.13	3,383,218.90	2,707,639.08	5,051,444.27	3,048,254.02
East Sussex	137,904.52	1,252,188.03	1,093,737.33	3,068,280.67	1,777,719.86
Essex	33,215.82	478,784.80	279,345.86	10,755,207.25	3,281,451.08
Gloucestershire	178,772.97	1,873,157.21	1,501,465.61	6,659,059.08	3,600,129.59
Greater London	704.01	73,983.78	13,022.03	288,208.92	125,517.66
Greater Manchester	41,634.29	356,106.11	163,950.72	630,903.23	531,791.45
Hampshire	70,985.24	1,146,950.89	579,784.76	7,306,807.10	2,956,214.06
Hereford and Worcester	568,266.71	4,796,637.65	4,390,840.36	9,734,386.41	5,869,263.64
Hertfordshire	19,930.95	408,442.43	175,598.11	4,001,736.34	1,354,289.14
Humberside	59,690.26	1,105,624.06	560,294.56	11,029,835.20	3,054,684.10
Isle of Wight	15,821.16	228,109.70	130,355.30	720,196.43	405,029.93
Kent	241,348.70	1,902,805.26	1,730,036.63	8,406,074.77	3,094,404.04
Lancashire	447,736.02	3,228,481.79	3,326,149.41	4,744,869.02	5,548,309.02
Leicestershire	167,956.70	1,632,267.42	1,391,865.92	7,598,278.46	3,927,548.61
Lincolnshire	101,037.07	1,775,789.62	892,910.26	19,312,091.10	6,052,915.42
Merseyside	2,935.16	51,534.61	23,059.98	549,660.68	287,127.35
Norfolk	70,955.48	1,510,377.40	656,988.66	12,750,388.93	4,465,805.66
North Yorkshire	1,098,985.24	8,681,985.38	8,255,463.12	19,806,227.51	11,203,839.86
Northamptonshire	170,684.41	1,600,108.65	1,385,136.16	8,059,386.46	3,058,931.74
Northumberland	879,434.05	8,336,908.10	6,586,422.68	10,900,145.61	6,227,342.15
Nottinghamshire	43,231.52	629,141.42	387,537.85	5,903,619.88	1,537,998.45
Oxfordshire	94,797.97	1,162,121.82	800,669.71	8,022,062.71	3,250,752.69
Scilly Isles	0.00	1,508.47	238.26	632.36	712.97
Shropshire	450,045.29	2,589,329.24	2,091,822.20	8,370,680.73	6,652,592.24
Somerset	331,143.35	3,305,963.81	2,585,044.47	6,620,751.59	6,560,058.18
South Yorkshire	40,175.04	595,423.53	344,468.63	2,849,217.26	1,361,540.11
Staffordshire	134,429.01	1,140,809.91	752,202.20	4,594,325.61	4,218,938.86
Suffolk	33,567.51	695,129.84	344,544.71	10,444,578.42	3,379,338.28
Surrey	30,549.37	543,349.49	259,523.94	1,245,831.43	815,929.17
Tyne and Wear	3,740.64	152,949.68	64,707.76	609,647.24	298,146.66
Warwickshire	147,950.13	1,318,825.80	1,199,911.67	5,662,022.73	2,480,183.29
West Midlands	10,550.20	184,153.27	89,202.93	511,241.44	495,061.73
West Sussex	56,625.96	755,687.75	444,876.68	3,375,760.17	1,787,853.01
West Yorkshire	123,095.24	1,403,953.16	956,780.51	2,460,213.00	1,899,087.59
Wiltshire	95,682.95	1,516,854.72	871,506.70	8,270,806.18	4,829,054.65
Total	9,832,149.89	92,583,021.39	74,322,289.95	290,411,251.48	164,225,416.90

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she received *(a)* the report of the Rural Task Force and *(b)* Lord Haskins' report on rural recovery after foot and mouth disease. [9919]

Margaret Beckett: I saw the report of the Rural Task Force which was chaired by my right hon. Friend, the Minister of State for Rural Affairs on 15 October immediately after the report had been completed. My noble Friend, the Lord Haskins, sent me a near-final draft of his report on 2 October, but he made some subsequent amendments; the report as printed was also completed on 15 October. The earliest mutually acceptable date for publication was 18 October.

Bio-security

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures have been taken to improve bio-security at ports to ensure that foot and mouth disease cannot enter the UK. [43458]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 15 March 2002]:* Since April last year initiatives on illegal imports have been co-ordinated by officials in DEFRA, working closely with other Departments such as HM Customs and Excise and Food Standards Agency, as well as the local authorities and port health authorities who are responsible for controls at ports and airports. This joint approach had led to more effective information sharing and improved targeting of activity at ports and airports.

DEFRA is also holding a high level forum on 21 March 2002 involving all stakeholders, to consider the next steps for intensifying our efforts and to agree further priorities and action.

Responsibility for checks on imports of meat and meat products (which might be coming from countries with FMD) are the responsibility of the local or port health authority and it is for the appropriate local authority to deploy staff according to the volume and nature of products imported.

Herd Size

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will estimate the size of the national *(a)* dairy herd, *(b)* beef herd, *(c)* pig breeding herd, *(d)* fattening pig herd, *(e)* sheep flock and *(f)* lamb flock under one year old for the year ending 2001; and what the figures were for 2000. [44102]

Mr. Morley: The December 2001 Survey of Agriculture Results for England were published on 7 March 2002 in Statistics News Release 11/02 and are available on the DEFRA website at www.defra.gov.uk. Estimates for the dairy and beef herd, the pig breeding and fattening herds and the sheep and lamb flocks are detailed in the table with comparable figures for 2000.

Thousand head

Herd[1]	*December 2000*	*December 2001*	*Percentage change*[2] *December 2001/ December 2000*
Dairy herd	1,581	1,439	–9.0
Beef herd	753	666	–11.5
Pig breeding herd	475	440	–7.4
Fattening pig herd	4,398	4,129	–6.1
Sheep breeding flock	8,188	6,698	–18.2
Lamb flock under 1 year[3]	3,790	3,241	–14.5

[1] Includes estimates for minor holdings.

[2] Based on unrounded figures.

[3] Excludes ewe lambs already put to the lamb which are already included in the figures for the breeding flock.

Agricultural Shows

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she and her Ministers have to visit agricultural shows in 2002. [34109]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 7 February 2002]:* My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State and the DEFRA ministerial team will be visiting a range of agricultural shows during 2002 and a programme of visits is being drawn up.

Common Land

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will implement regulations governing rights of vehicular access over common land and limiting the amount a common land freeholder can charge for access rights. [43881]

Alun Michael: The Government are currently considering the many responses made during the public consultation exercise on the regulations undertaken last year. We hope to be in a position to lay draft regulations for England before Parliament soon.

Right of Access Maps

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will publish the draft Right of Access maps for the lower north-west and the south-east of England as they are completed. [43462]

Alun Michael: Draft maps of open country and registered common land for land in the south-east and lower-north west mapping regions were issued by the Countryside Agency in November 2001, with a deadline for comments of 11 February 2002. The Agency will consider the representations which it has received about the draft maps before publishing provisional maps later this year. When the provisional maps are published, anyone with an interest in land may appeal to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State against its inclusion on a provisional map. When any appeals have been dealt with the Countryside Agency will issue a conclusive map. I have indicated that we will consider the case for bringing the right of access into force on a regional basis in the light of progress in the first two regions. I shall make an announcement soon.

Rural Affairs

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the total cost is of the "Your Countryside, You're Welcome" *(a)* launch and *(b)* campaign. [43082]

Alun Michael: Rather than a Government advertising campaign, the "Your Countryside, You're Welcome" campaign was owned by some 50 organisations who worked as partners with DEFRA, DCMS, the Countryside Agency and the English Tourism Council. Over 100 other organisations were supportive or involved in a variety of ways. No costs can be ascribed to their time and effort, nor to the high level of activity at local and regional level around the country which has helped to re-engage urban and rural interest in a positive way.

The total cost for the PR activity to support the "Your Countryside, You're Welcome" campaign was £209,000 plus VAT.

This covered all fees and expenses incurred on the campaign including the launch event on 28 January, the public event in Leicester Square on 10 March, and the *Daily Mirror* promotion in the week commencing 11 March.

Sustainability

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the Government's definition of sustainability. [43575]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 19 March 2002]:* There are a number of definitions of sustainable development. The Government's sustainable development strategy—"A

better quality of life" (Cm 4345)—defines it as "ensuring a better quality of life for everyone, now and for generations to come".

Like other definitions of sustainable development, the Government's approach emphasises the need to try to reconcile economic, social and environmental objectives and look for the best alternative that achieves this.

The Government's latest report on sustainable development—"Achieving a better quality of life 2001"—was published on 13 March 2002, and can be found via http://www.sustainable-development.gov.uk.

Stolen Equipment

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the answer of 23 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 926–27W, on stolen equipment, whether the computer equipment stolen from her Department was *(a)* new and unused and *(b)* used; and what was the nature of the data stored on such items in each case. [42645]

Mr. Morley: Further to the details I gave the right hon. Member on 23 January 2002, the Department's records show details of the following items of stolen computer equipment that were either new and unused or used.

Data stored on the stolen computer equipment relates to MAFF/DEFRA's business. It is not possible to be more precise.

Thefts of IT equipment since 1 May 1997

Thefts	*Number*	*Items stolen*	*Category*
1997			
3 May	20	PC	Used
6 May	1	PC	Used
9 June	1	Laptop	Used
1 August	2	PC	New and unused
11 August	1	Laptop	New and unused
9 September	1	PC	New and unused
30 September	1	PC	Used
2 October	1	Laptop	Used
1998			
12 January	2	Laptops	Used
21 June	1	Laptop	Used
5 September	1	Laptop	Used
21 September	2	Laptops	Used
1999			
1 February	1	Laptop, zip and mouse	Used
23 February	2	Central processing units	Used
26 March	2	PCs, 8 copies of software and 2 ethernet cards	Used
14 April	1	Laptop	Used
19 April	1	Psion organiser	Used
18 August	1	Laptop	New and unused
20 September	1	Laptop	Used
28 October	1	PC and printer	Used
15 November	1	Laptop	Used
22 November	1	Laptop	Used
20 December	1	Laptop	Used
2000			
28 January	1	Laptop	Used
13 February	1	PC and printer	Used
27 February	1	Laptop and floppy disk drive	Used
21 March	1	Psion organiser	New and unused
28 March	1	Psion 5 MX	Used
05 April	1	Laptop and mobile printer	Used
16 May	29	Processors (microchips) and 1 Laptop	Used
24 May	1	Laptop	Used

Thefts of IT equipment since 1 May 1997

Thefts	*Number*	*Items stolen*	*Category*
26 May	1	Laptop, Printer and Accessories	Used
7 July	3	2 PCs and 1 laptop	Used
19 July	4	Processors (microchips)	Used
20 July	1	PC and modem	Used
2 August	1	Laptop, 1 printer and 1 printer lead	Used
7 August	3	PCs	Used
17 August	1	Processor (microchips)	Used
11 September	1	Laptop, mouse and connections	Used
12 October	1	Modem card	Used
30 October	1	Laptop	Used
20 November	1	Laptop, 1 floppy disc and CD drive	Used
29 November	3	Processors (microchips)	Used
2001			
1 February	1	Laptop	Used
6 February	2	Laptops	Used
8 February	1	Laptop	Used
12 February	2	Laptops	New and unused
12 March	2	PC and printer	Used
21 March	1	Laptop	Used
2 April	1	Laptop	Used
9 May	2	DIM chips	New and unused
20 May	1	Keyboard	Used
2 July	1	PC	Used
2 August	1	Chips (microchips)	Used
16 August	1	Laptop plus 1 modem and carry case	Used
14 September	1	Laptop	Used
28 September	1	Laptop	Used
1 October	1	Laptop	Used
5 October	1	Laptop	Used
21 November	1	Laptop and 1 Projector	Used
19 December	2	Printers	Used
2002			
8 January	12	PCs	Used

Ministerial Transport

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she last used the railway service in connection with her official duties; what station she left from and what was the destination; and whether it is her intention to make greater use of the railways in future. [28100]

Mr. Morley: My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State last used the railway service in connection with her official duties on 22 January, travelling on the Eurostar service from Brussels to Waterloo. My right hon. Friend will continue to use the railway service where appropriate.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Article 13 Action Programme

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the *(a)* composition and *(b)* mission of the article 13 action programme; when it will meet; and what parliamentary scrutiny there will be of its activities. [39646]

Ms Hewitt: I have been asked to reply.

The Article 13 action programme is an activity of the European Community. It was agreed under Article 13 of the European Community Treaty on 27 November 2000, and will run until 2006.

The Programme supports the development of practical solutions to combat discrimination on grounds of racial and ethnic origin, disability, age, religion and belief and sexual orientation. The programme encourages the exchange of best practice on policies and practices which have been shown to work well in combating discrimination across Europe.

The day to day running of the programme is the responsibility of the European Commission under the direction of a Management Committee comprising of representatives of all member states including the United Kingdom. The Committee meets three or four times a year to provide the necessary guidance to the Commission. An evaluation of the programme will be reported to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. A copy of the evaluation report will be placed in the Libraries of the House once available.

Public Bodies (Chairman)

Mr. Forth: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the appointments made by his Department since 1 May 1997 of chairmen of *(a)* non-departmental public bodies, *(b)* commissions, *(c)* inquiries, *(d)* agencies and *(e)* task forces; and if he will list their (i) term of office, (ii) salary and (iii) known political affiliation (A) past and (B) present. [33882]

Mr. Bradshaw: *(a)* Foreign and Commonwealth Office has 10 Non departmental public bodies. Chairpersons appointed since 1 May 1997 are as follows:

Sir Frank Berman, Chairman, Diplomatic Service Appeals Board

(i) Term of office: three years (appointed November 2001)

(ii) Salary: nil

Baroness Helena Kennedy QC, Chair, British Council

(i) Term of office: three years (Appointed one term August 1999 to July 2001 re-appointed for a second term August 2001–July 04)

(ii) Salary: honorarium 35,000 perannum (agreed by order of the Charity Commissioners)

Sir Andrew Wood KCMG, Chairman, Britain-Russia Centre

(i) Term of office: three years (Appointed November 2000)

(ii) Salary: nil

Mr. Ernie Ross MP, Chairman, Westminster Foundation for Democracy

(i) Term of office: one year (July 1997 and yearly reappointment thereafter)

(ii) Salary: nil

Lady Suzanne Warner, Chair, Wilton Park Academic Council

(i) Term of office: two years (first appointment December 1999 reappointed December 2001).

(ii) Salary: nil

Mr. Jonathan Taylor, Chairman, Marshall Aid Commemoration Commission

(i) Term of office: three years (appointed April 2000)

(ii) Salary: nil

Right hon. Lord Radice, Chairman, British Association for Central and Eastern Europe

(i) Term of office: three years (reappointed October 2000)

(ii) Salary: nil

Sir Ewen Fergusson, Chairman, Government Hospitality Advisory Committee for the Purchase of Wine

(i) Term of office: five years (appointed April 1998)

(ii) Salary: nil

Mr. David Brewer, Chairman, Great Britain China Centre

(i) Term of office: three years (first appointment October 1997, reappointed October 2000)

(ii) Salary: nil

(b) Commissions

Mr. Arthur Wheeler Chairman, Foreign Compensation Commission

(i) Term of office: one year (last appointed December 2001)

(ii) Salary: nil.

Information on Political affiliation is not available.

Territorial Forces

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many members of staff of his Department are members of the Territorial forces; and if he has a strategy to encourage members of staff to become members of the Territorial forces. [44068]

Mr. Bradshaw: The number of staff in the FCO who are members of the territorial forces is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

The FCO supports staff who wish to serve in the reserve forces and allows them paid time off work to take part in these activities.

Civil Servants (Education)

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proportion of recruits to his Department came from Oxford and Cambridge in *(a)* the last year for which figures are available and *(b)* for the 10 preceding years. [43857]

Mr. Bradshaw: The last published figures for 2000 are in the 2001 Departmental report. The table shows the percentage recruited from Oxbridge for 2000–1990.

	Policy	*Operational*
2000	57	4
1999	44	4
1998	65	7
1997	48	6
1996	72	12
1995	57	[1]—
1994	71	[1]—
1993	71	[1]—
1992	79	[1]—
1991	52	[1]—
1990	67	[1]—

[1] Not collected pre-1996

Civil Servants

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will set out for each Civil Service grade within his *(a)* Department and *(b)* Department's executive agencies the (i) total number of staff employed, (ii) number aged (A) 16 to 25, (B) 26 to 35, (C) 36 to 45, (D) 46 to 60 and (E) over the age of 60 years, (iii) number of registered disabled and (iv) number of ethnic minorities. [39148]

Mr. Bradshaw: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given on 13 March 2002 by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary for the Cabinet Office, *Official Report*, column 1071W.

Special Advisers

Mr. Collins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on how many occasions since 1 May 1997 *(a)* departmental and *(b)* non-departmental special advisers have travelled abroad in an official capacity; and if he will list the total cost, including (i) travel, (ii) accommodation and (iii) subsistence allowance, for each occasion. [37980]

Mr. MacShane *[holding answer 27 February, 2002]:* Between 1 April 2000 and 31 March 2001, special advisers in my Department travelled abroad in an official capacity on eight occasions, at an average cost of £3,039.04 per trip. Information for the period 2 May 1997 to 31 March 2000 is already in the public domain. All travel by special advisers is undertaken in accordance with the rules set out in the ministerial code, and the civil service management code.

Council Proposal 569

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the legal basis for Council proposal Com (2001) 569. [39648]

Mr. Bradshaw: The legal base of proposal 569 was article 308 of the EU treaty. The proposal was adopted as a regulation (2580–2001) on 27 December 2001. The legal basis of the regulation was articles 60, 301 and 308 of the EU treaty.

The Government welcome this regulation as an integral part of the EU's measures to implement UNSCR 1373(2001). The UK strongly supported the timely adoption of UNSCR 1373 (2001) as a vital measure in the global campaign against terrorism. The regulation will assist in ensuring full compliance within the EU with the provisions of UNSCR 1373(2001). The Government consider the immediate freezing of assets to prevent their dissipation an essential tool in the fight against terrorism. The regulation does not limit the UK's ability to take autonomous measures against other individuals that we deem to be linked to terrorism.

External Contracts

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he will list the 30 largest contracts awarded by his Department from *(a)* May 1997 to April 1998, *(b)* May 1998 to April 1999, *(c)* May 1999 to April 2000, *(d)* May 2000 to April 2001 and *(e)* May 2001 to the latest date, indicating in each case the values of the contracts and the companies with which the contracts were placed; [38749]

(2) which non-accounting and non-information technology external organisations which previously held contracts with his Department *(a)* won new contracts at the culmination of the existing contracts and *(b)* won new contracts after a period of inactivity with his Department in each of the past five years. [38748]

Mr. MacShane *[holding answer 28 February, 2002]:* This information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Parental Leave Directive

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what estimate he has made of the *(a)* financial costs and *(b)* benefits to his Department of the Parental Leave Directive. [42478]

Mr. Bradshaw: No central records are kept of parental leave taken and so no estimates are readily available of the likely financial costs to the FCO of the introduction of the Parental Leave Directive. This information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office is committed to assisting its employees to achieve a better balance between home and work life. The entitlement to parental leave is another element of this.

West Bank

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what aid will be given to help rebuild settlements destroyed on the West Bank; and if he will make a statement. [43220]

Mr. Bradshaw: Through our bilateral aid programme, the European Union and UNWRA we support the short term needs of the Palestinian Authority. It is also critical to address our long-term goal of Palestinian nation building in parallel. The aim of our development assistance programme in the West Bank and Gaza Strip is to help develop the building blocks which will support the creation of a viable Palestinian state. We aim to provide a broad range of technical assistance designed to promote peace, stability and economic and social development. UK bilateral assistance is planned at £14 million this year. In 2001 the UK contributed £25 million to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency to support vulnerable Palestinian refugee communities. The Government have no specific plans to give aid to rebuild Palestinian towns in the West Bank.

Israel

Richard Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of Israel about Palestinian child detainees held in Israeli prisons and detention centres. [43484]

Mr. Bradshaw: Our embassy in Tel Aviv has raised with the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs the case of Sausan Abu Turki, a 14-year-old Palestinian girl arrested in late 2001 for allegedly attacking an Israel Defence Force officer, whom we understand the Israeli authorities continue to hold without charge. The embassy also supports the efforts of human rights NGOs and the EU in raising specific cases of alleged abuse against minors by the Israeli authorities.

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the role of the United Nations in securing peace in Israel. [43554]

Mr. Bradshaw: United Nations Security Resolutions 242 and 338 remain the basis for a just and lasting settlement in the middle east. We welcome the adoption of UNSCR 1397 on 12 March which sets out the vision of two states within secure and recognised borders. It demands an immediate cessation of all acts of violence and calls on both leaders to co-operate in the implementation of the Tenet plan and Mitchell Committee recommendations with the aim of resuming negotiations on a political settlement.

We support the efforts of UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan and UN Special Co-ordinator Terje Rod Larsen.

Iraq

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many times officials from his Department have had contact with Iraqi Government officials in *(a)* the last month, *(b)* the last three months and *(c)* the last six months. [44292]

Mr. Bradshaw: During the periods specified, there have been *(a)* 0 *(b)* 3 and *(c)* 5 meetings between officials from my Department and Iraqi Government officials.

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what evidence he has received linking Iraq to the New York terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. [44293]

Mr. Bradshaw: As we have consistently made clear, we have no reason to believe Iraq was involved in the September 11 terrorist attacks. Nevertheless, we share the concern of all responsible members of the international community about Iraq's support for terrorism and its development of weapons of mass destruction.

Belize and Guatemala

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on negotiations between Belize and Guatemala to resolve their territorial dispute. [45325]

Mr. MacShane: The Governments of Belize and Guatemala are working closely under the auspices of the Organisation of American States (OAS), to negotiate a settlement to their long standing territorial dispute. Two facilitators appointed by Belize and Guatemala, aim to present recommendations for an agreed settlement to both Governments shortly.

We firmly support the OAS-facilitated process. We very much hope that Belize and Guatemala will be able to agree a settlement this year. Such an agreement would have great significance for both countries and the region more widely. We are in close touch with both countries and are actively helping the facilitators to secure a final and lasting settlement to the dispute.

Stolen Equipment

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the answer of 22 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 776–77W, on stolen equipment, whether the computer equipment stolen from his Department was *(a)* new and unused and *(b)* used; and what was the nature of the data stored on such items in each case. [42640]

Mr. Straw: Further to the answer of 22 January, I can confirm that, with the exception of the boxed PC, monitor and keyboard stolen on 22 May 2001, and the seven monitors stolen on 10 January 2002, which were all new and unused items, the remaining items were all used.

As stated in the answer on 6 February 2002 by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, *Official Report*, column 948W, to the hon. Member for Romford (Mr. Rosindell), data held on the used equipment was of an unclassified nature, and no security breaches occurred as a result of the thefts.

Jamal Uddin

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions British officials had with Jamal Uddin in Kabul prior to his detention in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba by the US military authorities. [44320]

Mr. Bradshaw: The British Embassy in Kabul spoke to Jamal Uddin in Kandahar by telephone on 16 January about his movement from Kandahar to Kabul. In the event, before Mr. Uddin could travel to Kabul, he was detained by US forces in Kandahar on approximately 25 January and subsequently moved to Guantanamo Bay on 11 February where he was seen by British officials on 26 February.

British Overseas Territories

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when *(a)* he, *(b)* other Ministers and *(c)* a member of the Royal Family last officially visited each of the British Overseas Territories. [44049]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Secretary of State has not visited any of the Overseas Territories. Visits to the Overseas Territories by other Foreign Office Ministers and by members of the Royal Family over the last two years were as follows:

Visits by Ministers

Territory	*Visitor*	*Date of visit*
Visits by Ministers		
Cayman Islands	Baroness Scotland	July/August 2000
Anguilla	Baroness Scotland	September 2000
British Virgin Islands	Baroness Scotland	September 2000
British Antarctic Territory	Baroness Scotland	January 2001
Falkland Islands	John Battle	February 2001
Gibraltar	Peter Hain	September 2001
Montserrat	Baroness Amos	December 2001
Turks and Caicos Islands	Baroness Amos	December 2001
Visits by members of the Royal Family		
British Virgin Islands	Duke of York	March 2000
Montserrat	Duke of York	March 2000
Anguilla	Duke of York	March 2000
Turks and Caicos Islands	Duke of York	March 2000
Cayman Islands	Duke of York	March 2000
Bermuda	Princess Royal	April 2001

For visits prior to this I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) to my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay) on 7 June 2000, *Official Report*, columns 293–94W.

Gibraltar

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions have been held between the Government and *(a)* the EU and *(b)* individual member states of the EU, on the relationship between Gibraltar and Spain. [43431]

Peter Hain: I refer the hon. Member to the Presidency Conclusions from the Barcelona European Council on 15–16 March (copies of which have been placed in the Libraries of the House) in which the European Council:

> welcomes the decision of the UK and Spain to relaunch the Brussels Process on Gibraltar, established in November 1984;
>
> underlines the EU's support for both Governments' commitment to overcome their differences over Gibraltar, and to conclude a comprehensive agreement before the summer;
>
> invites the Commission to explore possible ways in which the EU could underpin any agreement reached.

St. Helena (Celebrations)

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs who will represent Her Majesty's Government at the 500 Anniversary celebrations on the island of St. Helena. [44197]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Governor will represent Her Majesty's Government at the 500 anniversary celebrations on 21 May.

SCOTLAND

Stolen Equipment

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to her answer of 22 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 698W, on stolen equipment, whether the laptop stolen from her Department was *(a)* new and unused and *(b)* used; and what was the nature of the data stored on it. [42637]

Mrs. Liddell: The laptop stolen from my Department was used and it contained non-classified information relating to the work of the Department.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Civil Servants

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many new entrants to the civil service were employed in her Department in each of the last five years; and how many in each year were aged 50 and over. [36497]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 25 February 2002]:* The information is set out in the following table.

	Entrants	*Aged 50 years and over*
1997–98	22	1
1998–99	16	3
1999–2000	35	1
2000–01	27	2
2001–02	34	1

Hyde Park

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many of the paying concerts and other events planned for *(a)* 2002, *(b)* 2003 and *(c)* 2004 in Hyde Park are contractually committed. [37880]

Mr. Caborn: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 28 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 1531–32W.

Export Bars

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) how much money has been spent by *(a)* her Department and *(b)* other Government Departments for the purpose of preventing an item being exported, following the placing of an export bar, since 1997; [39409]

(2) for each item that has had an export bar placed on it by the Department since 1997, how long the export bar has remained in place and how many of these items were *(a)* allowed to remain in the country indefinitely and *(b)* eventually exported; [39408]

(3) how many export bars have been carried out by her Department for each year since 1997; and if she will list the items and their value. [39407]

Dr. Howells: The information requested is also contained in the last five annual reports of the Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art. Copies are available in the Libraries of both Houses. Information relating to cases considered in the current committee year (from 1 July 2001 onwards) will be available after the year ends on 30 June 2002, in the annual report for that period.

There have been 71 temporary export bars since 1997. Details of the items and their value are provided in the first three columns of the table that has been placed in the Library.

Information the length of temporary export bars and the issue of export licences is set out in the fourth, fifth and sixth columns of the table. Temporary export bars usually take the form of a split period; the first to allow expressions of interest in purchasing the item to be made, and the second to allow the funds to be raised and the invoice paid. If there is no expression of interest by the end of the first period a licence is usually granted. If there is an expression of interest, then the deferral usually continues into the second period.

Items which have been under temporary export bar are usually purchased by UK institutions or private individuals, not by Government Departments. Decisions to purchase are usually made by the trustees of these institutions and they are often assisted by the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Art Fund and the Resource/Victoria and Albert Museum Purchase Grant Fund. Purchase information is shown in the final column of the table, and details of contributions made each year by grant-giving bodies can be found in Appendix G of the Reviewing Committee's annual reports.

Job Sharing

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the extent of job sharing in her Department. [41052]

Dr. Howells: The Department for Culture, Media and Sport has a range of policies intended to help staff to better manage work-life balance, including support for part-time and job-share opportunities. All posts are open to those wishing to work part-time or job-share although there are currently no posts being filled on a job-share basis.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many and what proportion of the staff of her Department are *(a)* job sharing, *(b)* term working and *(c)* engaged in another form of flexible working. [42428]

Dr. Howells: The Department for Culture, Media and Sport has a range of policies intended to help staff to better manage work-life balance, including support for part-time, job-share and other flexible work patterns. All posts are open to those wishing to work part-time or job-share although there are currently no posts being filled on a job-share or term working basis.

New Millennium Experience Company

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if surplus funds have been returned by the New Millennium Experience Company to *(a)* English Partnerships and *(b)* other parts of Government. [41741]

Dr. Howells: *(a)* No. *(b)* No. Funding for the New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) has been provided by the Millennium Commission. NMEC is now in voluntary liquidation and a trust holding money that was available to NMEC has returned £883,000 to the commission, relating to expenditure that will not, now, be required. Of the additional £47 million set aside by the Millennium Commission for NMEC in September 2000, £25 million has not been required.

BBC

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the Government's policy is on the future relationship of the BBC with Ofcom. [39628]

Dr. Howells: The Government's policy on the BBC and OFCOM is set out in the White Paper "A New Future for Communications". Our aim, within the proposed three tiers of regulation, is to create a more level playing field for the BBC and the commercial public service broadcasters, while recognising the distinctive role of the BBC. At tier one (covering for example standards and subtitling but with impartiality requirements excepted) and tier two (measurable quotas, news in peak time) the BBC will be regulated by OFCOM alongside other public service broadcasters. At tier three, the Governors will continue to regulate the delivery of the BBC's remit, while the commercial public service broadcasters will be given greater freedom in the delivery of their remits.

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will set out the past and present party political affiliations of those members of the British Broadcasting Corporation whom the Government are responsible for appointing. [43951]

Dr. Howells: My Department does not collect details of the political affiliation of people appointed to public bodies.

Regulatory Impact Unit

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many members her Department employs in its Regulatory Impact Unit; and if she will make a statement. [42934]

Dr. Howells: In the Department, regulatory impact issues fall to the Policy, Innovation and Delivery Unit. The Unit currently has 6.5 full time posts.

Public-Private Partnerships (Consultants)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the total external spending by her Department was on public private partnership consultants in each of the last four years; how many full-time equivalent consultants were employed over this period; how many billed consultancy days there were per year; what the implied average cost of each PPP consultant was; how many consultancy firms were used by her Department over this period; and if she will make a statement. [43203]

Dr. Howells: My Department has only engaged PFI consultants, I therefore refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 6 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 985W.

Departmental Functions

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the functions of her Department that have been *(a)* market tested and *(b)* outsourced in each of the last five years, specifying the (i) money saving and (ii) percentage saving in each case. [42992]

Dr. Howells: The DCMS is a mainly policy Department and has few activities capable of being outsourced. Some support services functions are able to be outsourced and during the last five years the provision of facilities management services have been contracted out after competitive tendering. The facilities services budget in total amounts to 0.15 per cent. of the total departmental budget and 5 per cent. of the administration budget. The saving of £60,000 annually represents a 4 per cent. saving of the facilities services budget but has also brought unquantifiable quality savings and industrial know-how. No market testing has taken place.

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the Public Service Agreement targets which have been revised and those which have been introduced since the publication of the 2001 departmental report. [43258]

Dr. Howells: My Department has not revised or introduced any new Public Service Agreement targets since the publication of the 2001 departmental annual report.

Special Advisers

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the number and expected cost to her Department of special advisers in *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03. [43272]

Dr. Howells:

(a) Details of special advisers employed in the Department 2000–02 are shown in the table.

	Special advisers: Full time	*Part time*	*Total*
2000	2	0	2
2001	[1]2	0	[1]2
2002	2	0	2

[1] We employed three special advisers to cover the two posts throughout the year.

(b) We expect to employ two special advisers for 2002–3.

The salaries of special advisers are negotiated individually within the stated pay range (£28,328–£82,867). Details of salaries remain confidential in order to protect the privacy of the individuals concerned.

Timber

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the companies from which her Department has obtained timber and wood products and the total spent with each firm over the last five years. [43408]

Dr. Howells: The only timber related products purchased in the last five years have been workstations. These are laminate over recycled timber chipboard in construction. The supplier has been Herman Miller Office Systems at a total cost of £105,000 over the five year period.

Film Industry

Jean Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the United Kingdom's contribution to the international film industry. [43500]

Dr. Howells: Between 1997 and September 2001 four British films, "The Full Monty", "Notting Hill", "Chicken Run" and "Bridget Jones's Diary", together grossed around £700 million at the worldwide box office. Recent major budget productions attracted to these shores such as "Tomb Raider", "Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone", "Chocolat", "Killing me Softly" and "The Mummy Returns" have contributed to the overall inward investment figure of approximately £539 million in 2000. The Film Council's Premiere Fund has a budget of £30 million of Lottery money over three years for the production of theatrical feature films that have the potential to attract significant audiences at home and abroad. The Film Council's most recent release, Gosford Park, has already won a Golden Globe and has been nominated for seven "Oscars". The UK was one of the earliest signatories of the European Co-Production Convention and has seven bilateral co-production agreements with other countries. The UK also has a massive talent base, providing a major contribution to the world's feature film industry.

Restoration

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list those publicly funded and grant aided *(a)* art galleries and *(b)* museums where items in their collections have been damaged as a result of inappropriate and poorly executed restoration work since 1990; and if she will make a statement. [43497]

Dr. Howells: None of my Department's grant aided museums or art galleries have items in their collections that have been damaged as a result of restoration work carried out since 1990. The science of conservation and restoration is continually improving to ensure that best practices are employed. All conservation and restoration work is carried out by expert conservators.

Press and Public Relations

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many press releases were issued by her Department *(a)* between 1 May and 31 December 1997 and *(b)* in each year from 1998 to 2001 inclusive. [40029]

Dr. Howells:

(a) My Department issued 248 press releases between 1 May and 31 December 1997.

(b) In 1998 we issued 319
In 1999 we issued 315
in 2000 we issued 331
in 2001 we issued 325.

Territorial Forces

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many members of staff of her Department are members of the Territorial Forces; and if she has a strategy to encourage members of staff to become members of the Territorial Forces. [44071]

Dr. Howells: The Department does not hold information on which members of staff are members of the Territorial Forces. We encourage staff to become members of the Territorial Forces by allowing up to eight days paid special leave per year for training plus an additional five for special courses or exercises. We also look favourably upon requests for unpaid special leave in connection with these activities.

Radio Broadcasts

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport in what languages other than English radio programmes are broadcast in the United Kingdom; and for how many hours each month in each case. [43860]

Dr. Howells: The following is a list of languages (other than English) which are broadcast on radio in the United Kingdom. Detailed information on how many hours each month, for each language are available only for BBC radio broadcasts.

Languages which are broadcast on independent radio in the UK:

Albanian, Arabic, Bengali, Cantonese, Croatian, French, Gaelic, German, Greek, Gujarati, Hindi, Hindko, Italian, Kashmir, Malaysian, Mirpuri, Pahari, Pathwari, Patois, Punjabi, Pashto, Russian, Serbian, Sinhalese, Somali, Spanish, Tamil, Turkish, Urdu and Welsh.

Stichting Transworld Radio Europe and WRN Euromax are broadcast in multi-lingual European.

The BBC also broadcast a number of languages on radio in the UK. These are:

Radio Nan Gaidheal broadcasts in Gaelic for around 155 hours per month;

Radio Cymru broadcasts in Welsh for around 535 hours per month;

The Asian Network broadcasts in Hindi, Urdu, Bengali, Gujarati, Punjabi and Mirpuri for around 272 hours per month;

Local radio stations offer some broadcasts in languages other than English including over 160 hours per month in Asian languages, four hours of Italian and 12 hours of Cantonese.

A special version of the World Service is currently available via Digital Satellite in Arabic, Bengali, Hindi, Urdu, Pashto and Persian and broadcasts 24 hours a day. Some listeners may also be able to receive foreign language programmes from the main World Service but this service is not of course directed at licence payers in the UK.

Tourism

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many tourism visits there were to *(a)* the UK, *(b)* England, *(c)* west midlands and *(d)* Staffordshire in each of the last four years to the latest available date. [43959]

Dr. Howells: The numbers of visits by overseas residents and visits with overnight stays by UK residents are given in the table for the latest available four years.

Data for 2001 are not yet available, with the exception of total visits to the UK by overseas residents, of which there were 23.4 million.

Million

	Visits by overseas residents	*Visits by UK residents*	*Total visits*
UK			
1997	25.5	162.2	187.7
1998	25.7	148.8	174.5
1999	25.4	173.1	198.5
2000	25.2	175.4	200.6
England			
1997	19.6	125.6	145.2
1998	19.9	115.4	135.3
1999	21.5	137.7	159.2
2000	21.5	140.1	161.9
West Midlands			
1997	1.27	[1]—	[1]—
1998	1.36	[1]—	[1]—
1999	1.43	[1]—	[1]—
2000	1.46	5.2	6.7
Staffordshire			
1997	0.11	[1]—	[1]—
1998	0.14	[1]—	[1]—
1999	0.13	[1]—	[1]—
2000	0.13	1.5	1.6

[1] Not available.

Sources:

International Passenger Survey—Office for National Statistics; UK Tourism Survey—English Tourism Council; Welsh Tourist Board; Visit Scotland; Northern Ireland Tourist Board.

Licensing Hours

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to review legislation governing hours of licensing for public houses. [42410]

Mr. Caborn *[holding answer 18 March 2002]:* This issue was thoroughly reviewed between 1997 and 1999. Following our review, the White Paper "Time for Reform: Proposals for the Modernisation of Our Licensing Laws (Cm 4696)", published on 10 April 2000, set out our plans for reforming the alcohol and public entertainment licensing laws, including the hours during which alcohol may be sold or supplied to the public. To counter and minimise public disorder resulting from fixed closing times, we intend to introduce flexible opening hours as a condition of the licences of each venue, with the potential for some to operate up to 24 hour opening on each day of the week, subject to consideration of the impact on local residents. We intend to introduce primary legislation to implement these proposals as soon as parliamentary time permits.

Golden Jubilee

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many non-domestic visitors she estimates will visit London during the week of the Queen's Golden Jubilee; and if she will make a statement. [44590]

Tessa Jowell: No estimate has been made of the number of non-domestic visitors likely to visit London during the week of the Queen's Golden Jubilee.

The Queen's Golden Jubilee is a great opportunity to encourage more people to visit the UK this year and it is central to the British Tourist Authority's current overseas promotional campaigns.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps have been taken to publicise the Queen's Jubilee internationally; and if she will make a statement. [44587]

Tessa Jowell: The British Tourist Authority (BTA) is a member of the Golden Jubilee Communications Group and is working closely with other members to promote the Jubilee abroad.

The Jubilee is central to the BTA's campaigns this year with all its main publications carrying features on the Jubilee. The BTA is undertaking a range of other promotional activities, such as producing a Royal Heritage map highlighting 50 locations throughout the country with royal connections; running a competition with BBC World Service in the US with winners securing tickets for the two Buckingham Palace concerts and bringing travel journalists and tour organisers to the UK to showcase Royal Heritage.

Stolen Equipment

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to the answer of 22 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 727W, on stolen equipment, whether the computer equipment stolen from her Department was *(a)* new and unused and *(b)* used; and what was the nature of the data stored on such items in each case. [42653]

Dr. Howells: The personal computer base units and personal computer monitor were new and unused and contained no departmental data.

The laptop was a recent procurement and contained only a small amount of correspondence, none of which was protectively marked.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Flexible Working

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many and what proportion of the staff of his Department are *(a)* job sharing, *(b)* term working and *(c)* engaged in another form of flexible working. [42413]

Angela Eagle: Home Office staff are able to take advantage of a variety of flexible and non-traditional working patterns, including job sharing and term working. The working pattern is decided in conjunction with local management to suit an individual's preferences and the requirements of their work.

We estimate that 11 per cent. of staff work part-time in a range of ways, for example reduced days per week, working alternate weeks and term time working, but we do not hold central records of the details of these arrangements. Many other staff work full time, but have flexible hours. 38 staff are currently recorded as being job sharers in the Home Office, United Kingdom Passport and Records Service and Forensic Science Service. Information on staff in the Prison Service who are job sharers is not held centrally and could not be provided without disproportionate costs.

Press and Public Relations

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were employed in a press or public relations function in his Department on 1 January in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999, *(d)* 2000, *(e)* 2001 and *(f)* 2002. [39941]

Angela Eagle: The information requested is shown in the table:

	Number of press officers at 1 January
1997	[1]14
1998	14
1999	14
2000	13
2001	23
2002	31

[1] At April—the nearest figure available.

This includes eight people employed as press officers for the Prison Service whose media relations operation moved to the Home Office in August 2001.

In addition at various times chief immigration officers and policy officials were on six-month attachments to the press office.

No one was employed in a general public relations function.

However as has been explained in previous answers, the expansion of the Home Office press office followed an external consultant's review of its staffing and operation and recommended the increases. Staff levels in the press office had been static for some years despite the enormous changes in the media and their increasing demands for a 24 hours service.

The figures for 1997 through to 2000 of 13 or 14 press officers do not reflect vacancies and the complement would have been nearer 17 or 18. The office was in fact supplemented by secondments, loans and attachments.

Animal Experiments

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will take steps to establish a Royal Commission into animal experiments; and if he will make a statement. [43993]

Angela Eagle: The Government have not ruled out a Royal Commission but strongly believe that resources can best be used to make immediate improvements to the operation of the 1986 Act and to promote the fullest application of the three Rs—replacing the use of animals with alternative methods; reducing the number of animals needed for a particular purpose and refining the procedures to minimise suffering.

In this context, the Animal Procedures Committee is currently considering the responses to a public consultation paper as part of its review of the cost/benefit assessment of applications for authority to use animals in scientific procedures. As part of this work, the committee plans to produce a statement on the validity of animal experiments. I expect to receive its report in the next few months.

The House of Lords has also established a Select Committee on the use of animals in scientific procedures and is currently gathering evidence.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will introduce a programme of investment involving companies that profit from animal experimentation in the development of non-animal experimentation alternatives. [43995]

Angela Eagle: The Government do not believe that setting mandatory requirements for investment into research into alternatives to the use of animals in scientific procedures is either desirable or necessary.

Nonetheless, every year the Home Office makes available to the Animal Procedures Committee (APC) a budget for research aimed at developing or promoting the use of alternatives which replace animal use, reduce the number of animals used, or refine the procedures involved to minimise suffering (the three Rs). Details of completed

research projects are published in the annual report of the Animal Procedures Committee, which is available from The Stationery Office.

The amount made available to the Committee for 2001–02 for this specific purpose has increased to £280,000. However, this is not the only money spent by the Government on seeking to develop alternatives, as other Departments also fund such work. It is estimated that the total spent on this by the United Kingdom Government is in the region of £2 million each year. Industry also spends many millions of pounds each year on the search for and development of alternatives. To take this further on an international level, the United Kingdom Government will continue to support the European Centre for the Validation of Alternative Methods (ECVAM) through contributions to the European Union.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures are in place to regulate the breeding of animals specifically for experiments; and if he will introduce further legislation on this issue. [43996]

Angela Eagle: Breeding and supply of animals for use in experimental or other scientific procedures are regulated by the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986. Such animals, as described in Schedule 2 of the Act (which lists the commonly used species), may generally only be obtained from designated breeding and supplying establishments.

These establishments are only designated if, on the advice of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Inspectorate, or my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State (Mr. Blunkett) is satisfied that they meet minimum animal welfare standards. The standards are set out in the Code of Practice for the Housing and Care of Animals in Designated Breeding and Supplying Establishments, presented to Parliament in 1995 under section 21 of the Act (HC 125, available—along with a recently published supplement—in the Library).

There are no plans to introduce further legislation. The Code of Practice will, however, continue to be supplemented and updated as required, to take account of any additions to Schedule 2 of the Act and of any new developments in the field of animal care.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will establish a mandatory control database to stop unnecessary experiments involving animals. [43994]

Angela Eagle: To meet the requirements of section 5(4) of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986, any application to use protected animals in research must be the subject of a detailed cost/benefit assessment by Home Office inspectors. The likely adverse effects on the animals concerned must be weighed against the benefit likely to accrue as a result of the proposed programme of work. All procedures are strictly regulated and all applications for licenses to use animals are assessed to ensure that the work is necessary.

For that purpose the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Inspectorate, who offer professional advice and recommendations on licence applications made under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986, use a range of resources to keep abreast of developments and results in animal research, and the scientific community have established and maintained their own databases to the same end.

A mandatory central database would be problematic for a number of reasons. There would, in particular, be significant difficulties in ensuring the completeness and quality of the data and in ensuring that intellectual or commercial confidentiality were not compromised. We do, however, believe that there is scope for further reducing the risk of duplication of animal testing by encouraging companies to engage in data sharing. To this end, in August 2000, we announced an inter-Departmental concordat on data sharing to enable Government Departments to reduce the duplication of tests on animals. The concordat commits United Kingdom regulatory authorities to help resolve legal and other obstacles and encourage data sharing between clients and thereby reduce animal tests. Progress in implementing the concordat will be reviewed in the next few months.

In addition, there are a number of international and national initiatives to encourage data sharing. International assessment programmes have well-established and effective methods for data sharing, ensuring mutual acceptance of data and dissemination of information on chemicals. This also extends to dissemination of data to developing countries.

Football (Policing Costs)

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department to what extent the annual contribution made to the Metropolitan Police by the Football Association is to cover policing costs at football matches. [35378]

Mr. Denham: The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis has informed me that the Football Association does not make an annual contribution toward the policing of domestic football matches within the Metropolitan Police Service area. Individual football clubs however do contribute toward costs for games at their respective home grounds.

Payments of around £11,000 in each of the years 2000–01 and 2001–02 have been made by the Football Association in connection with investigations or international matches.

Police Houses

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 4 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 686W, on police houses, if it is his policy to withdraw the right to buy from a police officer who will be entitled to buy his property on 1 July. [34645]

Mr. Denham: We propose in the Police Reform Bill to remove the Metropolitan Police Authority from the secure tenancy regime: but any secure tenant who has acquired the right to buy at the time of Royal Assent of the Bill will have a three month period of grace to exercise that right.

This will allow any secure tenant who has acquired the right to buy before the day on which the Act is passed and has either served a notice claiming to exercise that right before the Act is passed, or serves such a notice

within three months of the Act being passed, to complete the purchase process within the framework of the Housing Act 1985.

Police Accident Investigation Officers

Mr. Grogan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police accident investigation officers were employed in the UK in *(a)* 1992, *(b)* 1995, *(c)* 1998 and *(d)* 2001. [36549]

Mr. Denham: The information set out below is only for England and Wales as my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary (Mr. Blunkett) is not responsible for policing in Scotland or Northern Ireland.

Information is collected annually by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary about the deployment of police service personnel.

I understand from the Inspectorate that it is not possible to identify separately the number of accident investigation officers as they are part of a larger traffic support group within police forces that also undertakes other traffic duties such as speed radar operators, vehicle examiners and hazardous chemical experts.

Firearms

Kate Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in how many instances 22 single shot pistols of the type used in the Commonwealth and Olympic games have been used in *(a)* homicide, *(b)* robbery and *(c)* other indictable offences during the period since the passing of the Firearms (Amendment) No. 2 Act 1997 and for the same period prior to the passing of that Act. [38656]

Mr. Denham: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Prisons

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he last discussed conditions in prison in England and Wales with the Chief Inspector of Prisons. [43014]

Beverley Hughes: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary meets Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons, Anne Owers, normally on a quarterly basis to discuss current concerns. The most recent meeting was held on 31 October with the next taking place shortly.

Additionally I meet Her Majesty's Chief Inspector on a regular basis. The last meeting was on 14 February.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his plans to reduce the prison population. [42892]

Beverley Hughes: We need to ensure that we can perform the basic duty to protect the public by punishing people for the crimes they have committed while ensuring we engage in rehabilitation to reduce re-offending and prevent crime. To this end we are committed to a radical re-think of the sentencing framework so as to give clarity and direction to the courts and avoid the damaging effects of prison overcrowding. Prison must be used as effectively as possible and targeted where it is most necessary. It should be used for incapacitating dangerous, violent and other serious offenders but prison sentences should be as long as necessary for punishment and public protection, and no longer.

The reform of the probation service, with its central focus on reducing re-offending means that rigorously enforced community sentences are a real and tough alternative to imprisonment. We want to build on this work to provide sentencers with more than two stark options, imprisonment or a community sentence. We are looking at intermediate disposals such as intermittent custody and a strengthened suspended sentence. On community sentences the courts need to be able to mix and match with a generic sentence so that we can get it right for the individual. As part of the work taking forward the recommendations of the Halliday report on the sentencing framework we are looking at new forms of community penalties that allow the sentencer this flexibility. We aim to encourage greater use of community penalties for some non-violent offenders such as those convicted of theft and handling or fraud.

Home Detention Curfew and a rigorous assessment process plays an important role by enabling some prisoners to be released from prison, while still subject to restrictions placed on their liberty. This facilitates a smoother and more effective integration back into the community and helps offenders to secure employment as soon as possible.

We are addressing the recent increase in female prison population by taking forward the Government's strategy for female prisoners. A cross-Government women's offenders reduction plan is currently being developed by a multi-agency team drawn from across the criminal justice system, which is based in the Home Office. The aim of the programme is to strengthen policy, programme, research and spending partnerships across government to reduce women's offending. This includes linking criminal justice work with broader Government efforts to tackle social exclusion, particularly as it affects women at risk of offending.

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of *(a)* men and *(b)* women in prison are lone parents of children under the age of 18 years. [42961]

Beverley Hughes: There are no centrally collated statistics on this issue.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people who have escaped from prison are still at large; and on what dates they escaped from custody. [43019]

Beverley Hughes: Of the 105 prisoners who have escaped from prison establishments since 1 April 1997 and 8 March this year six remain unlawfully at large. The date of each of these escapes is:

30 December 1998

31 January 1999

26 November 1999

30 August 2000

21 May 2001

7 February 2002.

Jail Sentences

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons are serving a sentence in jail in England and Wales for *(a)* driving while disqualified and *(b)* actual bodily harm. [42788]

Beverley [redacted]: Data are not held centrally on those inmates serving sente[redacted] for driving while disqualified.

The number of persons serving sentences for assault on 31 January 2002:

Offence	*Number of sentenced prisoners*
Other assault (ABH)[1]	190
Assault occasioning GBH[2]	881
All prisoners sentenced for offences of violence against the person.	11,933

[1] Actual Bodily Harm
[2] Grievous Bodily Harm

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons were committed to custody in 2000 for *(a)* driving while disqualified and *(b)* actual bodily harm; and what were the average sentence lengths. [42789]

Beverley Hughes: Information taken from the Home Office court proceedings database for 2000 showing the number of persons sentenced to immediate custody and average sentence length imposed for driving while disqualified and assaults occasioning actual bodily harm in England and Wales is given in the table.

Persons sentenced[1] to immediate custody and the average sentence length imposed at all courts for driving while disqualified and assault occasioning actual bodily harm, England & Wales 2000[2]

Offence	*Sentenced to immediate custody*	*Average sentence length (months)*
Driving while disqualified	12,501	3.5
Assault occasioning actual bodily harm	4,404	8.0

[1] These data are on the principal offence basis.
[2] Staffordshire police were only able to supply a sample of data for magistrates courts proceedings covering one full week in each quarter for 2000. Estimates based on this sample are included in the figures, as they are considered sufficiently robust at this high level of analysis.

Mr. Lammy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* young offenders were sentenced to serve non-custodial penalties, *(b)* offenders were sentenced to serve custodial penalties and *(c)* offenders were sentenced to serve non-custodial penalties in the last 12 months broken down by the Metropolitan police divisional area in which they were arrested. [42769]

Beverley Hughes: Information collected centrally does not allow a breakdown by police division within the Metropolitan police area, nor does it show where an arrest takes place.

The available information, from the Home Office court proceedings database, relating to 2000 is shown in the table. These data give for each inner London magistrates court and outer London borough *(a)* young offenders (aged 10–17) sentenced to non-custodial sentences, *(b)* adult offenders (aged 18 or over) sentenced to custodial sentences, and *(c)* adult offenders sentenced to non-custodial sentences.

Information on court proceedings for 2001 will be available in the autumn.

Young offenders sentenced to non-custodial penalties and adult offenders sentenced to custodial and non-custodial penalties in the Metropolitan police area, 2000.

Sentencing court (Committing court in Crown Court cases)	*Young offenders*	*Adult offenders*	
	Non-custodial sentences	*Custodial sentences*	*Non-custodial sentences*
Inner London magistrates courts[1]			
Bow Street	3	745	4,757
Camberwell Green/ Tower Bridge	31	1,576	10,730
Greenwich / Woolwich	19	1,407	7,362
Highbury Corner	10	1,268	8,833
Horseferry Road	15	1,419	10,808
Marylebone	5	261	11,528
South Western	18	607	10,730
Thames	59	1,105	5,291
West London	29	830	5,198
Camberwell youth court	1,097	—	—
South-western youth court	501	—	—
Thames youth court	1,052	—	—
West London youth court	1,155	—	—
Outer London boroughs			
Barking and Dagenham	269	262	2,536
Havering	204	223	3,238
Redbridge	244	253	3,778
Newham	467	577	7,114
Waltham Forest	318	372	3,948
Bexley	233	203	1,445
Bromley	389	271	3,360
Croydon	578	330	5,528
Kingston-upon-Thames	204	203	2,490
Richmond-upon-Thames	183	155	2,074
Sutton	261	149	1,818
Merton	276	233	3,341
Ealing	321	325	2,920
Barnet	247	312	6,390
Brent	478	453	6,408
Enfield	299	341	4,829
Haringey	421	378	6,328
Harrow	198	177	2,975
Hillingdon	323	876	3,924
Hounslow	436	333	4,951
Other (not recorded)	16	174	175
Total	10,359	15,818	154,807

[1] Information held centrally does not allow a breakdown of cases by borough in the inner London area.

Legal Proceedings

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average time taken between arrest and sentencing of *(a)* young offenders and *(b)* adult offenders was in the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement. [42505]

Mr. Wills: I have been asked to reply. Information is not available in the exact form requested. Figures are available on the average time between arrest and sentence for 'persistent' young offenders in England and Wales, as used to monitor the Youth Justice Pledge to halve the average time from arrest to sentence. The latest data available shows that for those sentenced in magistrates courts and the Crown court in the 12 months ending 30 November 2001, the latest month available, the average arrest to sentence time was 77 days. For those

sentenced in November 2001 the average arrest to sentence time was 67 days compared with the target of 71 days.

From another source of information the time between arrest and sentence can be estimated for all young offenders sentenced in magistrates courts in England and Wales. For the 12 months ending September 2001, this estimate was 60 days. Similarly for adult offenders the time between charge (the closest available date to arrest) and sentence in magistrates courts was 58 days.

Young Offenders

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of young offenders broke the terms of their bail conditions in the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement. [42506]

Beverley Hughes: Regular statistics on the number of young offenders who break their bail conditions are not available centrally, and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. However, Home Office research published in 1998 showed that juveniles breached their bail conditions in 30 per cent. of cases.

Juvenile bail has been strengthened by the Youth Justice Board's bail support schemes and intensive supervision and surveillance programme. And curfews as a condition of bail, monitored electronically, will be available for 12 to 16-year-olds in six areas from 22 April 2002 and nationally from 1 June 2002.

National Probation Service

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the cost to public funds of the National Probation Service information system. [43121]

Beverley Hughes: A full breakdown of the costs of the National Probation Service information systems strategy can be found in the National Audit Office report published on 26 April 2001, HC401 Session 2000–01.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the business benefits derived from the introduction of the National Probation Service information system strategy. [43119]

Beverley Hughes: The National Probation Directorate will conduct a post-contract review of the National Probation Service information systems strategy (NPSISS) contract which will include consideration of benefits delivery to the Service.

I can say in advance of this review that the qualitative benefits to the National Probation Service (NPS) resulting from NPSISS include; the introduction of a network infrastructure which covers 38 of the 42 probation areas; the ability for electronic communication between these areas, the Directorate, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation and the Research and Statistics Unit; and the deployment of Lotus Notes across the Service. In addition this technology has given probation staff the opportunity to develop information technology skills providing the NPS with a computer literate workforce.

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many National Probation Services accredited programmes have been completed, broken down by probation area. [42790]

Beverley Hughes: This information is compiled on a quarterly basis. Figures for the first three quarters of 2001–02 (the most current information available) are:

Area	*Completions (core programme)*
West Midlands	
Staffordshire	4
Warwickshire	3
West Mercia	11
West Midlands	106
Regional Sub-Total	124
North-east	
County Durham	77
Northumbria	243
Teeside	82
Regional Sub-Total	402
Eastern	
Bedfordshire	37
Cambridgeshire	24
Essex	88
Hertfordshire	18
Norfolk	37
Suffolk	28
Regional Sub-Total	232
North-west	
Cheshire	23
Cumbria	27
Greater Manchester	158
Lancashire	166
Merseyside	74
Regional Sub-Total	448
East Midlands	
Derbyshire	36
Leicestershire	30
Lincolnshire	24
Northamptonshire	20
Nottinghamshire	18
Regional Sub-Total	128
Yorkshire and Humberside	
Humberside	29
South Yorkshire	20
North Yorkshire	11
West Yorkshire	86
Regional Sub-Total	146
South-east	
Hampshire	50
Kent	36
Surrey	52
Sussex	19
Thames Valley	99
Regional Sub-Total	256
South-west	
Avon and Somerset	109
Devon and Cornwall	29
Dorset	24
Gloucestershire	17
Wiltshire	19
Regional Sub-Total	198
London total	
Total	353

Area	Completions (core programme)
Wales	
Dyfed-Powys	9
Gwent	13
North Wales	12
South Wales	15
Regional Sub-Total	49
England and Wales	
Total	2,336

Road Accidents

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what duties the police have to carry out before an accident site can be cleared from *(a)* an A-road and *(b)* a motorway; [42749]

(2) what the average length of time was which it took for the police to clear an accident on *(a)* a motorway and *(b)* an A-road, in order to return the road to normal use; [42750]

(3) what the average response times were for the police to reach an accident on *(a)* a motorway and *(b)* an A-road in the last three years; [42748]

(4) what is the average length of time it took the police to complete all their official duties at an accident site on *(a)* an A-road and *(b)* a motorway in each of the last three years. [42751]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Information relating to the average time taken to reach accident sites on A-roads and motorways, to clear the site and to complete official duties are not recorded centrally. Individual forces have accident response time targets, of between 10 and 15 minutes. These targets are not uniform across the country to allow for differences in terrain, road infrastructure and police resources.

The main duties performed by the police in dealing with road accidents do not vary substantially between A-roads and motorways. They are:

(a) to gain access to the scene;

(b) to make the scene safe through coning and signing;

(c) to assist any injured party by effecting rescue or through first aid;

(d) to arrange attendance of other agencies to assist in rescue and scene management;

(e) to preserve the accident scene and undertake crash investigation when appropriate;

(f) to manage the traffic around the accident scene;

(g) to protect and recover property;

(h) to manage the handover of scene management to the Highways Agency; and

(i) where there are fatalities, to work in accordance with coroner's procedures in relation to the removal of bodies.

Experience Corps

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many inquiries he has received from residents in the constituency of Buckingham about setting up experience corps in the last 12 months. [43286]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 13 March 2002]:* I have not received any inquiries about the experience corps from residents of the constituency of Buckingham in the last 12 months.

Justice and Home Affairs Council (Scottish Representation)

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reason no devolved Administration Minister attended the 2411 European Union Council of Ministers (Justice and Home Affairs) meeting on 28 February, which particular matters of concern from the Scottish Executive were raised by the UK Government delegation; and what information is being provided by his Department to guarantee effective post-council scrutiny by the European Committee of the Scottish Parliament. [42688]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 12 March 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 27 February 2002, reference number 38035.

Arrangements allowing for the attendance of Ministers from the devolved administrations at Council of Ministers meetings are set out in the Concordat on Co-ordination of European Union Policy Issues which supplements the Memorandum of Understanding between the devolved administrations and the United Kingdom (UK) Government. Discussions on the composition of the UK delegation to specific Council meetings are normally conducted on a confidential basis. The Concordat further provides that a single UK negotiating position will be formulated and advanced. It states that the role of Ministers and officials from the devolved administrations will be to support and advance the single UK negotiating line which they will have played a part in developing.

I reported the outcome of the Justice and Home Affairs Council of 28 February 2002, in my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Connarty), Deputy Chairman of the House of Commons European Scrutiny Committee on 15 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 1258W.

Arrangements for post-Council scrutiny in Scotland are a matter for the European Committee of the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Executive. The Home Office provides information to Scottish Executive officials as part of that process.

Jury Trial

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the Government's plans to change the rights of defendants to elect a jury trial. [42894]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The removal of the defendant's rights to elect jury trial in either-way cases was one of the recommendations made by Lord Justice Auld in his Review of the Criminal Courts, and the matter remains under consideration, along with the rest of the Auld report.

Domestic Violence

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will introduce a national register of injunctions in cases of domestic violence. [43542]

Beverley Hughes: The ministerial group on domestic violence is considering this idea in consultation with practitioners. The Government's conclusions will be announced as soon as possible.

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps are being taken by his Department to improve domestic violence services for perpetrators and their partners; and if he will make a statement on the progress of the Probation Service domestic violence Pathfinder scheme. [42664]

Beverley Hughes: Two Pathfinder initiatives on domestic violence are under way. One is to pilot the Duluth Non-violent Men programme. The other is a major piece of research to identify the criminogenic needs of domestic violence perpetrators, in order to establish an evidence based way of addressing this type of offending.

The research into the pilot phase of the Duluth programme is due to finish in October 2002, and a report on it will be available over the winter of 2002–03. The research project is due to be completed in August 2002.

The National Probation Service is committed to completing the Pathfinders and to using the knowledge gained to review services to domestic violence perpetrators, in order to maximise reductions in abusive behaviour and develop services to enhance victim safety.

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects the results of the Duluth domestic violence Pathfinder evaluation to be published. [42659]

Beverley Hughes: The pilots are due to finish in September 2002 and interim evaluations will be available approximately three months after that. Longer term evaluations linking the programme to reconvictions will follow subsequently, but it is not possible at this stage to say when they will be available.

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department under what circumstances the Duluth domestic violence Pathfinder will be rolled out before the results of the evaluation are known. [42663]

Beverley Hughes: The Duluth programme will not be rolled out nationally unless it can be demonstrated that it meets the criteria for accreditation laid down by the Joint Prison/Probation Accreditation Panel.

Drug-related Crime (Bristol)

Dr. Naysmith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what further schemes the social exclusion unit is planning for Bristol, with specific reference to policies which might help combat drug-related crime. [40128]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth *[holding answer 13 March 2002]:* There are a number of programmes in place in Bristol to tackle drug-related crime and anti-social behaviour.

The Home Office fund a number of initiatives, some of which include:

an Arrest Referral Scheme based at Trinity Road police station, specialising in providing for crack cocaine treatment;

an 'Off the Street' initiative, working to disrupt the drug/sex market; and

Avon and Somerset Constabulary's Operation Atrium, working to disrupt the supply system of importation of crack cocaine.

My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary (Mr. Blunkett) has also announced a policing priority area in Bristol which will help police tackle drug-related crime.

Overstayers

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people who applied under the regularisation scheme for overstayers have had their cases *(a)* decided, *(b)* granted, *(c)* refused and *(d)* not yet considered; and what the target date for completing consideration of applications is. [42960]

Angela Eagle: A total of 17,120 applications were received by the closing date. In response to a ministerial commitment caseworking staff have been asked to consider applications in a phased way. Resources have been invested during the current financial year to sift all applications in order to speedily identify all those cases where leave to remain can be granted under existing policy concessions. Indications are that this target will be met, and so far approximately 1,200 cases have been granted indefinite leave to remain.

During the next financial year (2002–03) more caseworkers and resources will be devoted to substantive consideration of the remaining cases. The target date for the consideration of all cases is April 2003.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers are being held in Prison Service accommodation. [43038]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 14 March 2002]:* The latest available information on the number of persons detained under Immigration Act powers relates to 29 December 2001. The total number of asylum seekers detained in prison establishments as at that date is given in the table.

Place of detention	*Asylum seekers detained as at 29 December 2001*[1,2]
Dedicated Immigration Service wings[3]	295
Other prison establishments[4]	170
Total persons detained in prison establishments[4]	465

[1] Figures rounded to the nearest five.
[2] Persons detained under Immigration Act powers who are recorded as having claimed asylum at some stage.
[3] Persons detained at the dedicated Immigration Service wings at Haslar, Lindholme and Rochester.
[4] Includes 125 persons detained under dual immigration and other powers.

The temporary use of spaces in a number of local prisons ended in mid-January 2002, as did the use of the accommodation at Her Majesty's Prison Rochester. In addition, the dedicated detention facilities at Her Majesty's Prison Haslar and Her Majesty's Prison Lindholme were redesignated formally as immigration removal centres on 8 February 2002, thus requiring them to operate under detention centre rules rather than prison rules. These changes will not be reflected fully in the statistics until the information on Immigration Act detainees as at 30 March

2002 is published on 31 May 2002 on the Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate website at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

Following the incident at Yarl's Wood removal centre on 14–15 February 2002 a number of detainees held at that centre and others have been transferred to prison accommodation. This is consistent with our policy on the use of prison accommodation for detainees who pose particular control and security risks.

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he has changed his policy on his commitment not to house asylum seekers in prisons; and if he will make a statement; [43031]

(2) if asylum seekers who have not had an initial decision on their case are being held in Prison Service accommodation. [43030]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 14 March 2002]:* Our policy on the detention of asylum seekers in prison remains as set out in our White Paper "Secure Borders, Safe Haven—Integration with Diversity in Modern Britain". We made it clear that, although the routine use of prison accommodation for immigration detainees had ended, there would remain a need to hold small numbers of individuals, including asylum seekers, in prison for reasons of security. This would, for example, include individuals transferred to prison accommodation following the incident at Yarl's Wood removal centre on 14–15 February 2002. Such individuals would be identified on the basis of the security risk they are assessed to pose rather than on the progress of any asylum or other claim they may have made. As such, individuals who are assessed to pose a security risk and who have yet to receive a decision on their asylum application may be held in prison accommodation.

Julie Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if asylum seekers with dependent children will be eligible for subsistence benefits for them and their children if they choose to live with family or friends in the UK under his immigration and asylum proposals. [40681]

Angela Eagle: The White Paper "Secure Borders, Safe Haven—Integration with Diversity in Modern Britain" (Chapter 4 Paragraph 53) makes it clear that for the future, the case for abolishing the subsistence only option will be looked at and a power to allow this will be taken in forthcoming legislation. As yet we have not set any timetable for ending the subsistence only support option.

Paragraph 4.33 of the White Paper makes it clear that asylum seekers who refuse the offer of a place in one of the accommodation centres being trialled will not be offered any alternative forms of support. There is no reason why these proposals should lead to greater destitution among asylum seekers. We will be offering both accommodation and subsistence support to those who need it.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) of 13 February 2002, *Official Report,* column 461W, on asylum seeker accommodation centres, when the final criteria for selection of the four accommodation centres will be decided; who will draw up the final criteria; and how this information will be announced. [42747]

Angela Eagle: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) on 11 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 718W.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) of 5 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 160W, on asylum seeker accommodation centres, what education facilities will be made available to asylum seekers; and what role *(a)* local schools, *(b)* colleges and *(c)* other education institutions will be expected to take in the provision of education. [42727]

Angela Eagle: The trial accommodation centres will offer education facilities. We are working with key stakeholders to establish the range of facilities that will be available to children on-site and what if any role local schools, colleges and other educational institutions will be expected to take.

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers are detained; and of these how many are *(a)* awaiting an initial decision on their asylum claim and *(b)* awaiting an appeal. [42947]

Angela Eagle: The latest available information on the number of persons detained under Immigration Act powers relates to 29 December 2001. As at that date, 1,410 persons (to the nearest five) were being detained who had sought asylum at some stage.

I regret that the requested information on how many of these persons were awaiting an initial decision on their asylum claim and how many were awaiting an appeal on 29 December 2001, is not available and could be obtained only by examining individual case files at disproportionate cost.

Information on Immigration Act detainees as at 30 March 2002 will be published on 31 May 2002 on the Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate website at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department who will serve an asylum seeker's appeal dismissal when it is served personally on the other parties and the appellant's representative, if he has one, under the rules that came into force on 7 January. [42907]

Angela Eagle: An official of the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) serves the appeal determination, either in person, by post or by facsimile. If the asylum seeker's representative is present at the time of personal service, they will receive simultaneous notification from the official serving the determination on their client. If the representative is not present, it is usual practice for an IND official to provide notification, normally by facsimile, within 24 hours.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers have been dispersed to areas in Scotland in the last 12 months, broken down by local authority; and what percentage of these have had their asylum applications approved. [42737]

Angela Eagle: The only cluster area to which the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) disperses asylum seekers in Scotland is Glasgow.

As at the end of December 2001, 4,750 asylum seekers (including dependants) were being supported in NASS accommodation in Glasgow. The cumulative number dispersed to Glasgow over the last 12 months is not currently available.

This information broken down by local authority is not currently available.

NASS does not currently hold statistics on the asylum status of supported asylum seekers.

Commission for Racial Equality

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has for making Commissioner appointments to the Commission for Racial Equality. [45702]

Mr. Blunkett: I am pleased to announce that I have today appointed seven commissioners for the Commission for Racial Equality.

The appointments are:

Khurshid Ahmed, who is currently a non-executive director of Dudley Group of Hospitals National Health Service Trust;

Ian Barr, who will represent the interests of the Confederation of British Industry and is the co-founder and managing director of Astar Management Consultants Ltd;

Jagdish Singh Gundara, who is currently Professor of Education at the Institute of Education, University of London;

Kay Hampton, who will represent Scottish interests and is currently a lecturer in sociology at Glasgow Caledonian University;

Gloria Mills, who will represent the interests of the Trade Unions Congress and is currently the Director of Equalities at UNISON;

Cherry Short, who will continue to represent Welsh interests at the Commission, and

Sarah Spencer who is the Director of Citizenship & Governance at the Institute for Public Policy Research.

The appointments will initially be for four years.

The role of the commission is central to the drive for securing equality for all our citizens, and cohesion between diverse communities of our country. I want the commission to make a real difference to community relations in the years ahead.

In addition to these seven new appointments I will be recruiting two further commissioners with significant experience of working in the community to help support the commission's priority of building links with communities and particularly with young people.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Census (1901)

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how much of the work to transcribe the 1901 Census returns on to computer was carried out outside the United Kingdom; and if she will make a statement. [38543]

Ms Rosie Winterton: QinetiQ Ltd. appointed Enterprise and Supply Services (ESS) to undertake the transcription of the data from the 1901 Census returns. A proportion of this work was sub-contracted by ESS after full competitive tendering to a commercial data input company based in India and Sri Lanka (Hays Document Management). The proportion of transcription work undertaken outside the United Kingdom was 78 per cent.

Social Diversity

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how he proposes to ensure social diversity among JPs. [41549]

Mr. Wills: I know that my hon. Friend is concerned about this issue. My noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor is determined that the social composition of the magistracy reflects the community it serves, subject to all magistrates fulfilling the merit criteria for appointment. He will consider any suggestions from hon. Members how this can be achieved. Separated the national strategy for the recruitment of magistrates will supplement the efforts already being made by the Lord Chancellor's local advisory committees to deliver this aim. It will be published in the spring. I would be happy to meet my hon. Friend to discuss any ideas he may have for ensuring social diversity.

Magistrates Courts

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement on his plans to reform the structure of the magistrates court system. [43459]

Mr. Wills: Sir Robin Auld's Review of the Criminal Courts in England and Wales makes wide-ranging recommendations in respect of the magistrates courts. The period for comment closed on 31 January. The Government have taken no decisions on the report and is now considering the recommendations in detail, taking account of the comments received. The Government will announce its conclusions by way of a White Paper in the spring.

Consultants

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) if he will place in the Library copies of the consultancy work purchased by the Greater London Magistrates Court Authority in drawing up their Strategic Plan, 2002 to 2006; and if he will make a statement; [43796]

(2) if he will place in the Library copies of the consultancy work purchased by the Greater London Magistrates' Court Authority in drawing up their proposals to close the Magistrates court at the Guildhall, Kingston-upon-Thames; and if he will make a statement; [43797]

(3) which consultants have been employed by the Greater London Magistrates Courts Authority since it was established; how much has been spent by the GLMCA on consultants; and what the remits were for each of the consultancy projects the GLMCA has procured. [43798]

Mr. Wills: Decisions on the number, location and future of magistrates' courts in the Greater London area are for the Greater London Magistrates Courts Authority

to determine, in consultation with its local paying authorities. The issues raised in these three questions are, therefore, matters for that authority.

Constituency Duties (Data Protection)

Bob Spink: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) if he will take steps to make available to all hon. Members a pro forma standard consent form, for use in discharging their constituency duties, giving legal authority and protection when personal information has to be made available to an hon. Member by a statutory body; [42504]

(2) if he will make it his policy to review data protection legislation to allow personal information held by statutory bodies to be shared with hon. Members strictly in connection with their duties in helping constituents. [42503]

Mr. Wills: I am aware of the hon. Members' concern about the effect of the Data Protection Act 1998 on their constituency work. In consultation with my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House, I am considering what changes might be needed to the present arrangements.

Court Sittings

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the monthly court sitting hours for *(a)* 1998, *(b)* 1999, *(c)* 2000 and *(d)* 2001 for the magistrates courts in (i) Kingston-upon-Thames, (ii) Merton, (iii) Richmond-upon-Thames, (iv) Sutton and (v) Croydon. [43799]

Mr. Wills: Court sitting hours are collected annually for the Magistrates Courts Committees (MCC) areas rather than individual courts. The figures for the five MCC areas in the question are contained in the table. Figures for 2001–02 are not yet available for the single entity of the Greater London Magistrates Courts Authority (GLMCA) which was formed in April 2001 and incorporates the previous 22 Greater London MCCs including the five courts in question.

Court sitting hours

	1998[1]	*April 1999 to March 2000*[1]	*April 2000 to March 2001*
Kingston upon Thames	2,915	2,960	2,718
Merton	3,426	3,670	4,148
Richmond upon Thames	2,920	2,606	3,134
Sutton	2,622	2,628	2,780
Croydon	7,273	6,658	7,098

[1] At the end of 1998, the system was amended to collection based upon financial rather than calendar years.

Community Court Orders

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many warrants in respect of breach of community court orders have been outstanding for *(a)* less than 12 months, *(b)* 12 months to two years, *(c)* two to three years, *(d)* three to four years, *(e)* four to five years and *(f)* five years or more. [42792]

Mr. Wills: Lead responsibility for execution of community penalty breach warrants was transferred from the police to Magistrates Courts Committees on 1 April 2001. Prior to the transfer, statistics on community penalty breach warrants were not routinely kept. LCD is now collecting data but complete figures are not yet available. Of the community penalty breach warrants issued since the transfer, 10,034 were outstanding as at 28 December 2001.

As a result of the transfer, the courts now control the whole enforcement process and can give the work higher priority. From April 2002, the courts will be given almost £10 million extra—ring-fenced for enforcement. I have also announced challenging performance targets for next year which will highlight performance on community penalty breach warrants.

Persistent Offenders

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what powers are available to the courts to detain persistent offenders under 16 years who are *(a)* charged with and *(b)* guilty of non-violent offences; and if he will make a statement. [42244]

Mr. Wills: The decision whether to grant bail or not is a judicial decision taken within the statutory framework provided by the Bail Act 1976. The court may refuse to grant bail where it finds there are substantial grounds to believe that one or more of the statutory exceptions in the Act apply. Where the court finds such grounds and refuses bail, it must then decide where the youth shall be remanded. The courts' powers and the restrictions on those powers are set out in section 23 of the Children and Young Persons Act 1969

The courts' powers to order custody in respect of persistent offenders under 16 who are convicted of non-violent offences are set out in the Powers of Criminal Courts Acts (Sentencing) Act 2000. Section 100 sets out the courts' powers to impose a detention and training order of up to two years. Section 91 sets out the Crown Court's powers to order a youth to be detained for certain serious offences for a period not exceeding the maximum term of imprisonment with which the offence is punishable in the case of an adult aged 21 or over. These powers are subject to the general restrictions in section 79 of the 2000 Act on imposing discretionary custodial sentences.

Territorial Forces

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many members of staff of her Department are members of the Territorial forces; and if her Department has a strategy to encourage members of staff to become members of the Territorial forces. [44064]

Ms Rosie Winterton: We have staff who are members of the Territorial forces, although we keep no central record of numbers. We actively support members by providing eight working days paid special leave for training (of 15 days or more), as well as unpaid leave if they are required to undertake a period of mobilised service.

Magistrates Courts

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) what indicators and methods his Department uses to measure the satisfaction of magistrates courts' users; and if he will make a statement; [43776]

(2) what measures his Department uses to assess the quality of service and facilities provided by a magistrates courthouse; and if he will make a statement. [43777]

Mr. Wills: Quality of service in magistrates courts areas is assessed bi-annually by questionnaire and survey. Users are asked to rate their satisfaction with court facilities and the information given to them. The methodology and results are explained fully in LCD Information Bulletin 1/2002, copies of which are lodged in the Library of the House. This latest bulletin, issued on 7 March, covers the survey results for 2001.

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what performance measures his Department uses to judge the financial efficiency of magistrates courts; what the performance of each courthouse against those measures was in Greater London in *(a)* 1998, *(b)* 1999, *(c)* 2000 and *(d)* 2001; and if he will make a statement. [43778]

Mr. Wills: Cost per unit of weighted caseload is the financial efficiency performance indicator for magistrates courts. This indicator uses the gross expenditure in a year divided by the total unitary value of completed caseload. The measure is collected and assessed at the administrative level of the magistrates courts committees (MCCs), as set out in the table for 1998–99, 1999–2000 and 2000–01. Figures for 2001–02 are not yet available, and when they are produced they will only be available for the single entity of the Greater London Magistrates Courts Authority, (GLMCA), which was formed in April 2001 and incorporates the previous 22 Greater London MCCs.

Cost per unit of weighted caseload

£

	1998–99	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Barking and Dagenham	35.08	36.93	31.91
Barnet	37.73	50.58	45.53
Bexley	35.42	34.91	38.32
Brent	44.35	50.59	48.90
Bromley	42.51	53.20	45.12
City of London	57.37	55.88	58.75
Croydon	27.83	35.13	37.63
Ealing	33.10	34.90	38.88
Enfield	35.59	37.16	25.44
Haringey	35.75	34.79	35.57
Harrow	27.99	24.42	30.51
Havering	34.76	37.30	38.83
Hillingdon	31.43	39.00	35.20
Hounslow	40.09	47.94	48.07
Inner London area	47.78	53.81	48.05
Kingston upon Thames	38.42	46.94	43.87
Merton	39.24	41.03	72.29
Newham	39.02	21.93	42.73
Redbridge	35.36	37.99	40.35
Richmond upon Thames	44.91	44.41	43.62
Sutton	41.31	50.59	48.52
Waltham Forest	33.31	39.61	39.04
Greater London average	43.90	47.54	44.73

WORK AND PENSIONS

Rehabilitation Leave

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what recent representations he has received on the introduction of rehabilitation leave after trauma or sudden infirmity. [44264]

Maria Eagle: At their conference on 7 March the Royal National Institute for the Blind, in their employment strategy document Work Matters, raised the issue of disability leave to allow people losing their sight to get time off work for intensive rehabilitation, mobility training and the opportunity to learn new skills.

The Disability Rights Task Force considered this and concluded that the reasonable adjustment provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act provide adequate arrangements for employees affected. We are continuing to work with the Disability Rights Commission and employers to promote the retention and rehabilitation of people who become disabled.

Stolen Equipment

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to the answer of 23 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 851–52W, on stolen equipment, whether the computer equipment stolen from his Department was *(a)* new and unused and *(b)* used; and what was the nature of the data stored on such items in each case. [42643]

Malcolm Wicks: The information is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. From May 1997 to March 2001 there have been no reported cases of equipment stolen containing protectively marked data.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) whom he has appointed to his Regulation Scrutiny Group; and what is its remit; [42253]

(2) what plans he has to introduce changes to the housing benefit and council tax benefit schemes twice a year. [42254]

Malcolm Wicks: The Regulation Scrutiny Group is made up of officials from the Department and representatives appointed by the local authority associations. Its remit is to consider proposed changes to housing benefit and council tax benefit and to make recommendations on the timing of such changes, taking account of local authorities' capacity to implement them.

We have already made a commitment to the local authority associations that changes to regulations will only be introduced in April and October of each year apart from in very exceptional circumstances. This, combined with the Regulation Scrutiny Group, will go a long way to improving the handling of essential changes to the housing benefit and council tax benefit schemes.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many claimants for incapacity benefit underwent a medical examination in *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* 2001; and at what cost to public funds; [40783]

(2) what the policy of his Department is towards claimants for incapacity benefit who do not attend an appointment for a medical examination; [40791]

(3) how many claimants for incapacity benefit did not attend the medical examination arranged for them in *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* 2001; and at what cost to public funds. [40792]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: People who have been receiving incapacity benefit for more than 28 weeks normally undergo a personal capability assessment (PCA). The purpose of the PCA is to determine that a person meets the threshold of incapacity to continue receiving benefit. In addition, in selected pilot areas, examining doctors are able to produce a capability report for the person's personal adviser. The capability report helps those who wish to return to work by shifting the emphasis from disability to ability.

As part of the PCA process, a person may be called, where appropriate, to attend a medical examination. The importance of keeping an appointment along with the potential consequences of not attending are clearly highlighted in the supporting documentation sent to the person.

When a person fails to attend an appointment he or she is asked to provide written details of their reasons for non-attendance. The reasons, along with any other relevant information, are presented to a decision maker for consideration of whether there was good cause for not attending the appointment. The good cause provision acts as a safeguard for vulnerable people and those with genuine difficulties.

A decision maker decides good cause by considering all the evidence and applying the law to the facts of the claim. Each case is considered on merit and all relevant circumstances, including the person's state of health, are taken into account. If it is decided to withdraw entitlement, then the person can ask for the decision to be reconsidered or referred to an independent appeal tribunal.

The available information is in the tables.

Number of medical examinations

Year	Number of medical examinations	Cost of incapacity benefit examinations (£)
1999[1]	432,210	22,004,978
2000	372,934	18,868,786
2001	455,454	[2]28,654,598

[1] Figures for the number of medical examinations performed are not available until the beginning of the 1999–2000 financial year. Therefore, figures for the period 1 January to 31 March 1999 have been estimated.

[2] A restructuring of prices took place during 2001. As a result of this, the cost of incapacity benefit examinations increased, but this was offset by a reduction in the cost of Incapacity Benefit scrutiny reports.

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest 5.
2. Volumes and costs include severe disablement allowance.

Source:

Figures are taken from IMPACT 100 per cent. counts.

Number of incapacity benefit recipients who failed to attend a medical examination for incapacity benefit

Year	Number
1999	132,314
2000	124,356
2001	148,357

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest 5.
2. The Department only pays SchlumbergerSema for completed cases. The administrative costs associated with failed appointments are not separately available.

Source:

Figures are taken from a 100 per cent. count by SchlumbergerSema Medical Services of Incapacity Benefit (including Severe Disablement Allowance) customers who fail to attend a medical examination appointment.

Press Office

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many staff in his Department's press office have received *(a)* termination and *(b)* redundancy payments in each of the last four years. [41079]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: None.

Pensioners Tax Credit

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment has been made of the impact of the pensioners tax credit on pensioners in receipt of modest occupational pensions who are being taxed. [31353]

Mr. McCartney: Pension credit, which is not a tax credit, will have a positive impact on the small proportion of recipients with modest occupational pensions who also pay tax, as pension credit itself is tax free.

Retired People (Tooting)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many retired people in the Tooting constituency are in receipt of the minimum income guarantee. [38205]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The information requested is in the table.

Minimum income guarantee for pensioners, in the parliamentary constituency of Tooting, as at November 2001

	Total[1]	Claimants	Partners
All	2,900	2,500	400
State pension age	2,600	2,200	300
Working age	400	200	100

[1] Claimants and partners

Source:

Income Support Statistics Quarterly Enquiry, November 2001

Jobcentre Plus

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will direct the Chief Executive of Jobcentre Plus to consent to referring the current dispute with the Public and Commercial Services Union to ACAS for arbitration. [33531]

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if the PCS Union has agreed to refer the dispute over safety at work in the Benefits Agency and jobcentres to arbitration; and what the view is of Her Majesty's Government on this process. [32872]

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions whether the recent dispute between the Public and Commercial Services Union and the Benefits Agency over screening in benefits offices will be referred to ACAS; and if he will make a statement. [32763]

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions for what reason in the course of the industrial dispute over safety in Jobcentre Plus the involvement of ACAS has been specifically excluded as a means to bring this dispute to a resolution. [40503]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answers 5 and 6 February 2002]:* While conciliation and arbitration can be of value, it would not be appropriate in this instance to refer the current dispute to ACAS as the Public and Commercial Services Union has proposed. The fundamental principles underpinning the delivery of Jobcentre Plus are at the heart of the welfare modernisation and customer service improvement to which the Government are committed. They are not ones about which it is appropriate to seek arbitration.

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) if he will list the *(a)* subject matter, *(b)* dates and *(c)* times of (i) discussions, (ii) telephone conversations and (iii) meetings, (A) he and (B) the Chief Executive of Jobcentre Plus has had between 1 January and 28 February with (1) Mark Serwtoka, (2) Barry Reamsbottom, (3) Alan Churchyard and (4) Eddie Spence; [40500]

(2) if he will list the *(a)* subject matter, *(b)* individuals involved, *(c)* dates and *(d)* times of (i) discussions, (ii) telephone conversations and (iii) meetings he has had with the TUC in connection with the current trade dispute between his Department and the PCS Union; [40501]

(3) if he will list the dates and times of discussions, telephone conversations and meetings *(a)* he, *(b)* the Chief Executive, *(c)* Kevin White and *(d)* other senior managers in his Department have had with the PCS Union with regard to the Jobcentre Plus industrial dispute over safety; and which PCS Union senior officials those meetings and conversations were held with, between 4 September 2001 and 1 March 2002; [40502]

(4) what the overall cost arising from industrial dispute over safety in Jobcentre Plus is; and what expenditure has resulted. [40504]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Managers have had over 60 hours of discussions with PCS. There have been numerous other contacts and approaches but we have been asked to treat these as confidential.

We estimate that around £5.5 million has been saved in staff salaries since September.

Pensions

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to promote understanding of the importance of pension provision among young people. [37117]

Malcolm Wicks: The Government are committed to promoting the importance of pension provision to young people—as well as other groups.

The Government's pension education strategy includes providing information to people about their pension provision through pension forecasts, raising awareness of retirement planning through a publicity campaign. This includes activity aimed at young people, such as: advertising in publications and during TV programmes whose readership or viewers include a high number of young people; specific direct marketing activity for young people such as a targeted newspaper insert and direct mail to young people, and testing new ways to get information out to the public, for example through an interactive digital television pilot—due to launch this spring, which will have a section dedicated to a younger audience.

In addition, my Department continues to liaise with other Government Departments, the Financial Services Authority, employers, private pension providers and other organisations and groups to improve the way we provide pension information to consumers—including young people.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate how much exists in purchase pension pots that were annuitised in each of the last five years; and how much he expects will be annuitised in the next five years. [37031]

Maria Eagle: The information is not available as requested.

The latest available information on the value of annuities sold is in the tables. This information is from the Association of British Insurers (ABI), and the values quoted are in cash terms prices. The figures are for all annuities purchased—which will include those purchased by pension funds which are not money purchase. However most annuities will have been sold to money purchase occupational pension funds and to individuals converting personal pensions.

We do not have any information as to how much we expect will be annuitised in the next five years.

Value of new annuities (in cash terms)

Year	*£ million*
1996	3,394
1997	3,944
1998	5,755
1999	5,716
2000	5,708

Source:
Figures taken from ABI publication.
Quarterly press release—long term annual figures.

Pension Credit

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the marginal benefit withdrawal rate will be from October 2003 for a pensioner on the pension credit who also receives *(a)* council tax benefit, *(b)* housing benefit and *(c)* council tax benefit and housing benefit. [24234]

Mr. McCartney: The information requested is shown in the following tables. The tables show the marginal deduction rates applied to people under minimum income guarantee or pension credit regimes who also receive any combination of housing and council tax benefits.

Pension credit recipients with income above the guarantee credit who are also entitled to housing and council tax benefits will experience higher withdrawal rates than under the minimum income guarantee. However, these people will see gains from the introduction of the savings credit, the fairer treatment of capital and the extension of the applicable amounts in housing and council tax benefit due to our proposals for

pension credit. This means that a single pensioner over 65 with marginal deduction rates of 91 per cent. will gain at least £11 a week (couples will gain at least £15.81). It also means that almost 1.9 million pensioner households will get more help, or get help for the first time, with their rent or council tax.

Table 1: Marginal deduction rates facing a single pensioner aged 65 or over, and couples where one member is over 65[1]

	Illustrative weekly income (£)		*Percentage*		
Marginal deduction rates	*For singles*	*For couples*	*Council tax benefit (a)*	*Housing benefit (b)*	*Council tax benefit and housing benefit (c)*
Minimum income guarantee	0–100	0–154	100	100	100
	100+	154+	20	65	85
Pension credit	0–77	0–123	100	100	100
	77–100	123–154	40	40	40
	100–135	154–200	52	79	91
	135+	200+	20	65	85

[1] Excludes income tax

Table 2: Marginal deduction rates facing a single pensioner aged 60–64, and couples where both are under 65 but one member is aged 60–64[1]

	Illustrative weekly income (£)		*Percentage*		
Marginal deduction rates	*For singles*	*For couples*	*Council tax benefit (a)*	*Housing benefit (b)*	*Council tax benefit and housing benefit (c)*
Minimum income guarantee	0–100	0–154	100	100	100
	100+	154+	20	65	85
Pension credit	0–77	0–123	100	100	100
	77–100	123–154	100	100	100
	100–135	154–200	20	65	85
	135+	200+	20	65	85

[1] Excludes income tax

Table 3: Gains for single pensioners over 65 due to the introduction of pension credit

£

Illustrative weekly income for singles	*Pension credit*	*Council tax benefit (a)*	*Housing benefit (b)*	*Council tax benefit and housing benefit (c)*
0–77	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
77–100	0.00–13.80	0.00–13.80	0.00–13.80	0.00–13.80
100–135	0–13.80	2.76–13.80	8.97–13.80	11.73–13.80
135+	0.00	2.76	8.97	11.73

Table 4: Gains for pensioner couples where one member of the couple is over 65 due to the introduction of pension credit

£

Illustrative weekly income for couples	*Pension credit*	*Council tax benefit (a)*	*Housing benefit (b)*	*Council tax benefit and housing benefit (c)*
0–123	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
123–154	0.00–18.60	0.00–18.60	0.00–18.60	0.00–18.60
154–200	0–18.60	3.72–18.60	12.09–18.60	15.81–18.60
200+	0.00	3.72	12.09	15.81

Notes for all tables:

1. It is assumed that a pensioner with HB and/or CTB entitlement was entitled to these benefits before the introduction of pension credit.

2. Although single pensioners with income under £77 and pensioner couples with income under £123 face 100 per cent. marginal deduction rates their final income will be raised to the amount of the guarantee credit as a result of the introduction of pension credit.

3. Tables 3 and 4 show gains due only to the savings credit and the extension of the applicable amounts in housing and council tax benefits by the maximum savings credit. Some pensioners will gain more because of the changes to the treatment of capital and the more generous income assessment.

Mental Health

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to increase the level of in-patient care for those spending over a year in mental health hospitals above the present weekly allowance. [40651]

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions at what level the personal allowance for mental health patients requiring in-patient care is set; and if he plans to review it. [41469]

Maria Eagle: There are no plans to change the amount by which benefits are reduced for hospital in-patients who have been in hospital for more than 52 weeks.

The hospital downrating rules prevent double provision from public funds as the publicly funded NHS maintains people while they stay in hospital as well as providing free treatment. Social security maintenance benefits are also paid from state funds. They are therefore not paid in full indefinitely where a person is in a NHS hospital and having their day to day living expenses met through the NHS.

The double provision principle is a key cornerstone of the system of national insurance introduced over 50 years ago.

However, we also recognise that people have on-going financial commitments while in hospital, and although we consider the six week rule strikes a fair balance between what the state should provide financially and the provision individuals should make for themselves, we have none the less decided to extend the period before benefits are downrated by a further seven weeks to the 13 week stage. This will mean that people previously affected by the six week rule will be able to keep their benefits untouched if their period of stay in hospital is under 13 weeks. Benefit is generally then not downrated again until after 52 weeks.

Benefit is adjusted in this way because, generally speaking, the national health service will have assumed the responsibility of providing for patients who have spent more than 52 weeks in hospital. The personal requirements allowance is regarded as a reasonable amount to cover small personal items not already provided by the hospital.

Incomes

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the *(a)* mean and *(b)* median income of (i) single men aged 65 to 74 years, (ii) single men aged 75 years and over, (iii) single women aged 65 to 74 years and (iv) single women aged 75 years and over, (v) pensioner couples aged 65 to 74 years and (vi) pensioner couples aged 75 years and over for the latest year for which figures are available. [39545]

Mr. McCartney: The information requested is given in the table.

Net weekly income before housing costs 1999–2000

	Mean	*Median*
Single men aged 65 to 74 years	183	134
Single men aged 75 years and over	162	131
Single women aged 65 to 74 years	144	123
Single women aged 75 years and over	134	121
Couples aged 65 to 74 years	299	234
Couples aged 75 years and over	245	201

Notes:
1. Income is defined here as net income before housing costs.
2. Amounts are in £ per week at July 1999 prices and are rounded to the nearest £1.
3. A pensioner couple is defined as a married or cohabiting couple.
4. Pensioner couples are allocated to age categories according to the age of the head. The head of a couple is defined as the man.

Source:
Family Resources Survey 1999–2000

Departmental Advertising

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what advertising campaigns his Department is *(a)* running and *(b)* planning for the future; what the committed spend on marketing is for the 2001–02 financial year; and what estimate has been made of the final cost of all his Department's marketing in the 2001–02 financial year. [7898]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: We are currently (February/March) running the following advertising campaigns: Pensions education, Inherited SERPS, New Deal 25 Plus, and DDA awareness.

Between October 2001 and February 2002 the following campaigns ran: New Deal 25 Plus, Targeting Benefit Fraud, New Deal for Disabled People, Winter Fuel Payment awareness, Pensions education.

Major campaigns costing over £250,000 for the financial year 2001–02 are as follows:

New Deal for Disabled People—£850,000: A national campaign to launch NDDP, covering press advertising in national and regional titles, supported by a helpline, website and publicity material.

New Deal 50 Plus—£500,000: A regional campaign to encourage more of the over-50s into work and to increase their awareness of the local help available.

New Deal 25 Plus—£500,000: A national campaign to inform the public about changes to the programme through radio advertising, a video and printed materials, supported by research.

Age Positive—£500,000: PR (including direct mail and partnerships with regional newspapers, sponsoring an award, exhibitions, research and promotional material) to raise employers' awareness of the business benefits of employing an age-diverse work force.

Work Incentives—£450,000: Advertising campaign on local radio to raise awareness of the range of financial initiatives available to those moving from benefits into employment if they meet the qualifying criteria.

Pensions Education—£7,520,000: A publicity campaign to encourage people to save for their retirement and understand the pension options available to them.

State Second Pension—£500,000: Development and implementation of publicity to inform carers about how new state pension rules could help them—linked to the overall pensions education campaign.

Pensioners' Guide—£1,058,000: Production and distribution of a guide on cross-Government help and services for pensioners.

Winter Fuel Payments—£716,000: Information for people aged 60 plus and advisers about winter fuel payments and activity reminding them to claim and telling them how to claim for winter 2001 and for relevant previous winters.

Changes to rules on inherited SERPS—£453,000: Publicity about the change to the rules on inheriting the State Earnings-Related Pensions Scheme.

Targeting Fraud—£9,000,000: A national advertising campaign on television, radio, press and posters to deter dishonest behaviour, reinforced by regional press advertising showing that benefit fraudsters are regularly caught and punished.

Disability Discrimination Act Awareness—£3,000,000: A national, regional and trade press advertising campaign to raise the public's awareness of the DDA and specifically to encourage service providers to ensure that disabled people have access to their services.

Other activity is being considered but nothing has been finalised.

Allocations, and therefore spend, are not set in stone at the beginning of the financial year, but remain flexible throughout the year responding to need as and when required.

Mr. Tom Mann

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will issue advice to decision-makers for *(a)* attendance allowance and *(b)* disability living allowance to give full weight to the definition of virtually unable to walk as given in Cassinelli *v.* Secretary of State for Social Services, Times Law report 6.12.91, following the Chairman's ruling on 11 February at the reconstituted tribunal set up by the Sutton Benefits Agency office concerning Mr. Tom Mann. [39412]

Maria Eagle: The 1991 judgment of the Court of Appeal in Cassinelli *v.* Secretary of State for Social Services was concerned only with the meaning of the test of "severe discomfort" in relation to whether the manner in which a person could make progress on foot out of doors was so limited that he could be taken to be virtually unable to walk for the purpose of entitlement to mobility allowance. The court held that the test is one of severe discomfort rather than of severe pain or distress. This is not relevant to *(a)* attendance allowance, for which entitlement depends upon a severely disabled person's need for personal attention, supervision or watching over from another person; but *(b)* it continues to be relevant to the higher rate mobility component of disability living allowance, which replaced mobility allowance in 1992, and the guidance to decision makers about that component in the Decision Makers Guide cites the meaning of "severe discomfort" given in the Cassinelli judgment as the one to be followed when considering whether a person is virtually unable to walk.

Legal Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what legal costs have been incurred by his Department in each of the last four years. [34285]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Department for Work and Pensions was formed in June 2001 from the former Department for Social Security and parts of the Department for Education and Employment.

Legal costs for the new Department are not yet available for the current financial year (2001–02).

New Deal

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make additional funding available to New Deal providers to help trainees with *(a)* basic skills and *(b)* English speaking. [36403]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Long-term unemployed people who need help with basic skills or the English language are identified by personal advisers during the Gateway period of the New Deal. Those with a need can then be referred to help within the Gateway, including short basic skills courses. People who need more intensive, longer-term assistance are offered help through the Education and Training New Deal option which can provide courses lasting up to 26 weeks.

Basic skills or English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) training is provided in response to an individual's needs. The Employment Service contracts locally with New Deal providers to meet the needs of their particular client group and provides sufficient funding for this to be achieved.

The help provided through the New Deal is an important part of the Government's strategy to improve literacy and numeracy skills. A new curriculum in ESOL was launched in February and will further improve the quality of language provision available to those who need it. We will be working to embed the new curriculum into our employment programmes.

Minimum Income Guarantee

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proportion of pensioners who are entitled to support claim the minimum income guarantee. [36407]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Estimates of the proportion of pensioners who are entitled to and claim the minimum income guarantee are published in Income Related Benefits Estimates of Take-Up. A copy of the latest publication covering financial year 1999–2000 is in the Library. Estimates of take-up of the minimum income guarantee are subject to greater uncertainty than other published take-up estimates; research is under way to improve the precision of estimates.

The take-up campaign launched in May 2000 attracted over 127,000 successful claims for the minimum income guarantee.

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what percentage of pensioners in *(a)* the North Norfolk constituency and *(b)* England claim the minimum income guarantee. [43696]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 15 March 2002]:* The information requested is in the table.

MIG claimants in North Norfolk and England by percentage relevant population—November 2001

Area	*Number of MIG claimants (Thousand)*	*Percentage population aged 60 and over*
North Norfolk parliamentary constituency	3,400	—
North Norfolk LA	3,400	11.0
England	1,459,200	14.3

Area	*Number of MIG beneficiaries (Thousand)*	*Percentage population aged 60 and over*
North Norfolk parliamentary constituency	3,900	—
North Norfolk LA	3,900	12.5
England	1,622,800	15.9

Mrs. Irene Adams: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pensioner households are benefiting from the minimum income guarantee. [43979]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: As at November 20001, there were 1,741,300 pensioner households benefiting from the minimum income guarantee in Great Britain.

Source:

Income Support Statistics Quarterly Enquiry, November 2001.

State Second Pension

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if self-employed people will be required to join the State Second Pension. [24228]

Mr. McCartney: As with SERPS self-employed people cannot join the State Second Pension because they do not pay class 1 national insurance contributions.

Civil Servants

Mr. MacDougall: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many new entrants to the civil service employed in his Department were aged 50 years and over in each of the last five years. [42399]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Department for Work and Pensions was formed in June 2001 from the former Department for Social Security and parts of the Department for Education and Employment.

The statistics relating to the number of staff aged 50 or over on their recruitment to the new Department are not yet available for the current financial year (2001–02).

Unemployed People (Lanarkshire)

Mr. Roy: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to help unemployed people in Lanarkshire over 50 years of age back to work. [42617]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: People over 50-years-old on benefits can also take advantage of the help and support available through our New Deal 50 plus. By the end of January over 61,000 people had moved off benefits and into work nationally through New Deal 50 plus and 906 people have been helped into work in the Lanarkshire Employment Service district.

We have made a firm commitment to tackle the high levels of inactivity among people over 50 by increasing choice and opportunities for employment. We are doing this by setting the standard for non-ageist approaches to recruitment, training and development, promotion, redundancy and retirement through the Code of Practice on Age Diversity in Employment.

Our policies are having a positive effect and the national employment rate of older workers has risen for the fourth year running.

Pension-related Benefits

James Purnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate he has made of the increase in the MIG per pensioner if money accrued through delaying the payment of pension-related benefits by increasing the retirement age to 67 years were put into funds for the minimum income guarantee. [43650]

Maria Eagle: We have no plans to increase the state pension age to 67. It is not possible to estimate how such a change would affect the MIG in future as it depends upon the level of MIG at that time, on pensioner income growth (which itself is affected by the increase in retirement age) and on pension credit that is being introduced in October 2003.

Occupational Pensions

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what information his Department collates on the value of occupational pensions available *(a)* in payment to current pensioners, *(b)* as assets for future pensioners and *(c)* in connection with the overall incomes of retired people. [41999]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Department of Work and Pensions collects information on the value of occupational pensions available in payment to current pensioners and in connection with the overall income of retired people via the Family Resources Survey. The Family Resources Survey (FRS) is a continuous survey, interviewing approximately 25,000 private households in Great Britain each year. The FRS asks a wide range of questions about people's incomes and other living circumstances, including sources of pension income.

Information on assets of private pension funds, including occupational pensions, is published in the National Statistics MQ5 publication. The Office for National Statistics have stated that they expect to publish figures in April.

Benefit Application Forms

Mr. Roy: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to simplify benefit application forms, with particular reference to *(a)* elderly and *(b)* disabled claimants. [37080]

Maria Eagle: All our forms are constantly reviewed and regularly researched. We frequently adopt suggestions made by members of the public as well as organisations such as the Social Security Advisory Committee.

A radically changed minimum income guarantee (MIG) form was introduced last October after consultation with pensioners and their organisations. The new form cut the number of pages pensioners had to complete from 40 to 10 and removed questions irrelevant to the vast majority of pensioners. The Department also established a MIG helpline to enable pensioners to claim over the telephone.

Improvements have been made to our standard size claim forms, particularly those relating to disability benefits. They include using a larger type size, increasing the size of answer boxes and using a background tint that gives the best possible contrast to improve legibility.

We are also currently testing a new shorter and simpler attendance allowance claim form aimed at claimants aged 75 or over. If this 16 page form, which replaces the existing 34 page form, is successful in obtaining the information we need we will be looking to apply the lessons learned to other groups of disabled people applying for disability living allowance and attendance allowance.

Pensioners Earnings

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what *(a)* proportion and *(b)* number of pensioners have income from earnings, broken down in both cases into five-year age bands. [44226]

Maria Eagle: The information requested is in the table.

Age	Proportion of pensioners with income from earnings (percentage)	Number of pensioners with income from earnings
60–64	20	80,000
65–69	19	320,000
70–74	8	130,000
75+	2	60,000
All	9	580,000

Source:

Family Resources Survey 2000–01.

Income Support

David Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people in Telford are in receipt of income support payments. [41424]

Malcolm Wicks: As at November 2001 there were an estimated 6,900 income support recipients in Telford parliamentary constituency.

Notes:

1. Number is rounded to the nearest 100.

2. Estimate is based on a 5 per cent. sample of the income support computer system, and is subject to sampling variation.

Source:

Income Support Statistics Quarterly Enquiry, November 2001.

Asbestosis

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people receive industrial injury benefit as a result of suffering from asbestosis. [37112]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Asbestosis is a generic term for all asbestos-related diseases. The prescribed diseases (PDs) relating specifically to those suffering from the effects of exposure to asbestos are diffuse mesothelioma (PD3), primary carcinoma of the lung (PD8) where there is evidence of asbestosis and diffuse pleural thickening (PD9). In addition pneumoconiosis (PD1) can relate to asbestosis but also to silicosis (which is not an asbestos-related disease).

The available information is in the table.

Number of cases where industrial injuries disablement benefit was in payment as at 1 April 2000

Disease	Number
Pneumoconiosis (PD1)	[1]11,000
Diffuse mesothelioma (PD3)	1,000
Primary carcinoma (PD8)	[2]200
Diffuse pleural thickening (PD9)	2,000

[1] This figure also includes cases of silicosis which is not an asbestos-related disease. Separate figures for asbestos-related disease only in this category are not available.

[2] As this figure is less than 500 it should be treated as an indication of the number of cases only.

Source:

Figures are from a 10 per cent. sample of IIDB assessments in payment, and are rounded to the nearest 1,000.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Fair Trade

Mr. Weir: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 26 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 703W, on fair trade goods, if he will review during Fair Trade Fortnight the amount of fairly traded goods used in his Department. [35456]

Mr. Leslie: My Department's purchasing policy is based on value for money principles and purchases are considered on the basis of fitness for purpose and whole life cost. Where these considerations are equal the choice of goods is then influenced by ethical and environmental factors and fair trade goods will be considered in that context.

My officials will consider with the new service provider for the Department's London offices the availability of fair trade goods in its refreshment facilities. Our contracted catering providers have assured us that wherever commercially practicable and viable they trade with companies who have their own ethical or fair trading initiatives.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether fair trade products are sold in his Department. [39828]

Mr. Leslie: Yes; our contracted catering providers have assured us that wherever commercially practicable and viable they trade with companies who have their own ethical or fair trading initiatives.

As I mentioned in my reply to the hon. Member for Angus (Mr. Weir) on 26 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 703W, the Cabinet Office will consider with the new service provider for the Department's London offices the availability of fair trade goods in its refreshment facilities.

Civil Servants

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what was the *(a)* percentage and number of rail journeys undertaken on first class tickets, *(b)* average cost of a first class journey by rail and *(c)* total cost of rail travel in each of the past four years broken down by grade of civil servant. [37504]

Mr. Leslie: Section 8 of the Civil Service Management Code, paragraph 8.2.1, requires Departments and agencies to ensure that staff use the most efficient and economic means of travel in the circumstances, taking into account any management benefit or the needs of staff with disabilities.

The information requested is not held centrally, and could be obtained only at disproportionate costs.

Sponsorship

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, ref 32799, on which date the Cabinet Office guidelines on sponsorship took effect; and if he will make a statement. [39729]

Mr. Leslie: The Cabinet Office document "Guidance to Departments on Sponsorship of Government Activities" was published in July 2000 as part of the Government's

response to the Sixth Report from the Committee on Standards in Public Life (Cmnd 4817). These guidelines updated the previous internal sponsorship guidelines that had been circulated to Departments in March 1999.

Radio Advertising

Ms Abbott: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how much the Central Office of Information spent on radio advertising on behalf of other Government Department agencies and NDPBs in the last year; what percentage of this was spent on black minority media advertising; and what the five main campaigns that the Central Office of Information financed that involved radio advertising were. [41341]

Mr. Leslie: For the year 2000–01 the total spend on radio advertising was £16 million, with 1.25 per cent. spent on black minority stations.

The top five campaigns, by value which featured radio advertising were:

University for Industry autumn campaign,
Vehicle car crime,
Think! (road safety),
Police recruitment and
Children's tax credit.

Women and Equality Unit

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many staff are employed in the Women and Equality Unit of the Cabinet Office. [43112]

Mrs. Roche: The Women's Unit was created in 1998. Its staff for the first financial year of its existence (1998–99) was 45. The unit was renamed the Women and Equality Unit following last year's general election in order to recognise its new policy responsibilities across the United Kingdom for gender equality, co-ordination of sexual orientation policy and its sponsorship of the Equal Opportunities Commission. Its current staffing level stands at 68.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the findings were of the joint benchmarking study of the Women and Equality Unit of the Cabinet Office and the Swedish Government. [43111]

Mrs. Roche: The publication "Women as Entrepreneurs in Sweden and the UK: Different Perspectives" built upon a bilateral initiative between Sweden and the UK on women's entrepreneurship.

The publication identified the sharing of good practice and supporting joint projects between the two countries, as effective tools to encourage female entrepreneurship.

The study showed that, in the UK, the reasons for starting a business, the type of business run and the chosen method of accessing finance were markedly different between men and women. The reasons for these differences need to be reflected in the support provided.

Employers' Forum on Disability

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister which Government Departments are members of the Employers' Forum on Disability. [44266]

Mr. Leslie: The following civil service Departments and agencies are all members of the Employers' Forum on Disability:

Cabinet Office
Court Service
Crown Prosecution Service
Department for Education and Skills
Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions
Department for Work and Pensions
Department of Health
Department of Trade and Industry
Employment Service
Foreign and Commonwealth Office
Highways Agency
HM Customs and Excise
HM Land Registry
Home Office
Inland Revenue
Insolvency Service
Lord Chancellor's Department
Ministry of Defence
Ministry of Defence Police
National Assembly for Wales
Office for National Statistics
Ofgem
Ofsted
Oftel
Patent Office
The Public Record Office
Companies House
Defence Science and Technology Laboratory
The Meteorological Office
Financial Services Authority
Qualifications and Curriculum Authority
Scottish Office
Health and Safety Executive
Prison Service
Child Support Agency and Benefits Agency
The Rent Service.

Sickness Absence

Tony Cunningham: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what was the overall level of sickness absence in the civil service in 2000. [45327]

Mr. Leslie: The report "Analysis of Sickness Absence in the Civil Service 2000" prepared for my Department by Biomathematics and Statistics Scotland (BioSS) shows that by applying the same methodology as in previous years the average level of sickness absence was 9.9 days per staff year. This represents a small decrease over the equivalent figure of 10.1 days set out in the report for 1999. The report contains a comprehensive analysis of the 2000 figures.

Calculated on the basis of absence per person, the figure for the civil service was 8.5 days. According to the CBI survey for 2000, this compares favourably with a figure of 10.2 days for the public sector as a whole and is only slightly more than the average rate of 7.8 days for all sectors.

Departments have published Service Delivery Agreements which contain their individual targets for reducing sickness absence. Overall the civil service has been targeted to reduce sickness absence by 30 per cent. (to 7.2 days per staff year) by 2003 against the 1998 baseline. My Department is continuing to work with other Departments and agencies as they take forward their plans to reduce sickness absence.

I have placed copies of the BioSS report in the Libraries of the House.

HEALTH

Unlicensed Medicines

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what joint strategies have been agreed between the Medicines Control Agency and the United States Government Food and Drug Administration's Office of Criminal Investigation to combat the online sale of licensed and unlicensed medicines; and if he will publish them. [39018]

Ms Blears: The Enforcement Group currently has no specific joint strategies with the Food and Drug Administration Office of Criminal Investigations. However, it does maintain close informal contact, on a case by case basis, shares intelligence, conducts joint investigations including visits where appropriate.

Anti-TB Vaccinations

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the level of supply of anti-TB vaccinations to the NHS is. [38681]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* Current central stock holding (as at 12 March 2002):

	Number
BCG	2,126,550
Tuberculin PPD	201,920

Capita Group

Mr. Boris Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the contracts that have been awarded to the Capita Group by the Department. [39343]

Ms Blears: Since April 2001 five separate business areas within the Department have commissioned various pieces of work from companies operating within the Capita Group.

The total value of work commissioned by each of the business areas varied between £10,500 and £87,700. The overall value of work was £271,700. In each case the work involved services to support a number of recruitment exercises to fill posts within the core Department and membership of committees.

Press and Public Relations

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many press releases were issued by his Department *(a)* between 1 May and 31 December 1997 and *(b)* in each year from 1998 to 2001 inclusive. [40034]

Ms Blears: The information requested is shown in the table.

Year	*Number*
1 May 1997 to end of year	230
1998	556
1999	742
2000	664
2001	552

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people were employed in a press or public relations function in his Department on 1 January in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999, *(d)* 2000, *(e)* 2001 and *(f)* 2002. [39940]

Ms Blears: The information requested is shown in the table.

	January					
	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*
Number of staff in Media Centre—Press Officers	15	16	18	21	22	24
Number of staff in Campaigns/PR	16	16	15	17	28	31
Number of staff in Leeds (NHS Communications)	11	10	11	16	23	24
Number of staff in—Comms Regional Offices	15	15	18	19	23	19
Total	57	57	62	73	96	98

Technologies Advisory Group

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 26 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1064W, if he will list the names of the members of the Technologies Advisory Group and their declared interests. [40542]

Ms Blears: At present, most members of the Technologies Advisory Group are officials in the Department or in the National Assembly for Wales, who serve on the group as part of their responsibilities within the two Departments rather than in a personal capacity. The officials who attend meetings may also vary depending on their availability and the topics under discussion. For these reasons we do not consider it would be appropriate to list individual names. We are currently consulting on proposals to extend the membership of the group and we will consider, in the light of replies to consultation, whether there would be a case in future for listing the names of individual members.

NHS Communication (E-mail)

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if it is his policy that there should be one e-mail system through which NHS employees can communicate with each other; and if he will make a statement. [40790]

Ms Blears: Yes. Our programme for modernising the national health service (NHS) as set out in the NHS plan will rely on the provision of efficient and effective information systems to enable the benefits for patients and the public to be achieved. A common e-mail system is one component of this; by opting for a common system across the NHS the maximum benefits of value for money will be obtained. To this end, the NHS information authority is currently conducting a formal open procurement exercise for e-mail and directory services for the NHS. It is expected that subject to successful completion of negotiations a preferred bidder will be announced shortly.

Accommodation Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the cost was of hotel accommodation for departmental staff working away from home in each of the last four years. [41067]

Ms Blears: The Department does not keep separate information about the cost of hotel accommodation but I am able to provide information about the cost of night subsistence for departmental staff working away from home. This will include hotel accommodation, meals and some incidental expenses. The cost of night subsistence, including overseas, for the last four financial years for which information is available is as follows:

Year	*Hotel and subsistence costs (£)*
1997–98	871,756
1998–99	861,352
1999–2000	1,099,249
2000–01	1,338,967

Alcohol Misuse

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the Government expect to publish their alcohol misuse strategy. [40878]

Ms Blears: The NHS plan says that the Department will be implementing the national strategy to tackle alcohol misuse by 2004. The Department is on course to achieve this target and we expect to publish a consultation paper for the strategy this summer.

Healthy Living Centres

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many healthy living centres there are in Northumberland. [40879]

Jacqui Smith: The healthy living centre initiative is managed by the New Opportunities Fund (NOF). There are currently no healthy living centres in Northumberland, however, there are a number of applications under consideration and a decision on one from the Northumberland area is expected from the NOF Healthy Living Centre Committee shortly.

Children in Care (Education)

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of children leaving care have had five or more GCSEs, grades A-C, in each of the past five years. [40874]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is only available for the past two years, and is shown in the table.

Proportion of children leaving care who had five or more GCSEs at grade A to C for the years ending 31 March 2000 and 2001*

England	*Percentage*
2001	5
2000	4

Cannabis

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the relationship between cannabis smoking and the risks of *(a)* schizophrenia and *(b)* lung cancer. [40841]

Ms Blears: The "'Dangerousness of drugs'" report published last year by the national addiction centre states that there is evidence of an association between cannabis use and schizophrenia, but the significance of this association is unclear. Cannabis can exacerbate the symptoms of schizophrenia in affected individuals and is linked with relapse in schizophrenia.

The report also states that there is no conclusive evidence that cannabis causes cancer in humans, but may be an important risk factor for the development of respiratory cancer. However, smoking tobacco as well or using tobacco as a vehicle for smoking cannabis resin is a confounding factor.

National Radiological Protection Board

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health to what extent the work and advice of the NRPB is independent of Government. [41185]

Yvette Cooper: The National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB) was set up in 1970 under the Radiological Protection Act as a corporate body with functions concerning the protection of people from radiation hazards. It is a non-departmental public body. The chairman and members of the statutory board are appointed by Health Ministers, following Nolan/Neill principles, to ensure an appropriate mix of independent experts. Responsibility for setting the overall strategic direction of the work of NRPB, for monitoring the programme and ensuring that advice is impartial, authoritative and independent of Government and others bodies, rests with the chairman and the appointed members.

The board benefits from the advice of three independent advisory groups composed of non-NRPB experts. The Advisory Group on Non-ionising Radiation and the Advisory Group on Ionising Radiation review the evidence on the biological and medical effects of radiation. They also advise the board on future research priorities. A new advisory group—the Radiation, Risk and Society Advisory Group—has been set up to help NRPB to improve its communication in a practical way.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what evidence underlay the NRPB's judgment that a magnetic field exposure of 1600uT is unsafe. [41187]

Yvette Cooper: The considerations underlying the National Radiological Protection Board's guidance on exposure to electromagnetic fields is contained in Documents of the NRPB Volume 4 Number 5, 1993 and Documents of the NRPB Volume 10 Number 2, 1999.

Insofar as magnetic fields are concerned, the exposure guidelines are developed to prevent adverse effects of induced current in the body. The current density level given in the above NRPB advice to avoid adverse biological effects on the central nervous system is 10 milliamperes per square metre.

Calculations were made to relate the external magnetic field to the induced current density using a dosimetric model. The model chosen was considered to be conservative hence exceeding the investigation level (1600T) does not necessarily imply an "unsafe" level.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether it is within the remit of the NRPB to present to the public a statement of the effects of *(a)* ionising and *(b)* non-ionising radiation. [41186]

Yvette Cooper: The Radiological Protection Act 1970 provided for the establishment of a National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB) with functions concerning the protection of people from radiation hazards; and for connected purposes. The Act defines "radiation hazards" as the dangers of ionising radiations emitted by radioactive substances or other sources and radiations which are electromagnetic but not ionising. The reference to non-ionising radiation was added by Statutory Instrument 1974 No. 1230.

It is, therefore, within NRPB's remit to comment on ionising and non-ionising radiation; NRPB's website www.nrpb.org contains much material on both types of radiological hazard.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what decision the NRPB has made with respect to its magnetic field exposure threshold. [41188]

Yvette Cooper: The National Radiological Protection Board advice on electromagnetic field (EMF) exposure guidelines is contained in Documents of the NRPB Volume 4 Number 5, 1993 and Documents of the NRPB Volume 10 Number 2, 1998.

A further review of the scientific basis for the EMF exposure guidelines is currently in progress. The terms of reference for the review are:

To produce a comprehensive assessment of the science covering the areas of biology, epidemiology and dosimetry and provide guidance on limiting exposure of people to electromagnetic fields in the range of 0 Hz to 300 GHz.

To consider where information may be lacking, discuss any need to invoke a precautionary approach and what that might be.

The results of the review will be published as a consultative document in 2002.

Mesotherapy

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the mesotherapy treatments which are available from the NHS; and if he will make a statement. [41213]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 7 March 2002]:* I understand that while mesotherapy has a number of applications, it is of most relevance to the NHS as a method of pain relief. Mesotherapy is a treatment where local anaesthetic is injected in small amounts to an area of pain. Chronic pain relief is provided throughout the NHS in different forms, and includes the use of local anaesthetic. However, pain relief is a short-term measure and it is important that the underlying cause of the pain is identified and treated.

The decision on the type of pain relief treatment provided to patients is made on a case by case basis. The Department does not collect details of the different types of pain relief available on the NHS.

Autism

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how the additional money for research into autism will be spent. [41463]

Jacqui Smith: The additional funds provide the opportunity for the Medical Research Council (MRC) to accelerate research on autism, building on existing strengths and addressing gaps which were identified in the report of their review of the epidemiology and causes of autism. It will complement and add to the MRC's current support for research in this field. It is likely that the range of research supported will be broader than that of the MRC review and may include research to develop and evaluate interventions.

The MRC will shortly be setting up a steering group which will offer detailed advice on implementation. Building on the success of lay involvement in the MRC review, the membership of this group will importantly include lay people. The Department will have an observer on the group. We will continue to pursue our constructive dialogue with the MRC on autism research.

Dentistry

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children are registered with an NHS dentist in the East Riding of Yorkshire; and what the figures are for each year since 1997. [41309]

Jacqui Smith: Arrangements are now in place to ensure that patients can gain access to NHS services simply by calling NHS Direct. This means that even if a patient chooses not to register with a dentist it will still be possible for that patient to access all forms of dentistry that are provided by the NHS.

The number of child patients registered with a general dental service (GDS) dentist in East Riding and Hull health authority (HA) at 30 September for each of the years 1997 to 2001 is shown in the table.

In September 1996, the registration period for new child registrations was shortened to 15 months. Previously child registrations expired at the end of the following

calendar year. This affected registration numbers from December 1997 onwards. Data for 1997 is not comparable with later years.

Some patients that are not registered with a GDS dentist choose to attend occasionally.

Data for the East Riding area is unavailable.

General dental service: number of child registrations, 1997 to 2001

East Riding and Hull health authority	*Thousands*
Year	*Number*
1997[1]	85.6
1998	79.2
1999	80.7
2000	81.6
2001	81.8

[1] Registration number is not comparable to later figures because of the change in the registration period to 15 months.

Mental Health

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans the Government have to support NHS staff dealing with the mental health problems of older people; and if he will make a statement. [40828]

Jacqui Smith: Following publication of national service frameworks (NSF) for mental health and for older people, the Department has established a number of multi-agency care group workforce teams, including one focused on older people and one on mental health, to support national workforce development.

Standard 7 of the Older People's NSF concerns the promotion of good mental health in older people and the provision of treatment and support for older people with dementia and depression. Work undertaken to implement the framework standards, and within the care group workforce teams, will help to strengthen training and education for existing staff and support recruitment, consistent with the proposals in the NHS plan for new staff to support people of all ages with mental health problems.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what proportion of the hospital budget was spent on mental health services in each year since 1997; [41709]

(2) what proportion of the community health budget has been spent on mental health nursing services in each year since 1994–95. [41706]

Jacqui Smith: The proportion of the hospital budget spent on mental health services in each year since 1996–97 and the proportion of the community health budget spent on mental health nursing in each year since 1994–95 is shown in the table.

Percentage

	Community	*Hospital*	*Total*
1994–95	9.5	10.9	10.7
1995–96	9.5	10.9	10.7
1996–97	12.2	12.2	12.2
1997–98	13.6	12.0	12.3
1998–99	13.3	11.8	12.1
1999–2000	13.3	12.3	12.5

However the figure given for 1999–2000 is not comparable to previous years or future years, 1999–2000 represents the first year that primary care group expenditure was included in the calculation and the formula used to apportion the expenditure was based on estimated data. In future years the data for primary care groups will be more detailed and the resultant figure for percentage spend will be more accurate.

Domiciliary Care

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people are receiving domiciliary care; and if he will make a statement. [41601]

Jacqui Smith: An estimated 1.3 million adult clients received a package of community-based services (following assessment), by councils with social services responsibilities, in England, during the period 1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001. A client may be recorded more than once during the year.

Hospital Service Availability

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his policy is towards acceptable travel distances between *(a)* maternity hospital services, *(b)* paediatric hospital services and *(c)* general hospital services. [41404]

Yvette Cooper: The Department set up a Maternity and Neonatal Workforce Group last year to examine the best way to provide high quality maternity services which will provide safe, effective, evidence based and accessible care to mothers and babies.

We are also committed to producing the acute module of the new children's national service framework which will, among other issues, consider access to appropriate care and facilities for children.

Women's Hospitals

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his policy is on providing specialist maternity and obstetric services in stand-alone dedicated women's hospitals. [41408]

Yvette Cooper: The national health service provides a variety of types of care for women during pregnancy and childbirth including care in stand-alone dedicated women's hospitals, general hospital maternity units, as well as midwife-led units. We expect this variety to continue and do not support any one single model of maternity service provision in preference to all others.

It is for health authorities and NHS trusts to decide on the pattern of service provision taking into account the needs of local service users, evidence of effectiveness and available resources.

The Department has set up a Maternity and Neonatal Workforce Group to make recommendations through the Children's Taskforce on workforce issues and various models for configuration of maternity services.

National Care Standards

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has *(a)* made and *(b)* received of the cost of upgrading establishments to meet his national care standards; and if he will make a statement. [40888]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 7 March 2002]:* The full Regulatory Impact Assessment for the Care Homes Regulations and national minimum standards for care homes for older people and younger adults estimated that the cost of meeting the environmental standards from 1 April 2002 would be £68 million over five years.

A and E Services (Shropshire)

David Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average waiting time is for patients at the accident and emergency units at *(a)* Princess Royal Telford and *(b)* Royal Shrewsbury hospital. [41420]

Ms Blears: The average waiting time in accident and emergency (A&E) units in not collected.

The NHS plan set new targets to reduce the maximum wait in A&E from arrival to admission, transfer or discharge to four hours by 2004. The interim milestone is to achieve 75 per cent. of A&E attendees waiting four hours or less by March 2002.

In line with this, from August 2001, the Department has collected data on total time in A&E from arrival to transfer, admission or discharge. Information suggests that the NHS is on track to meet the March 2002 milestone with currently 77 per cent. of all people attending A&E waiting four hours or less.

NHS Reorganisation

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the cost of office moves resulting from NHS reorganisation in the last three years. [42214]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* The Department has not collected any data which would enable an assessment to be made of the cost of office moves resulting from NHS reorganisation. For example, mergers of NHS trusts may involve the need to consolidate at one of those merged, or new offices entirely. The cost of this is not readily identifiable from trust accounts.

MMR Vaccine

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to review the target payments paid to general practitioners for MMR vaccination rates. [42269]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* There have been calls for a moratorium on the target payment system in the wake of the public debate on the MMR vaccine. We recognise the hard work of general practitioners and health visitors in responding to parents' concerns around MMR and trying to sustain high rates of immunisation in the current climate. However, we consider it would be inappropriate and counter-productive to change the target payment system at this time.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of children in the Cynon valley have been immunised before their fifth birthday against measles, mumps and rubella in the last year for which figures are available; what the national average is; and what steps his Department is taking to ensure that the Government reach their target rate for vaccination. [39521]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I have been asked to reply. These are matters for the National Assembly for Wales. I am, though, aware that the Assembly has taken a number of steps over the past year, aimed at improving uptake of the MMR vaccine.

In April 2001, they launched the Mythbuster initiative, to assist health professionals in counselling concerned parents and dispelling myths surrounding the safety of MMR. This was followed up with a comprehensive information programme which included an in-depth technical pack, leaflets, posters and videos.

Correspondence

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will reply to the hon. Member for West Chelmsford's letter of 22 November, with reference to Mr. Raybould (Ref column: POH (3) 5499/G). [42969]

Ms Blears: A reply was sent on 15 March.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 11 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 843W, on parliamentary questions, if he will give details of the work that has been re-prioritised in order for the backlog of outstanding Questions to be answered. [43904]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 18 March 2002]:* Clearing the backlog of outstanding parliamentary questions has been handled without the need for a major re-prioritisation of work. It has been cleared either through staff working extra hours, by using staff between postings or by temporarily seconding a member of staff whose duties were covered by colleagues.

NHS Widowers' Pensions

James Purnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what estimate he has made of the cost of including women doctors' pension contributions prior to 1988 in the calculations for NHS widowers' pensions; [43652]

(2) if he plans to include the contributions paid into NHS pensions by women doctors prior to 1988 in the calculations for NHS widowers' pension provision. [43651]

Mr. Hutton: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the former Member for North Norfolk (Mr. Prior) on 13 January 1999, *Official Report*, column 212.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 21 March 2002

DEFENCE

Porton Down Volunteers

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 15 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 936W, regarding the 1973 report prepared at Porton Down, on what dates the Ethics Committee overseeing the human experiments at the Chemical Defence Establishment scrutinised this experiment; and if he will place in the Library copies of the papers of the committee which relate to the discussion of this experiment. [43477]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library a copy of the report produced by the Chemical Defence Establishment, Porton Down in 1985 entitled "Pyridostigmine pre-treatment and neuromuscular transmission in man—a study using single fibre electromyography". [43445]

Dr. Moonie: Yes. This technical note reports preliminary results and analysis. The full results and final conclusions of the work in which Service volunteers who had been exposed to a low dose of Sarin and monitored over a number of years using single fibre electromyography have already been published entitled: "Single fibre electromyographic changes in man after organophosphate exposure" (Human and Experimental Toxicology 1996, 15, 367–75).

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library a list of the common and chemical names of the vesicants which have been tested on Service volunteers at the Chemical Defence Establishment, Porton Down during the Service volunteer programme; and if he will list the numbers of Service volunteers who were tested with each of these vesicants. [43452]

Dr. Moonie: At present there are no definitive figures detailing the numbers of Service volunteers who have been exposed to vesicant agents or all the agents which were used. However, it is believed that some 8,000 individuals have participated in studies which have involved the use of the following two vesicants:

Sulphur mustard; chemical name 2–2'-di(chloroethyl) sulphide

Lewisite; chemical name 2-chlorovinyl dichloroarsine.

In addition, a small number of volunteers may have been exposed to the following two vesicants during the Service volunteer programme:

Phosgene oxime; chemical name dichloroformoxime

Nitrogen mustard; chemical name 2–2'-2''-tri(chloroethyl)amine.

Test and Evaluation Centres

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future of the BUTEC and Rona test and evaluation ranges, and if he will make a statement. [44428]

Dr. Moonie: The BUTEC and Rona ranges are Ministry of Defence facilities operated by QinetiQ under contract to MOD. They provide a comprehensive range of test and evaluation facilities, for which the MOD has a continuing requirement.

Munitions

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the quality difference between shells manufactured in *(a)* the USA and *(b)* the UK by BAE Systems. [43392]

Dr. Moonie: All munitions, irrespective of the country of manufacture, must meet the Department's same high quality requirements and rigorous safety standards before entering service with the UK armed forces.

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence by what means he plans to apply benchmark prices to munitions. [43394]

Dr. Moonie: Benchmarking is already an integral part of the Framework Partnering Agreement (FPA) between Royal Ordnance Defence (ROD) and the MOD. A specific Benchmarking Working Group, comprising both MOD and ROD staff, has been established within the FPA and currently uses two techniques to monitor benchmarking. These techniques are comparative analysis and performance analysis.

Explosives

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how long-term security of supply for explosives is defined in the Framework Partnering Agreement between his Department and ROD. [43396]

Dr. Moonie: The Department entered into a Framework Partnering Agreement with Royal Ordnance Defence in 1999. Long-term security of supply is not specifically defined within the agreement; however, both parties are committed to a long-term relationship and continuous dialogue on matters of mutual interest, including security of supply.

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much explosive used by his Department was bought from the USA in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [43393]

Dr. Moonie: In the last 12 months, the Ministry of Defence has not bought explosive substances from the USA.

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if the ROD Framework Partners Agreement includes the plant in Bridgwater; [43399]

(2) pursuant to the answer of 11 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 656W, on explosives, which plants controlled by BAe are *(a)* included and *(b)* not included in the Framework Partnering Agreement between his Department and ROD. [43427]

Dr. Moonie: The Royal Ordnance Defence (ROD) facility at Radway Green is explicitly included in the Framework Partnering Agreement because of the organisational structure of the Company. Beyond this, individual ROD facilities are not specifically included or excluded from the Agreement.

Depleted Uranium

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the training exercises that have taken place on the Eskmeals and Kirkcudbright training areas over the last five years and the regiments that have been involved. [43424]

Dr. Moonie: The training exercises (broken down by type of training) that have taken place on Kirkcudbright training area within the last five years, and the formations or units that have been involved are shown in the table:

Formation training (non-firming exercises)	*Formation/unit*	*Year and frequency*				
		1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Extended period operational training	HQ Northern Ireland	0	0	0	0	8
Exercise Eagles Eye	16 Air Assault Brigade	0	0	0	0	1
Exercise Eagles Strike	Queens Own Yeomanry	0	0	0	1	0
Operational training	5 Airbourne Brigade	0	0	1	0	0
Exercise Northern Lights	3 Royal Marines Commando	0	0	1	0	0
Exercise Swift Hawk	5 Army Air Corps	0	0	8	4	1
Exercise Executive Stretch	107 Brigade	0	1	2	1	0
Individual training	Infantry Training Centre Catterick	2	6	11	7	2
Exercise Deep George	1 Reconnaissance Brigade	2	0	0	0	2
Field firing	39 Regiment Royal Artillery	2	0	0	0	0
Field firing	32 Regiment Royal Artillery	0	1	0	0	0
Field firing	101 Regiment Royal Artillery	0	0	1	0	0
Field firing	9 Royal Irish Regiment	0	0	3	0	0
Field firing	A Company Kings Own Scottish Borderers	0	0	1	0	0
Field firing	3 Squadron Royal Air Force	0	0	0	4	0
Field firing	A Company Black Watch	0	0	0	1	0
Non-firing exercises	Officer Training Corp Glasgow	1	0	0	0	0
Non-firing exercises	C Company Lowland Volunteer	1	1	0	0	0
Non-firing exercises	Scottish Yeomanry	1	0	0	0	0
Non-firing exercises	105 Air Defence Regiment Royal Artillery	2	0	0	0	0
Non-firing exercises	4/5 Irish Rangers	1	0	0	0	0
Non-firing exercises	27 Transport Regiment	0	1	0	0	0
Non-firing exercises	245 Provost Company	0	1	0	0	0
Non-firing exercises	Campbell College	0	1	0	0	0
Non-firing exercises	4/5 Royal Irish	0	1	0	0	0
Non-firing exercises	Royal Ghurka Rifles	0	1	0	0	0
Non-firing exercises	24 Field Ambulance	0	1	0	0	0
Non-firing exercises	3 Royal Highland Fusiliers	0	1	0	0	0
Non-firing exercises	152 Field Ambulance	0	0	1	2	0
Non-firing exercises	Scottish Transport Regiment	0	0	2	0	0
Non-firing exercises	9 Royal Irish Regiment	0	0	3	0	0
Non-firing exercises	162 Squadron Royal Corps of Transport	0	0	1	0	0
Non-firing exercises	United States Navy SEALs	0	0	1	0	0
Non-firing exercises	101 Regiment Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers	0	0	1	0	0
Non-firing exercises	52 Lowland Regiment	0	0	0	1	0
Non-firing exercises	204 Field Ambulance	0	0	0	1	0
Non-firing exercises	Royal Marines Reserves Scotland	0	0	0	0	1
Non-firing exercises	Officer Training Corps (Northumbrian)	0		0	0	1

Eskmeals is not used in support of training activities for any of the three services. The site is owned by the Ministry of Defence and operated by QinetiQ who provide test and evaluation services in support of the UK armed forces on a variety of medium to heavy calibre weapon systems.

MOD Land (Access)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment has been made of the changes necessary to open up his Department's land to disabled people; and if he will make a statement. [44639]

Dr. Moonie: A pilot audit was undertaken using the BT millennium miles scheme that led to the upgrading of a track and path to improve wheelchair access, and more are planned. New paths have been constructed at Sennybridge, including one that will permit wheelchair access. This, together with paths at Lulworth, and Elstead Common, Longmoor, is promoted as "Easy-going Trails" in the fourth edition of "Walks on MOD Lands" and in the "Access" section of the DE website.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of the public annually used the public access areas on his Department's land in the last year for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [44638]

Dr. Moonie: No comprehensive surveys have been carried out to establish the numbers of visitors who access the defence estate, However, in January 2002, as a first step in meeting the targets set by the estate strategy "In Trust and on Trust" (published in June 2000), pilot visitors surveys were carried out at the Aldershot training

area and Willsworthy Ranges. These provided promising results, but need to be developed further before they are used elsewhere at suitable Ministry of Defence sites.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent assessment has been made of public access to his Department's land; and if he will make a statement. [44637]

Dr. Moonie: There is a presumption in favour of access to the defence estate wherever this is compatible with operational and military training uses, public safety, security, conservation, and the interests of Ministry of Defence's tenants. This policy was set out in 2000 in the estate strategy "In Trust and on Trust" together with a number of objectives in respect of access and recreation.

A number of pilot studies have been carried out in furtherance of those objectives: at Willsworthy Ranges and Aldershot training area on visitor numbers, and two at Lulworth, on path conditions and applying the BT millennium miles scheme. This led to the upgrading of tracks at Lulworth to improve wheelchair access. Similar studies will be carried out elsewhere. A fourth edition of the booklet "Walks on MOD Lands", was published and the updated "Access" section of the defence estates website went live in November 2001.

These initiatives have been developed in conjunction with a variety of external stakeholders, and reflect the Ministry of Defence's continuing commitment to improving public access to the defence estate.

MOD Housing

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps are taken to ensure that complaints from service personnel and their families about the suitability or condition of his Department's housing is investigated and dealt with; what targets the DHE has in dealing with complaints; what the level of achieving these targets was in the last year; what steps are being taken to improve the complaints procedure; and if he will make a statement. [44967]

Dr. Moonie: The Defence Housing Executive (DHE) has a formal procedure for investigating and resolving complaints about Service Families Accommodation (SFA), which is publicised in the Occupants Handbook. A copy is available in each family quarter. The current targets are to acknowledge written complaints within one working day and to send a full response within 10 working days.

In the first nine months of the current reporting year, which started on 1 April 2001, the DHE responded to 95 per cent. of all written complaints within the target times. Complaints procedures are currently under review as part of the development of DHE's customer care strategy.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many cases of suspected property fraud in the provision of his Department's housing have been taken to court in each year since 1997; and if he will make a statement; [43006]

(2) what incentives have been provided for private companies to *(a)* detect and *(b)* report fraud in his Department's housing; and if he will make a statement; [42980]

(3) what assets have been frozen in suspected property fraud cases in the provision of his Department's housing in each year since 1997; and if he will make a statement; [42981]

(4) how many cases of suspected property fraud in the provision of MOD housing have been successfully prosecuted in each year since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [45442]

Dr. Moonie: No cases of suspected fraud relating to the provision of housing by the Defence Housing Executive (DHE) have gone to court since 1997. However, a case of property fraud has been referred to the Crown Prosecution Service for advice, with a view to criminal prosecution. Two additional cases of suspected fraud have been referred to the Defence Fraud Analysis Unit (DFAU) for investigation and may come to court in the future.

No incentives are paid to private companies to detect and report suspected fraud. The Ministry of Defence has a policy of zero tolerance to fraud and this is impressed upon contractors. Companies are expected to produce their own anti-fraud policy statement when tendering for contracts.

To date, for the period beginning 1997, the MOD police have no record of any assets having been frozen in suspected property fraud cases associated with the provision of accommodation by the Department.

Golden Jubilee

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many military officers are expected to be present at the Queen's Golden Jubilee festivities; of that number, how many will be there for the purpose of *(a)* protection/security, *(b)* marching in the parade and *(c)* performing music; and if he will make a statement. [44583]

Dr. Moonie: I am withholding details of protection or security operations in accordance with Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. A Golden Jubilee Festival is due to take place in central London on the afternoon of the 4 June 2002 at which the armed forces will play an appropriate part. However the details are still being finalised with the organisers.

Israel

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for which MOD contracts Israeli companies are bidding as *(a)* prime contractors and *(b)* as teaming partners; and in the case of the latter, with which companies they are teamed. [45185]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Service Personnel Memorial

Dr. Vis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made with the memorial to service personnel killed since the Second World War; and if he will make a statement. [44480]

Mr. Hoon: Pursuant to the answer I gave on 20 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 313W, I regret that a paragraph was omitted from the answer in error. The

answer should have included the following paragraph. Those members of the Royal Fleet Auxiliary and the Merchant Navy who were killed in conflict zones while in direct support of the armed forces will also be included on the memorial.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards

David Winnick: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, if submissions are being made by the House of Commons Commission to the review being carried out by the Committee on Standards in Public Life on the future appointment of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards and related matters; and if he will make a statement. [44996]

Mr. Kirkwood: The House of Commons Commission has been invited to contribute to the inquiry by the Committee on Standards in Public Life, and will do so.

PRIME MINISTER

Energy Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on energy costs incurred by his office in each of the last 10 years. [42446]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on 19 March 2002, *Official Report*, columns 267–68W.

Local Elections

Mr. Kevin Hughes: To ask the Prime Minister what advice has been given to civil servants on the conduct of Government business during the forthcoming elections to local councils on 2 May. [46033]

The Prime Minister: The Government have issued guidance to civil servants on the principles which they should observe in relation to the conduct of Government business in the period before the forthcoming elections.

The guidance stressed that civil servants should conduct themselves in accordance with the Civil Service Code and is based on the need to maintain the political impartiality of the civil service and the need to ensure that public resources are not used for party political purposes.

The guidance will come into force on 11 April.

Copies of the guidance have been placed in the Library of the House, and are also available from the Vote Office.

Surveillance Commissioners

Mr. Miller: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make an announcement about the appointment and re-appointment of surveillance commissioners under Part III of the Police Act 1997. [46090]

The Prime Minister: In accordance with Section 91 of the Police Act 1997, after consultation with the Scottish Ministers, I have agreed to appoint and re-appoint the following surveillance commissioners to assist Sir Andrew Leggatt, the chief surveillance commissioner. There are three commissioners for England and Wales, two for Scotland and one for Northern Ireland. However, the remit of each commissioner covers the whole of the United Kingdom so that any commissioner can act in jurisdictions other than his own.

I have appointed from 1 November 2001, as a commissioner the Right hon. Lord Sutherland, who served as a judge of the Court of Session from 1985 to 2001, for a period of three years.

I have also re-appointed as commissioners:

Sir Charles McCullough who was appointed as surveillance commissioner in 1998 and is re-appointed for a further three years from 1 November 2001. He served as a High Court judge of the Queen's Bench Division from 1981 to 1998;

The right hon. Sir Michael Hutchison who was appointed as surveillance commissioner in 1998 and is re-appointed for a further three years from 1 November 2001. He served as a Lord Justice of Appeal from 1995 to 1999;

Lord Bonomy who was appointed as surveillance commissioner in 1998 and is re-appointed for a further three years from 1 November 2001. He has been a judge of the Court of Session since 1997;

The right hon. Sir John MacDermott who was appointed as surveillance commissioner in 1998 and is re-appointed, 1 November 2001, until 1 October 2003.

The commissioners are appointed under the provisions of Part III of the Police Act 1997. The Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 extended the commissioners remit. Since the authorisation of intrusive surveillance operations forms a key component of the Government's response to serious and organised crime, I attach considerable importance to these appointments and I am delighted that the commissioners have accepted their appointments. In conjunction with Sir Andrew Leggatt, their substantial judicial experience, particularly of the criminal justice system, will provide independent oversight of surveillance operations, which although operationally important, must also be subject to stringent safeguards.

Golden Jubilee

Mrs. Fitzsimons: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on plans for celebrating the 50th anniversary of Her Majesty the Queen's accession to the throne. [46091]

The Prime Minister: I announced on 29 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 205W, the programme of visits and other events throughout the United Kingdom from May to August this year, which will be undertaken by Her Majesty and His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh, to mark the Golden Jubilee.

I am, therefore, pleased to be able to announce further details of the programme of Jubilee visits to the London boroughs which they will carry out during the summer of this year. Although the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh will not be able to visit every borough, their itinerary will enable them to meet as many Londoners as possible.

The programme is as follows:

East London

9 May—The Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh will visit Newham, Redbridge and Waltham Forest. The Queen will also visit Barking and Dagenham.

North London

6 June—The Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh will visit Barnet, Brent and Haringey.

West London

25 June—The Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh will visit Bushy Park, Gunnersbury Park, Hillingdon and Kingston-upon-Thames.

South London

4 July—The Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh will visit Croydon, Crystal Palace and Lewisham.

These details, together with further information about other confirmed Golden Jubilee celebrations and events can be found on the searchable calendar of events on the official Golden Jubilee website at http://www.goldenjubilee.gov.uk/. The British Monarchy website at http://www.royal.gov.uk/ also has details of the Queen's programme and other royal engagements. These will be updated throughout the year as confirmation of events is received.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Arms Deals

9. **Harry Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proposals she has to stop bribery and corruption in arms deals involving UK firms. [42855]

Nigel Griffiths: This Government are not prepared to treat corruption as a necessary part of doing business, whether the deal involves arms or not.

Social Enterprise

11. **Margaret Moran:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures she intends to take to assist social entrepreneurs. [42858]

Mr. Alexander: A range of measures to support and develop social enterprises, and the people who work in them, will be included in the Social Enterprise Strategy I intend to publish after Easter.

Construction

12. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the Government's policy on the construction industry. [42859]

Ms Hewitt: Government and industry are taking forward three policy initiatives designed to increase the overall productivity and competitiveness of the UK construction industry.

First, Rethinking Construction. In partnership with the industry we are using demonstration projects, case studies and best practice dissemination to prove the business case for change and to provide practical means by which companies can improve their productivity and competitiveness and clients can demand products that actually enhance their own performance. We have agreed to continue the initiative until April 2004.

Second, my Department supports a substantial programme of construction-related innovation and research. Sir John Fairclough, a former Government chief scientist, has recently conducted a review for us of how we should best provide that support in the future. The report establishes an excellent framework for improving the effectiveness of construction research. We are consulting the industry on how we can work with them to take forward the recommendations.

Finally, the Quality Mark Scheme, which will enable builders to demonstrate their competence and to distinguish themselves from their less reputable rivals. The scheme will be rolled out across the country over a three to four year period.

These three closely connected initiatives are being taken forward against a backdrop of continuing work with the industry to understand the various issues it faces, especially in relation to wider Government policy, to ensure we develop polices and regulations that recognise the competitiveness issues in the industry while meeting Government's broader objectives on the environment, safety and so on.

Paid Leave

13. **Mr. Watts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on her policy on entitlement to payment for bank holidays. [42862]

Alan Johnson: Entitlement to time off on bank holidays depends on an employee's contract of employment. However, under the Working Time Regulations, employees are entitled to a minimum of four weeks' leave per year with pay. They may use part of this entitlement to take time off on bank holidays, subject to their employer's agreement.

Scott Report

14. **Ms Drown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will implement the recommendations of the Scott report on export licensing. [42863]

Nigel Griffiths: The Bill responds to the Scott report's key recommendations that the existing export control should be replaced with legislation that:

Sets restrictions on the Government's power to control exports;

Gives Parliament the power to scrutinise orders introduced under export control legislation.

In addition the Bill gives the Government important new powers to control trafficking and brokering in arms, and the transfer of sensitive technology by intangible means.

Lord Scott has welcomed the Bill, commenting that "for the first time in some 50 years there are proposals for export controls which will have constitutional and democratic respectability." (Lord Scott made this comment during the Bill's Second Readings in the House of Lords—*Hansard*, 8 January column 482).

Knowledge Transfer

15. **Kevin Brennan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she is taking to promote knowledge transfer between the university sector and British industry. [42864]

Ms Hewitt: The Government's two White Papers, "Excellence and Opportunity", published in July 2000, and "Opportunity for All", published in February 2001, set out our science and innovation policy for the 21st century, and include a comprehensive range of measures to help promote knowledge transfer between the university sector and British industry. We are making excellent progress.

We are considering, as part of the Government's spending review, how to further develop these initiatives to build on universities' potential as drivers of growth in the knowledge economy.

Steel Industry

16. **Julie Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to help the Welsh steel industry. [42865]

Ms Hewitt: My Department and the National Assembly for Wales work closely with the steel industry to provide support to improve the sector's competitiveness. The Welsh Assembly co-ordinates the All-Wales Steel Task Force with the aim of promoting the industry as well as dealing with the consequences of restructuring.

My Department has supported a number of industry-led initiatives which benefit companies in Wales and elsewhere in the UK. The Metals Industry Competitive Enterprise (MICE) aims to introduce lean manufacturing techniques throughout the sector. Welsh companies are among those who have already taken advantage of this important initiative. In February I announced funding for the new National Metals Technology Centre (NAMTEC) which I hope will play an important role in ensuring the UK metals industry as a whole remains a world leader in innovation.

22. **Andrew Selous:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the British steel industry. [42873]

Ms Hewitt: The UK steel industry has experienced difficult trading conditions in recent years and many jobs have been lost through restructuring and cost cutting. However, the industry has an excellent productivity record, produces a wide range of high quality products and has a well trained work force helping it compete against international competition at home and overseas. We are determined to stand by the industry in combating the recent unjustified US action to impose prohibitive import tariffs.

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many people were employed in the UK steel industry in each of the last 20 years. [44777]

Ms Hewitt: The number of people employed in the UK steel industry in each of the last 20 years was:

	[1]*Thousand*
1982	74.5
1983	63.7
1984	61.9
1985	59.0
1986	55.9
1987	54.9
1988	55.1
1989	53.8
1990	50.8
1991	45.1
1992	40.8
1993	39.2
1994	38.1
1995	37.9
1996	36.5
1997	35.2
1998	32.5
1999	28.9
2000	25.5
2001	[2]22.0

[1] Number employed at end of year on European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) iron and steel activities.
[2] Estimated.
Source:
The Iron and Steel Statistics Bureau.

Post Office Network

17. **Vernon Coaker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she is taking to publicise the services available at local post offices. [42867]

Mr. Alexander: This is an operational matter for Consignia.

I have however been informed by Post Office Ltd. that extensive marketing and advertising are undertaken to raise awareness of new and existing products offered through the post office network.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent representations she has received on the rural postal network. [43846]

Mr. Alexander: I refer the hon. Member for the Vale of York to my answer on 11 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 69W.

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action she is taking to maintain the network of sub-post offices in urban neighbourhoods. [42872]

Mr. Alexander: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to the hon. Member for Hertsmere earlier today.

Broadband

19. **Jonathan Shaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what she is doing to increase use of broadband technology. [42869]

Mr. Alexander: The Government strategy to drive broadband rollout and take up was set out in the UK Online annual report published in December 2001.

The report includes a number of actions to stimulate demand, by making it easier to access broadband services, and stimulating the demand and supply of new broadband content and applications.

23. **Mrs. Humble:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many homes and businesses have a broadband connection. [42874]

Mr. Alexander: Oftel's broadband brief published in February 2002 reported that there were over 146,000 ADSL end-users and 196,000 cable modem end-users. Take-up is growing rapidly, with a growth of over 500 per cent. over the last year.

Menswear Exports

20. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to raise with the WTO the tariff on exports of menswear from the United Kingdom to the United States; and if she will make a statement. [42870]

Ms Hewitt: This issue will be addressed as part of the market access negotiations within the WTO Doha Development.

Clean Coal Technology

21. **Mr. Bill O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has received following the publication of the energy report by the performance and innovation unit on clean coal technology; and if she will make a statement. [42871]

Ms Hewitt: To date we have received no representations following the publication of my Department's review on Government support for cleaner coal technology demonstration plant.

Trade Sanctions

24. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has, in coordination with European partners, for targeted trade sanctions on US products. [42875]

Ms Hewitt: The Government fully support the European Commission's request for consultations with the US, including seeking compensation for the damage to EU trade by the US measures. We will await the outcome of these consultations before reaching any final view on other responses to the US measures.

Philippines

25. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry pursuant to her statement of 15 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 1000, on the WTO, what progress has been made in consultations with the Philippines on trade issues in relation to Mindanao. [42876]

Ms Hewitt: Although the Government do not have a bilateral aid programme with the Philippines, the Philippines does receive considerable support from other donors and from multilateral organisations, including the World bank and the Asian Development bank, both of which receive funds from the Government. These multilateral resources should enable the Government of the Philippines to tackle poverty and achieve faster growth, provided that a sound policy environment can be maintained.

If the Mindanao train project is sound and requires concessional resources, multilateral finance should be available.

Vibration White Finger

26. **John Mann:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the decision to set a deadline on new claims to the compensation scheme for current and ex-miners suffering from vibration white finger. [42877]

Ms Hewitt: The number of new claims registered under the scheme is declining and this has led to reduced opening times for many testing centres. The Department is keen to ensure that existing claims are assessed and settled as soon as possible. In consultation with the Claimants' Solicitors Group the Department has agreed a cut-off date of 31 October 2002. This has been advertised in local and national press.

Once the scheme is closed, claims may still be accepted by solicitors and processed as personal injury claims.

Climate Change Levy

27. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent representations she has received about the cost impact of the climate change levy on the competitive position of manufacturing industry in the United Kingdom. [42878]

Ms Hewitt: The Department has received a number of representations from business about the climate change levy.

The Government are keeping in touch with business on the levy to monitor initial experience with its operation. Primary responsibility for the levy lies with my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Environmental Policies

28. **Mr. Wiggin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she takes to integrate environmental concerns into her Department's policies. [42879]

Ms Hewitt: DTI's aim is to ensure that environmental concerns are brought into the mainstream of the Department's policy-making and operational management, within the wider context of promoting sustainable development.

The effectiveness of DTI's procedures for environmental screening and appraisal of policies were reviewed last year by a member of the Foresight Environmental Appraisal Task Force and the Department's internal audit. New guidelines are being finalised which will be published on DTI's website.

DTI's Estates and Facilities Management Directorate run an environmental managements system accredited to ISO 14001 covering DTI's HQ Buildings. It incorporates monitoring, control and regular audits to ensure the continued effectiveness of the system and to track progress towards targets.

Science

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on her policy on British science. [42868]

Ms Hewitt: Our policy is to ensure that we continue to maintain and develop a world class science and engineering base for the UK, and take steps to ensure that it makes the greatest possible contribution towards economic growth, productivity, sustainable development and improved quality of life.

Shipbuilding

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on shipbuilding. [42860]

Ms Hewitt: My Department continues to work closely with the shipbuilding industry to assist it in its efforts to improve its international competitiveness, employment and training.

Nigel Devereux

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the responsibility has been of Mr. Nigel Devereux during his secondment to her Department; what policy formulation Mr. Nigel Devereux has been involved in; and if she will make a statement. [43687]

Ms Hewitt: Mr. Nigel Devereux has held the position of Head, Downstream Oil since May 2000 in which role he deals with issues relating to the refining and marketing of petroleum products, including the formulation of policy in these areas.

All secondments into the Department are undertaken within the principles of the Civil Service Commissioners' Recruitment Code and are subject to formal contractual arrangements covering detailed terms including issues of conflict of interest.

Labelling

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what regulations there are to ensure that retail products are labelled to indicate if animal experimentation had taken place in the production process. [43997]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 20 March 2002]:* Animal testing is only carried out in the UK where it is necessary to ensure the health and safety of consumers i.e. before a new pharmaceutical product is placed on the market. Even in these cases some of the world's most stringent requirements for laboratory animal welfare and licensing must be fully complied with.

The UK does not test finished cosmetic products or their ingredients on animals and has not done so since 1998. The Cosmetic Products (Safety) Regulations 1996, which implement the European Cosmetics Directive have a voluntary measure which allows claims about animal testing to be made if a manufacturer so chooses. There are no other regulations on product labelling with regard to animal testing.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to update labelling laws on animal testing to ensure consumers can make informed purchasing decisions. [43971]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I have no such plans.

Under the Cosmetic Products (Safety) Regulations 1996 manufacturers may refer to testing on animals in the labelling but any reference must state clearly whether the tests carried out involved the cosmetic product itself or its ingredients.

Government Technology Policy

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will set out the Government's policy on *(a)* nanotechnology, *(b)* biotechnology and *(c)* manufacturing industry; and if she will make a statement. [43579]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 19 March 2002]: (a)* Nanotechnology—This Government recognises that nanotechnology has the potential to transform the UK industry base. We are focusing on strengthening the research base through new collaborative programme in our leading universities. Our current spend through the Research Councils on nanotechnology is worth over £30 million a year.

We are also encouraging industry to use this investment to underpin its own research. We particularly wish to see dynamic new firms being spun out from the research base through the use of the £100 million support for seed capital funds, entrepreneurship and incubation that we have made available to the universities and public sector research establishments.

(b) Biotechnology—The Government's policy on biotechnology is to maintain the UK as the leader in Europe in biotechnology by maximising the potential for commercial developments arising from the UK's excellence in the science base and promoting a supportive regulatory and fiscal environment in the EU and UK, such that the UK is seen as the best place in Europe for:

(i) biotechnology enterprises to start up, operate and grow; and

(ii) inward investment in biotechnology.

(c) Manufacturing—The Government's policy on manufacturing industry is to ensure its future competitiveness and productivity through the stable macro-economic environment we have established, together with our policies to encourage investment, to promote enterprise, innovation, and knowledge transfer, to raise skills, and to provide an effective and competitive framework.

Claims Direct

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement as to her Department's inquiries into the *(a)* flotation and *(b)* collapse of Claims Direct. [41166]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Department has powers to conduct confidential inquiries into companies and these are exercised when there is good reason to do so in the public interest. The Department does not comment on the

affairs of companies that are or have been the subject of inquiries under the Companies Acts. However Claims Direct Plc issued a press notice on 23 July 2001 confirming that it was providing information to the DTI under Section 447 of the Companies Act 1985.

The Department does not know of any reason to suggest Claims Direct Plc has "collapsed".

Export Licensing

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what account she takes of sustainable development issues in export licensing. [42861]

Nigel Griffiths: All relevant export licence applications are considered on a case by case basis against the Consolidated EU and National Arms Export Licensing Criteria. This includes the compatibility of the arms exports with the technical and economic capacity of the recipient country, taking into account the desirability that states should achieve their legitimate needs of security and defence with the least diversion for armaments of human and economic resources.

Unsolicited Faxes

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what research she has undertaken on systems which allow people to opt out of receiving unsolicited faxes; and if she will make a statement. [42856]

Miss Melanie Johnson: We consulted widely about this when we were considering how to implement the Telecommunications Data Protection and Privacy Directive in 1999.

No-one may send an unsolicited fax for direct marketing purposes to an individual subscriber without the subscriber's prior consent. Nor may anyone send such a fax to corporate subscribers if they have registered with the Fax Preference Service, or if they have told the direct marketer not to send them any further faxes. These regulations are enforced by the information commissioner.

EC State Aid Rules

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) which schemes submitted to Advantage West Midlands in the last 12 months have been ruled ineligible as a result of EC state aid rules; [43487]

(2) what recent representations she has received in respect of EC state aid rules. [43486]

Alan Johnson: No projects have been ruled ineligible on state aid grounds alone. Some have given rise to state aid concerns which require them either to be amended so that they do not constitute aid or so that they fell within the block exemption regulations. Other schemes, or their UK funding streams, may need to be or are being notified to the commission so that their compatibility with the EC treaty can be determined. I have received representations from Members of Parliament and businesses about the state aid rules. It is important that the rules are respected but also that they should not inhibit unnecessarily regeneration of urban centres.

MINISTER FOR WOMEN

Ministerial Duties

32. **Michael Fabricant:** To ask the Minister what proportion of her time she spends in each week on matters relating exclusively to women; and if she will make a statement. [42885]

Ms Hewitt: My roles as Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and Minister for Women are inextricably linked, since women are almost half the workforce, account for a third of new business start-ups and make the majority of decisions as consumers. As Minister for Women I concentrate on issues of work: life balance, narrowing the gender pay gap and women's entrepreneurship, working closely with my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Cabinet Office.

Science and Engineering

33. **Tony Cunningham:** To ask the Minister what steps she is taking to encourage women to take up careers in science and engineering. [42886]

Ms Hewitt: We are raising awareness of the opportunities for women through promotional material such as SPARK magazine, ambassador and role model campaigns and by encouraging girls to try for themselves science, engineering and IT in several ways: computer clubs, the WISE Campaign Outlook programme and endorsing the "take our daughters to work" day on 25 April. We are also looking at DTI schemes to ensure that they do not inadvertently exclude women who want to return to science and engineering careers.

Flexible Working

34. **Ann McKechin:** To ask the Minister if she will make a statement on the impact of flexibility at work on productivity growth in Britain. [42887]

Ms Hewitt: Greater flexibility at work can boost productivity by enabling employees to balance work and family responsibilities, thus improving recruitment, retention and motivation and reducing absenteeism. More flexible working hours also enable the business to meet customers needs more effectively, for instance through longer opening hours.

Equal Pay

35. **Vernon Coaker:** To ask the Minister what recent assessment she has made of the effectiveness of the Equal Pay Act 1970. [42888]

Ms Hewitt: The Equal Pay Act had a significant impact in reducing the pay gap from 37 per cent. in 1975 to 18 per cent. today. It has been effective in providing legal protection against pay discrimination but also in challenging the culture of undervaluing women.

We are taking forward action to tackle the complex underlying factors behind the pay gap including promoting a voluntary approach to pay reviews among employers through the Castle Awards and with the help of the Fair Pay Champions, carrying out pay audits in Government Departments, and taking forward recommendations from the Kingsmill Review.

Gender Pay Gap

Helen Jones: To ask the Minister for Women what research her Department is undertaking on the gap between men and women's pay. [42881]

Ms Hewitt: The Women and Equality Unit published a comprehensive report called "The Gender Pay Gap" on 5 December 2001. It found that the key causes of the gender pay gap were: women having less work experience and lower levels of qualifications; part-time work; differences in travel patterns; and occupational and workplace segregation.

International Women's Day

36. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Minister what representations she has received about celebrating International Women's Day. [42889]

Ms Hewitt: On International Women's Day I spoke at a conference and exhibition in Leicester which was attended by women from the many different communities across the city.

I also received invitations from the London borough of Waltham Forest and the UK Association for the UN Development Fund for Women.

My hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Cabinet Office marked the occasion by announcing the Castle Awards which will reward employers work in tackling equal pay issues and help narrow the gender pay gap.

Mothers (Return to Work)

Lynne Jones: To ask the Minister for Women what assessment she has made of the obstacles preventing those mothers who want to return to work from doing so. [42882]

Ms Hewitt: The Government have identified a number of obstacles which may deter mothers who want to return to work, including the difficulties of balancing work and family life, access to child care facilities, difficulties making work pay, skills becoming out of date and lack of confidence. We are promoting a range of measures to tackle these issues.

SCOTLAND

Access to Government Information

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many requests have so far been received in 2001–02 for information in accordance with the Government's Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. [24780]

Mrs. Liddell: For the period 31 January 2001 to 28 February 2002 seven requests have been received for information in accordance with the Government's Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Memorandum of Understanding

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will make a statement on the resource implications in 2001–02 of the Memorandum of Understanding and supplementary agreements. [24777]

Mrs. Liddell: There are no separately identifiable costs relating to the Memorandum of Understanding and supplementary agreements. Any work would be carried out by staff as part of their normal duties and I would expect the costs to be small.

Newspaper Advertising

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the expenditure of her *(a)* Department, *(b)* agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies on newspaper advertising by title in each year since 1997. [26983]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999. Since that date, expenditure on newspaper advertising was as shown in the following table:

Period/newspaper	*Expenditure (£)*
1 July 1999 to 31 March 2000	
Sun (Scotland)	3,643.00
Aberdeen Press and Journal	3,290.00
Dundee Courier	3,277.00
Scotsman	3,290.00
Daily Record	7,403.00
Herald	4,113.00
1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001	
Sun (Scotland)	7,520.00
Sunday Herald	6,630.00
Aberdeen Press and Journal	15,002.00
Daily Record	15,040.00
Dundee Courier	17,434.00
Scotsman	17,146.00
Herald	18,753.00
Scotland on Sunday	12,859.00
News of the World	4,759.00
Sunday Mail	11,104.00
Sunday Post	7,465.00
Sunday Times	12,521.00
1 April 2001 to 31 January 2002	
Sunday Herald	2,143.00
Aberdeen Press and Journal	13,886.00
Daily Record	31,080.00
Sun (Scotland)	1,487.00
Dundee Courier	17,420.00
Scotsman	14,781.00
Herald	20,487.00
Scotland on Sunday	4,286.00
Sunday Mail	7,050.00
Sunday Post	4,976.00
Scottish Farmer	1,555.00
Campbeltown Courier	117.00
Lloyds List	552.00
Ballymena Times	162.00

Most of the advertising costs relate to electoral registration publicity and information on postal voting.

Departmental Payments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will list the instances in which her Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies failed to pay valid invoices within 30 days or after the agreed credit period in the financial year 2000–01. [32024]

Mrs. Liddell: In the financial year 2000–01 my Department received 3,716 invoices in respect of goods and services and 3,709 (99.7 per cent.) were paid within 30 days.

Departmental Rebranding

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what the total cost was of rebranding her Department following its name change after devolution. [31960]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999. Costs of £2,140 were incurred for changes to signage at Scotland Office buildings in Edinburgh and London and there were minor additional costs for stationery items.

IT Contracts

Richard Younger-Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the total expenditure of her Department on IT systems and support in each year from May 1997 to date; how many IT contracts have been let in each of those years; of the other main contracting party in each of those contracts, how many have been *(a)* companies whose registered office is in (i) England and Wales, (ii) Scotland and (iii) Northern Ireland and *(b)* foreign companies; and what are the names of the companies falling within category (a). [33671]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999. The Department's IT systems and support is provided by the Scottish Executive. Costs were as follows:

1 July 1999 to 31 March 2000: £63,046

2000–01: £188,594

2001–02 (to date): £142,174.

The Scotland Office has let no IT contracts during this period.

Publications

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will list the publications issued by her Department in each of the last four years; and what the *(a)* circulation, *(b)* cost and *(c)* purpose of each was. [34198]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999. Since then, the Department has issued the following publications:

	Title	*Circulation*	*Cost (£)*	*Purpose*
1999–2000	Assessment of the Voter Education Campaign for the Scottish Parliament	Scotland Office Website and available to purchase from The Stationery Office	18,950	Commissioned to assess the effectiveness of the Voter Education campaign for the Scottish Parliament elections in 1999
1999–2000	The Scotland Office Departmental Report	Published on the Scotland Office website and presented to Parliament	2,000	This is published jointly and presented to parliament by the Secretary of State for Scotland and the Chief Secretary to the Treasury. It explains the Department's aims, objectives and gives details of expenditure plans.
1999–2000	The Scotland Office Resource Accounts	Laid in Parliament by the Secretary of State for Scotland	150	These accounts report expenditure by the Department in resource terms.
2000–01	The Scotland Office Departmental Report	Published on the Scotland Office website and presented to Parliament	2,200	This is published jointly and presented to parliament by the Secretary of State for Scotland and the Chief Secretary to the Treasury. It explains the Department's aims and objectives and gives details of expenditure plans.
2000–01	The Scotland Office Resource Accounts	Laid in Parliament by the Secretary of State for Scotland	2,300	These accounts report expenditure by the Department in resource terms.

	Title	*Circulation*	*Cost (£)*	*Purpose*
2000–01	Comparisons of Motoring Taxation Costs Across Europe—report by Colin Buchanan and Partners.	Published on the Scotland Office website and placed in the House of Commons Library.	4,500	This report provides a breakdown of costs for Scotland and the Scottish Highlands and Islands to allow a comparison of these specific areas with other parts of the EEA.
2000–01	Scotland Office Charter	Published on the Scotland Office website and printed copies are available on request.	125	Sets out the Department's commitment to providing high quality and efficient services in line with the Service First Initiative.
2000–01	Scotland Office Winter Supplementary Estimate	Presented to Parliament by command of Her Majesty.	2,200	This is the official request to parliament for additional resources.
2001–02	Friends of Scotland	Copies circulated to a wide range of individuals and groups	4,171	To publicise the Friends of Scotland Initiative which seeks to promote the image of a modern, outward-looking Scotland and harness the goodwill that exists towards Scotland.
2001–02	The Size of the Scottish Parliament—A Consultation	MPs and MEPs for Scottish constituencies. MSPs, the Scottish Executive, the Electoral Commission, DTLR and groups representing civic Scotland. Also available on the department's website	1,007	To consult as widely as possible on whether the number of MSPs in the Scottish Parliament should be reduced in line with the current provisions of the Scotland Act, or whether the link between Westminster and Holyrood constituencies should be broken.

Accountancy Services

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what the total cost to her Department was for accountancy services in each of the last four years. [34171]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999.

Accountancy services to the Department are provided by the Scottish Executive, as required, and detailed costs are not available. The Scotland Office has not used external accountancy services.

Mobile Telephones

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will list, for 1997–98 and for each subsequent financial year, the amount spent *(a)* in the United Kingdom and *(b)* abroad by (i) her Department, (ii) its agencies and (iii) its non-departmental public bodies on (1) providing mobile telephone equipment, including handsets and other associated equipment, (2) telephone calls made using such equipment and (3) telephone calls made using privately owned mobile telephones but subsequently reclaimed by (x) Ministers and (y) staff. [34405]

Mrs. Liddell: The information is not held in the form requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Entertainment Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will list for 1997–98 and for each subsequent financial year, including the current year to date, the amount spent by *(a)* her Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* its non-departmental public bodies on (i) food and (ii) alcohol, indicating how much was spent on guests, and how much in respect of (A) Ministers and (B) staff, broken down to show how much was provided directly by her Department and how much reclaimed. [34457]

Mrs. Liddell: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Departmental Events

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will list the *(a)* conferences, *(b)* seminars, *(c)* workshops, *(d)* exhibitions and *(e)* press conferences which have been sponsored by her Department and which took place on non-Departmental premises in each of the last four years giving the title, purpose, date and cost of each. [34295]

Mrs. Liddell: The information requested is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Working Conditions and Practices

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment has been made of the effect of the Working Time Directive on her Department's employees; how many employees are working in excess of 48 hours per week; what steps she is taking to reduce this number; and if she will make a statement. [35895]

Mrs. Liddell: The standard terms and conditions of service for staff in the Scotland Office fall within the limits set by the working time regulations. At present I have no staff who have opted to sign a waiver disapplying the 48 hour limit. Persistent working in excess of 48 hours per week would be discouraged and my Department advocates flexible working patterns in line with the Government's work-life balance policies.

Fair Trade

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to her answer of 22 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 407W, on fair trade goods, if she will review during Fair Trade Fortnight the amount of fairly traded goods used in her Department. [35454]

Mrs. Liddell: My Department did not participate directly in Fair Trade Fortnight. The Government are contributing through the Department for International Development, which is providing £120,000 to the Fair Trade Foundation over three years (2001–2003) in support of its efforts to target new groups through its annual Fair Trade Fortnight campaigns. When the opportunity arises, fair trade goods are used.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Third World

Mrs. Irene Adams: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what action the Government are taking to help eradicate *(a)* debt and *(b)* child poverty in the third world. [43932]

Clare Short: The UK has played a major role in tackling the unsustainable debt burden of the poorest countries. We led the way in securing the revision of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative, which was agreed in September 1999. Up to US$100 billion debt could be written off for the 42 HIPC countries. So far, 26 countries have qualified for this exceptional relief. These countries will receive more than US$60 billion worth of debt relief, reducing their debts by more than two-thirds on average. We hope that more countries will qualify for debt relief but substantial further progress will be difficult, as many of the remaining HIPC countries are either affected by conflict or have severe governance problems.

The UK goes further than is required under the HIPC Initiative and provides 100 per cent. relief on its bilateral debts to countries once they qualify, and holds any debt repayments 'in trust' in the meantime. The Government have already cancelled their aid debts to all the poorest countries, not just HIPC. The UK is also the second largest contributor (US$306 million) to the HIPC Trust Fund to help international financial institutions meet their share of HIPC costs.

We seek to reduce the poverty of children, which causes suffering to today's children and jeopardises the well-being of future generations, by working to address the cause of poverty and deprivation in the families and communities in which they live. Support for children's rights to basic health care, education, nutrition, shelter, protection from violence and abusive labour, along with sustainable livelihoods for their parents, is central to our work towards the millennium development goals.

We are working to energise the international system to achieve the goals. The goals include the target of, by 2015, lifting 1 billion people out of abject poverty, universal primary schooling, and reducing under-five child mortality by two thirds.

Heavily Indebted Poor Countries

Mrs. Irene Adams: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what action the Government are taking to persuade the World bank to change loans to heavily indebted poorer countries to grants. [43933]

Clare Short: We are firmly opposed to any suggestion that World bank highly concessional loans should be converted to grants. The International Development Association (IDA) of the World bank provides very concessional loans which are paid back over 40 years with a 10 year grace period and low service charge. Such loans are highly effective in helping countries to reduce poverty and are complemented by grant resources provided by other agencies. Any move to change IDA loans to grants would undermine the effectiveness of IDA and its future financial integrity.

Pakistan

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what financial aid her Department has provided to Pakistan in the current financial year; and what she plans to allocate in the next financial year. [45864]

Clare Short: By the end of the financial year, 31 March 2002, my Department will have provided £20 million of budget support to Pakistan. Next year, I plan to allocate £40 million. This is a slight change from the planned disbursement I announced to Parliament last December, and reflects the pattern of resource availability in my Department. Our overall commitment to provide £105 million financial aid over three years remains unchanged.

Iraq

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if her Department is in a position to make an assessment about the likely humanitarian impact of military action against Iraq before any military action is taken; and if she will make such a study prior to military action. [44299]

Clare Short: No decisions have been taken on any military action against Iraq.

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development which organisations have provided her Department with reports on the current humanitarian situation inside Iraq. [44298]

Hilary Benn: DFID has access to reports on the current humanitarian situation from a number of agencies working in both northern and central/southern Iraq. These include the United Nations Childrens Fund (UNICEF), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the World Health Organisation (WHO), as well as a number of NGOs.

Cluster Bombs

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to her answer of 13 March 2002 ref. 40655 on cluster bombs, what estimates she has received from UNMAS on the number of *(a)* cluster bombs used and *(b)* unexploded bomblets located at the sites where cluster bombs were used in Afghanistan. [44391]

Clare Short: UNMAS estimate that 1,152 Cluster Bomb Units have been used in Afghanistan. (b) UNMAS estimate that there are up to 14,000 unexploded bomblets as a result. The accuracy of this estimate cannot be confirmed until more clearance work is undertaken and/or actual weapons used and target information is received from the Coalition.

Mine Clearance

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the organisations to which the Government have given money for the purposes of mine clearance in 2001–02, specifying the amount given in each case. [43876]

Clare Short: The table gives the figures requested.

Estimated final outturn 2001–02

Organisation	*£*
The HALO Trust (bilateral)	1,150,000
Mines Advisory Group (MAG) (bilateral)	1,000,000
United Nations Mine Action Service (UNIMAS)	5,000,000
UNICEF (Mines Awareness)	500,000
International Trust Fund for De-mining—Bosnia	500,000
Organisation of American States (Nicaragua de-mining)	189,000
BACTEC de-mining (Kosovo)	15,000
DSL (Kosovo)	750,000
ELS (Kosovo)	22,000
QinetiQ	100,000
UNDP	2,100,000
Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian De-mining (GICHD)	1,000,000
Cranfield Mine Action	221,000
Landmine Monitor	30,000
DISARMCO (Research and Development)	61,000
ERA (Research and Development)	117,000
	12,605,000

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what Government expenditure was on humanitarian mine clearance in 2001–02, broken down by country. [43877]

Clare Short: Estimated Government expenditure for 2001–02 on mine action programmes by country is indicated in the following table:

Country	*Amount (£)*
Afghanistan	3,150,000
Eritrea	694,540
Nicaragua	189,000
Cambodia	1,000,000
Northern Iraq	206,137
Jordan	197,402
Laos	300,000
Georgia	500,000
Bosnia	500,000
Croatia	326,529
Kosovo	2,000,000
Global contribution to UNMAS and UNDP	2,600,000

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much was spent by the Government on *(a)* humanitarian mine clearance, *(b)* commercial mine clearance, (d) military initiative mine clearance, (d) mine awareness, (e) victim assistance and (f) research and development for mine clearance in 2001–02. [43878]

Clare Short: Estimated disbursements for 2001–02 are as follows:

£ million

	2001–02
(1) Humanitarian Mine Clearance	[1]10.2
(2) Mines Awareness	0.5
(3) Research and Development	1.3

[1] Also includes some integrated mine awareness activities. As programmes are often integrated separate costs of awareness are not available. Specific mine awareness activities are undertaken with UNICEF as shown at item two.

United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps the Government *(a)* have taken and *(b)* plans to take to respond to the Action Plan of the Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries. [44360]

Clare Short: The Government are working to implement the action plan of the Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries in a variety of ways both through out bilateral programmes and our multilateral work. Over the past four years, we have increased the proportion of aid allocated to least developed countries, as a proportion of our bilateral country resources, from 33 per cent. to 45 per cent.

We are supporting the Commonwealth Secretariat's Trade and Investment Access Facility to deliver a range of activities designed to strengthen the capacity of least developed Commonwealth countries to address trade issues. We also continue to work with multilateral organisations including the United Nations and the European Commission to ensure that the momentum generated by the third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, on key issues such as trade, aid untying and financial issues is maintained in follow-on international conferences. These include the current Financing for Development conference in Monterey (18–22 March) and the forthcoming World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg.

We consider it important to see the third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries as part of an on-going process of developing a partnership for poverty eradication between developing countries, including least developed countries, and the international community. We will therefore continue to work with our partners to build on the positive achievements made on recent initiatives such as the European Union's "Everything But Arms" agreement and the Development Assistance Committee's recommendations on untying, both of which were strongly supported by the UK, to ensure that least developed countries can achieve sustained economic growth and development.

St. Helena

Mr. MacDougall: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent discussions she has had with the Government of St. Helena; and if she will make a statement. [43865]

Hilary Benn: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development has had no recent discussions with the Government of St. Helena. DFID officials do have regular contact and last met members of St. Helena's Executive and Legislative Council earlier this month during their visit to the UK to discuss air access.

Mr. MacDougall: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what aid was given to St. Helena in each of the last six years for which figures are available. [43870]

Clare Short: Expenditure figures for UK development assistance to St. Helena in each of the last six years for which figures are available were:

£ million

	Total DFID programme
1995–96	9,267
1996–97	7,990
1997–98	8,765
1998–99	8,805
1999–2000	9,362
2000–01	10,116

Mr. MacDougall: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on progress towards the construction of an airfield on St. Helena. [43871]

Clare Short: A "Comparative Study of Air and Sea Access" was published last July. A copy of the report was placed in the House of Commons Library. It identified various options, which have since been under consideration by the St. Helena Government. As part of that process, the views of the islanders have been sought. The outcome has been a majority preference in favour of possible air access in future, as an alternative to replacing St. Helena's dedicated passenger and supply ship. Island representatives have recently visited the UK to discuss air access and will be reporting their discussions to the St. Helena Government at the beginning of April.

Territorial Forces

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many members of staff of her Department are members of the Territorial forces; and if she has a strategy to encourage members of staff to become members of the Territorial forces. [44070]

Hilary Benn: This information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. We have no particular plans to encourage members of staff to become members of the Territorial forces.

Justices of the Peace

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many members of staff at her Department are Justices of the Peace; and if she has a strategy for her Department to encourage members of staff to become Justices of the Peace. [44553]

Hilary Benn: This information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. We have no particular plans to encourage members of staff to become Justices of the Peace.

Staff (Locally Elected Representatives)

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many members of staff at her Department are locally elected democratic representatives; and if she has a strategy for her Department to encourage members of staff to become locally elected democratic representatives. [44542]

Hilary Benn: This information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. We have no particular plans to encourage members of staff to become locally elected democratic representatives.

Tanzania

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development when she was informed of the application for an export licence for the sale of an air defence system to Tanzania. [39830]

Clare Short *[pursuant to her reply, 8 March 2002, c.684W]:* I apologise for the error contained in my reply. The answer should have read:

> The applications were first drawn to my attention in October 2000, not October 2001.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Ethnic Community Religious Groups

Mr. Cox: To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, what discussions he has had with the Church Commissioners about possible financial assistance to ethnic community religious groups in England and Wales; and if he will make a statement. [43942]

Mr. Bell: My hon. Friend will know from my answer of 30 November 2001 that in 2000—the latest year for which audited figures are available—the Commissioners made available £160 million to support the work of the Church of England, including a share to support the stipends of the serving ministry, targeted particularly on areas of need and opportunity. Within the Church of England there are many parishes with ethnic community religious groups that the Church seeks to serve.

The Church of England cultivates its connection with minority faith communities through its Inter Faith Concerns Group and has also contributed financially to the work of the Inner Cities Religious Council.

The Commissioners do not have a remit for Wales.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Courts Martial

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people are serving prison sentences imposed by courts martial; and which prisons they are held in. [41363]

Beverley Hughes: Provisional data show that on 31 January 2002 27 prisoners were serving prison sentences imposed by courts martial.

Prisoners sentenced by courts martial

Prison name	*Male*	*Female*
Acklington	1	—
Aylesbury	1	—
Blundestone	3	—
Chelmsford	2	—
Deerbolt	1	—
Drake Hall	—	1
Guys Marsh	2	—
High point	—	1
Hollesley Bay	1	—
Holme House	1	—
Kirklevington	1	—
North Sea Camp	1	—
Stocken	1	—
Stoke Heath	1	—
Wakefield	1	—
Wayland	3	—
Wealstun	2	—
Wymott	3	—

Entitlement Cards

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what work on development of an entitlement card, other than for asylum seekers, is being conducted in his Department; and what measures have been adopted to co-ordinate this work with the Department of Social Security. [40863]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 7 March 2002]:* A small unit has been established in my Department to draft the consultation paper which I announced on 5 February 2002 and to manage the consultation exercise. Some of the detailed work on how a scheme might operate is being undertaken in partnership by the United Kingdom Passport Service and the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency.

My officials are working closely with colleagues in a number of Government Departments including the Department for Work and Pensions which is represented on a group of senior officials chaired by the Cabinet Office which has overseen the work at official level.

Fees

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which fees his Department, its agencies and associated public bodies collect; how much has been raised or is anticipated will be raised from each of these fees from 1998–99 to 2004–05; which of these fees count as negative expenditure; and if he will make a statement. [41312]

Angela Eagle: The fees collected by the Home Department are summarised in the table. All of the fees are classified as negative expenditure within the Departmental Expenditure Limit (DEL), unless otherwise shown.

£000

	1998–99	1999–2000	2000–01	2001–02	2002–03	2003–04	2004–05
Animal licence fees	960	943	1,058	1,061	1,518	1,844	2,029
Animal licence fees Consolidated Fund Extra Receipts (CFER)—not negative DEL	1,440	1,415	1,587	1,591	2,277	2,767	3,043
Passport fees	57,000	88,053	123,287	119,900	131,000	135,200	140,500
Passport fees (CFER)—not negative DEL	32,000	18,000	11,000	17,000	28,000	45,000	45,000
Drugs licence fees	494	555	558	512	512	512	512
Subject access office fees	890	1,228	1,599	1,952	2,000	2,000	2,000
Receipts from non-statutory inspections	169	134	73	63	173	173	173
Training course Fees (including Crime Reduction College)	1,984	2,203	1,870	5,259	5,259	5,259	5,259
Police National Computer fees	0	0	17,774	17,774	18,550	18,550	18,550
Firearms licences for museums CFER—not negative DEL	4	147	1	1	1	1	1
Criminal Records Bureau fees	0	0	0	3,392	63,249	77,245	117,276
Citizenship fees	6,408	6,419	9,580	13,812	15,408	17,813	19,013
Right of abode fees	57	63	105	120	87	87	87
Travel document fees	0	338	2,031	2,387	2,387	2,387	2,387
Immigration Service Commissioner fees	0	0	0	277	250	250	240

Retail Crime

Mr. Leapper: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what support his Department has given to the British Retail Consortium to *(a)* establish and *(b)* manage retail crime partnership; and what contribution his Department makes to the British Retail Consortium annual retail crime survey for England and Wales; [39863]

(2) if he will make a statement on the number of meetings he has had with representatives of the retail industry to discuss retail crime prevention in the last 12 months; [39864]

(3) what studies have been made of the effects of retail crime partnerships on crime reduction; and if he will publish a list of the locations of retail crime partnerships in the UK. [39865]

Mr. Denham: My hon. Friend (Mr. Ainsworth) addressed the launch of the British Retail Consortium annual crime survey on 27 June 2001. I also visited a number of retailers in the St. Leonards areas of Hastings on 6 February 2002 when the Small Retailers in Deprived Areas scheme was launched.

Home Office officials are in regular contact with several retail representative bodies to discuss a range of issues, including retail crime prevention. Home Office Ministers and officials will continue to hold meetings with retail representatives such as the British Retail Consortium to ensure that their concerns are heard and understood by Government.

My Department has supported the work undertaken to establish partnerships by funding development work by a consultant for the past two years. This has resulted in the production of a definitive guide on how to establish and run a retail crime partnership, and we have encouraged retailers and other stakeholders in main shopping centre areas to establish partnerships to tackle retail and related crime. We are aware of the following retail crime partnerships currently in existence in England and Wales and registered with Business Crime Check.

Acocks Green Shopping Centre (SC)
Aintree
Andover
Barnstaple
Barrow
Bath
Bedford
Birkenhead
Birmingham
Bitterne
Blackburn
Blackpool
Bluewater SC
Bognor Regis
Bolton
Bootle
Boscombe
Bournemouth
Bradford
Brent Cross SC
Bridlington
Brighton
Bristol Broadmead
Bromley
Burnley
Burton-On-Trent
Bury St. Edmunds
Buxton
Caernarfon
Cardiff
Carlisle
Cheltenham
Chester
Chesterfield
Clacton
Clapham

Coventry
Crawley
Cribbs Causeway
Crosby Village
Croydon
Darlington
Dewsbury
Durham
Eastleigh
Epsom
Evesham
Exeter
Fareham
Folkestone
Fosse Park SC
Gloucester
Gravesend
Great Yarmouth
Grimsby/Cleethorpes
Guildford
Hanley
Harbourne
Harlow
Hastings
Hatfield
Haywards Heath
Hemel Hempstead
Hereford
Hexham
Holloway
Hounslow
Huyton Village
Ipswich
Keighley
Kendal
Kensington, Liverpool
Kettering
Kidderminster
Kirby
Leamington Spa
Leeds
Leicester
Lewisham
Lincoln
Liscard SC
Littlehampton
Liverpool
Llandudno
Lowestoft
Luton
Lymington
Maidenhead
Maidstone
Manchester
Margate
Market Watch, Liverpool
Meadowhall SC
Merry Hill
Merthyr Tydfil
Metro Centre, Newcastle
Middlesbrough
Milton Keynes
Neath/Port Talbot
Nelson
Newbury
Newcastle
Newport, Isle of Wight
Newton Abbott
Northampton
Norwich
Nottingham
Nuneaton
Orpington
Peterborough
Plymouth
Pontefract
Portsmouth
Prescot/Fairfield
Preston
Redcar
Redditch
Rhyl
Richmond
Ringwood
Romford
Rugby
Rugeley
Salisbury
Scarborough
Sheffield
Shipley
Shoreham
Shrewsbury
Sittingbourne
Skegness
Slough
Solihull
Southport
Southsea
Stevenage
Stockport
Stockton
Stoke-on-Trent
Stratford-upon-Avon
Sutton
Sutton in Ashfield
Swansea
Swindon
Taunton
Telford
Trafford Centre
Tunbridge Wells
Uxbridge
Wallington
Walsall
Waltham Cross
Walthamstow
Walton
Wandsworth
Warrington

Watford
Welwyn Garden City
Westminster
Weston-Super-Mare
Wimborne
Winchester
Windsor
Wirral
Wolverhampton
Wood Green
Woolwich
Worcester
Workington
Wrexham.

There are other locations where partnerships are known to exist or are being developed but these are not registered with Business Crime Check. I am not aware of any specific studies on the effects of retail crime partnerships on crime reduction

The annual retail crime survey carried out independently by the British Retail Consortium and my Department is not involved in its production.

Lancet Inquiry

Mr. Frank Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will consider referring the issues raised by the Lancet inquiry back to the Crown Prosecution Service. [36516]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 25 February 2002]:* This is a matter for Cleveland Police.

Burglar Alarms

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures his Department is taking to co-operate with the private security industry to reduce the number of false burglar alarm call outs in England and Wales. [37429]

Mr. Denham: The principal link for the security industry in the matter of false alarm calls is the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) through their Research and Development Committee. Home Office involvement includes an alarm technology programme which aims to define new ways in which the police service uses alarm systems to tackle burglary and volume crime. In addition, the Police Scientific Development Branch of the Home Office has published a number of papers on the subject and will carry out a study into false alarms in partnership with ACPO. This will investigate the causes of false alarms and highlight the need for best practice throughout the security industry. In the meantime Police Scientific Development Branch will continue work on alarm verification, expanding it to include all of the latest types of sensor devices and audio and imaging techniques.

Active Community Unit

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what initiatives are planned for the constituency of Buckingham funded by the Active Community Unit; and what target he has for involvement in volunteering of residents in the constituency. [43285]

Angela Eagle: The Active Community Unit is not currently funding any projects based in the constituency of Buckingham. However the Unit funds a wide range of national voluntary and community sector organisations which benefit every area of England.

The Active Community Unit aims to achieve a step change in people's voluntary involvement in their communities. We want to encourage and enable more people to volunteer. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister (Mr. Blair) has laid down a challenge to one million more people getting involved in their communities, and the Home Office is committed to making significant progress towards this goal by 2004. This figure is not broken down by constituency.

Criminal Records Bureau

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what rent will be paid for the premises of the Criminal Records Bureau in Shannon Court, Liverpool [21705]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* I understand that the rent payable by Capita, the private sector partner in the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) programme, for the Shannon court premises is £1,015,000.

Prison Service

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the Prison Service will implement the recommendations of the Independent Review Body concerning pay for operational managers, prison officers and related grades. [40714]

Beverley Hughes: The report of the Prison Service Pay Review Body (PSPRB) on the pay of governing governors and operational managers, prison officers and related grades in England and Wales in 2002 was published on 30 January 2002 and copies placed in the Library.

The PSPRB has recommended a basic rise of 6 per cent. over a 15 month period. This is a significant award which my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary (Mr. Blunkett) has decided will be implemented in full. The locality allowances to Prison Service staff in eligible areas in London and the south-east will be increased immediately by the full amount recommended, with effect from 1 January 2002. The general award will be paid in two steps, 3.5 per cent. backdated to 1 January 2002; the remainder in January 2003.

The key recommendations are:

a 6 per cent. increase to basic pay rates over the 15 month period covered by the report;

rates of local pay allowance paid to staff in London and parts of the south-east will be increased with effect from 1 January 2002 by:

£500 to £3,500 per annum for the top rate

£400 to £2,300 per annum for the middle rate

£200 to £1,000 per annum for the lower rate.

Current arrangements for the performance pay of operational managers will remain unchanged. Various special allowances will be raised in line with the basic award.

Prison Population

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to deal with the rise in the prison population. [45391]

Beverley Hughes: The Halliday review of the sentencing framework has given us a unique opportunity to examine what we should do to prevent, tackle and punish offending behaviour. The recent rise in the prison population suggests that sentences are not currently being targeted as effectively as they could be. Prisons are focusing on housing more and more prisoners for whom it is not demonstrably the right option. The Government is currently considering how to take the sentencing reforms forward with a view to publishing our conclusions in a White Paper to be published in the Spring. Whatever the population pressures, the Government is uncompromising in its response to serious and dangerous offenders. Where there is a need to protect the public, this should take place in a secure environment. Communities must be protected from such offenders.

As part of this I am very keen to look imaginatively at alternatives to full time custody, and in particular would like to explore options for piloting intermittent custody and introducing a new suspended sentence (custody minus). These sentences, alongside the tougher and more flexible community sentences we already have, as well as those being proposed, will give sentencers the confidence to explore alternatives to short custodial sentences. Easing pressure on the shorter-term population will enable the Prison Service to focus on providing longer term prisoners with the regimes, training and programmes they need to correct their offending behaviour.

Home detention curfew (HDC) is a key resettlement tool which gives us the opportunity to monitor an offender during their transition back into the community. It is also a useful tool in helping us manage the prison population by reducing over-crowding at the same time as improving the resettlement and rehabilitation opportunities for less serious offenders. From the beginning of May prisoners serving sentences of between three months and under 12 months, with the exception of those convicted of violent or drugs offences within the previous three years, and prisoners who have any history of sexual offending, will be released on home detention curfew for the latter part of their sentence unless there are compelling reasons not to do so. All offenders not statutorily excluded will be subject to a risk assessment and released on HDC only where it is safe to do so. Under the HDC scheme released prisoners serve the remainder of their custody period at home under electronic curfew usually from 7pm to 7am. At any one time we expect that this measure will remove up to 1,350 prisoners from prison accommodation, in addition to the 1,800 who are already on the scheme. The impact of these arrangements and any further extensions of the HDC scheme will be kept under close review.

Yarl's Wood

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether Lloyds Syndicate 962 D. J. Pye is acting for the Home Office in relation to a claim for compensation for damage following the incidents at Yarl's Wood Remand Centre on 14 and 15 February. [38778]

Angela Eagle: Insurance in respect of the Yarl's Wood Removal Centre and any claims arising from it is the responsibility of Group 4 Amey Immigration Ltd. in accordance with the contract for the management and operation of the centre. The insurance provisions are in the joint name of the Home Office and the contractor.

Bedfordshire Police Authority

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to ensure the Bedfordshire Police Authority will not suffer a loss to its budget in the event of a successful claim against it by loss adjusters. [38779]

Mr. Denham: Any claim would be against the Bedfordshire Police Authority. Whether the authority is liable for compensation will depend on the circumstances. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary made the Government's position clear in respect of any claims against the Bedfordshire police by the insurers for compensation in his statement of 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 445 and at columns 450–51. We will work with the police to protect their interests and those of the people they serve in Bedfordshire.

Police Complaints

Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if an investigator independent of the Metropolitan police has been appointed to investigate complaints by members of the public against officers below the rank of commander in Operation Helios; [39363]

(2) what complaints by *(a)* members of the public and *(b)* others against police officers involved in the Operation Helios investigation of (i) Superintendent Ali Dizaei and (ii) Chief Inspector Leroy Logan have been recorded in accordance with police discipline regulations; [39358]

(3) how many police officers involved in Operation Helios have formally been given regulation 9 notices specifying the nature of complaints against them. [39359]

Mr. Denham: The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis informs me that, in light of the on-going proceedings involving Superintendent Ali Dizaei, the views of the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) have been sought. The issue of complaints will be a matter for consideration in the disclosure process within the criminal proceedings.

As the relevance and admissibility of these matters may well be an issue at the trial it is the view of the CPS, which has been accepted by the Commissioner, that to disclose information at this time would risk possible prejudice to the trial process.

Private Medical Insurance

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 11 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 57W, on private medical insurance, what plans *(a)* Norfolk, *(b)* Thames Valley, *(c)* Hertfordshire and *(d)* Bedfordshire police authorities have to make private medical insurance available to their staff; what assessment his Department has made of the potential effects on police officer availability of such plans; and if he will make a statement. [37190]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 28 February 2002]*: None of these police forces make private medical insurance available to police officers and support staff.

We are currently developing an occupational health strategy for the police service which will encourage measures which will help to reduce sickness absence rates and increase police officer availability.

Best Value

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what police forces are the subject of best value assessments. [39235]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* All police authorities in England and Wales are defined as best value authorities under the Local Government Act 1999. This requires them to secure continuous improvement in the way their functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

Police Community Consultative Groups

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what guidelines he has issued on the appointment of chairmen of police community consultative groups; [39234]

(2) how many chairmen of police community consultative groups *(a)* are and *(b)* are planned to be nominated from (i) the relevant police authority and (ii) non-police members of PCCGs. [39236]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* Section 96 of the Police Act 1996 places a duty on police authorities to make arrangements for obtaining views of people in the force area about matters concerning the policing of the area.

The Act does not specify that this duty should be fulfilled through the establishment of police/community consultative groups which have no formal status set out in statute, and whose constitution and membership is not governed by any binding directives or guidance. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary (Mr. Blunkett) has issued no specific guidelines on the way in which the chairs of any such groups should be appointed. Information about them is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

In its report published in December 2001, the Community Cohesion Review Team, chaired by Ted Cantle and set up following the disturbances in the north of England last summer, recommended that a good practice guide to community consultation should be developed, and that work is being taken forward.

Sexual Abuse Investigations

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the definition is of trawling, in relation to sex abuse cases; and what research has been done by the HMIC to ascertain the effectiveness of the trawling process. [35957]

Mr. Denham: I refer to a letter sent by my predecessor (Mr. Clarke) in February of last year which addressed this subject.

The term "trawling" has been used by critics of the police to describe the process by which police investigations into serious allegations of historical sexual abuse in children's homes and other institutions trace potential witnesses. As such, it is not for my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary to provide a definition of a term he considers unhelpful and pejorative and is not normally used by the police.

The process referred to by the term is an investigative method which involves sampling from an often long list of potential witnesses who may have information that can be used to corroborate or rebut an allegation of sexual abuse which may have taken place a considerable time beforehand. Due to the very complex nature of these investigations, witness evidence is often paramount due to the lack of forensic and other evidence after the passage of time since the alleged offences.

The Code of Practice issued under Part II of the Criminal Procedure and Investigations Act 1996 sets out general responsibilities for officers conducting investigations into allegations that a crime has been committed. Under the code, police officers conducting an investigation should pursue all reasonable lines of inquiry, whether these point towards or away from the suspect. The practice referred to is established practice as the best use of police resources in eliciting information to assist an investigation.

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) undertook a thematic inspection into child protection in 1999 and is currently taking a major part in an inspection of safeguards for children's welfare led by the Social Services Inspectorate. HMIC also routinely conduct detailed force inspections, which include arrangements for child abuse and major crime investigations. None of these has, thus far, thrown doubt over the quality of investigation into institutional child abuse allegations; nor has any evidence to support concerns into the sampling of historic institutional child abuse allegations been brought to the attention of HMIC or the Association of Chief Police Officers.

Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many court cases have been determined without a jury since the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 came into force. [41367]

Mr. Keith Bradley *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* Information relating to the outcome of cases under the Act began to be collated centrally from 1 January 2002. Information about cases completed in 2002 will not be published until the autumn of next year.

Domestic Violence

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what advice is available to probation areas on changing their domestic violence services from established perpetrator programmes with central partner support services in favour of the Duluth Pathfinder. [42662]

Beverley Hughes: Until a nationally accredited programme is available we will not be advising areas to change to a centrally determined programme.

Crime Statistics

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many crimes were recorded by each police authority in England and Wales in each category of crime for each year since 1997. [37903]

Mr. Denham: The requested data have been published in table 2.5 in the 1997, 1998, 1999 and 2000 editions of "Criminal Statistics England and Wales", which are available in the Library. It should be noted that there was a change in counting rules for recorded crime on 1 April 1998, which expanded the offences covered, and placed a greater emphasis on counting crimes in terms of numbers of victims. Numbers of recorded crimes after this date are therefore not directly comparable with previous years.

Road Traffic Accidents

Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of emergency police call-outs in the last 12 months for which figures are available were to road traffic accidents, broken down by police authority; and what estimate he has made of the saving to police authorities which a *(a)* 5 per cent., *(b)* 10 per cent. and *(c)* 20 per cent. reduction in road traffic accidents represents. [37462]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 26 February 2002]:* In 2000–01 there were 668,549 calls to the police in England and Wales that related to road traffic crashes. These accounted for 3.8 per cent. of the total number of nearly 17.5 millions calls. Data are not available by police force area, and there is no central record of the number of traffic incidents attended by the police as the result of calls or of how many police attended on any occasion.

The latest information on the value of road accident prevention is given in "Highways Economics Note No 1", published by the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, in October 2001. This estimates that the total reduction in police costs if all road traffic accidents in 2000 could have been prevented would have been approximately £30 million.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Press Office

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what this year's budget is for his Department's *(a)* press office and *(b)* Directorate of Communication; [41997]

(2) what the establishment level is of his Department's press office; and for how many months that level has been achieved since June 2001; [41989]

(3) how many staff there are within his Department's press office. [41990]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* Resource allocations for 2001–2002 are as follows:

		£ million
(a)	Press Office	2.487
(b)	Directorate of Communication	5.842

Within these resource allocations, the press office has an indicative establishment provision for 35 posts. Since June 2001, the press office has averaged 4.5 vacant posts per month.

I also refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 19 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 220W.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the vacancies in his Department's press office. [40107]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given above to questions 41997, 41989, and 41990.

International Travel

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much his Department spent on international travel in 2000–01. [41681]

Dr. Whitehead: My Department spent £1,868,846 on international travel from April 2000 to end of March 2001.

Communications Costs

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the annual budget for communications activities, including press, public relations, marketing and internal communications, was for his Department for each financial year from 1997–98 to 2001–02. [39908]

Dr. Whitehead: Annual expenditure in the years requested was as follows:

£ million

	Director of Communication administration expenditure[1]	*Departmental external publicity and marketing expenditure*	*Total*
1997–98	6.3	12.5	18.8
1998–99	7.0	11.2	18.2
1999–2000	6.5	20.4	26.9
2000–01	6.3	25.7	32.0
2001–02[2]	5.8	20.2	26.0

[1] Excluding external publicity
[2] Latest forecast

Passenger Cars

Helen Southworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the Government's proposal to consult on piloting a comparative, colour-coded label for passenger cars. [45714]

Mr. Jamieson: I have today published a consultation paper on piloting a comparative label for passenger cars. The consultation sets out the Government's proposals on a possible new form of label, which would be based on the environmental performance categories used in the Graduated Vehicle Excise Duty system. We believe this would make an effective label, consistent with and reinforced by the environmental message given through the new taxation regimes. The proposal at this stage is to begin piloting a comparative label later this year, with a view to making any further decision following that pilot. Any proposal to make the label mandatory, would be subject to further consultation. I have placed copies of the consultation document in the Library.

Access to Information

Charlotte Atkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to amend the rules regulating the provision of access to information by local authorities. [46163]

Mr. Raynsford: I have today laid before the House two statutory instruments: the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Access to Information) (England) Amendment Regulations 2002 and the Local Authorities (Access to Meetings and Documents) (Period of Notice) (England) Order 2002.

Our aim in modernising local government is to make local decision-making more accountable. We have listened very carefully to the responses we received to the consultation on access to information in local government which we launched in April 2001. We believe it is right that local people should have earlier warning of the important decisions that local authorities take and of the meetings where these decisions take place. In line with this the statutory instruments will have the effect of increasing the notice period authorities have to give of such decisions or such meetings from three to five days.

This reform will encourage greater participation by local people in the democratic process. Decisions that local authorities take will benefit from the transparency that public debate brings. Decision-making will be brought closer to those affected by those decisions.

Our consultation also asked views on two other issues—proposals to revise the definition of "exempt" information given by Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 and the framing of guidance on financial thresholds for key executive decisions.

We currently have no plans to make changes to the definition of exempt information, but we will consult further in the planned review of the access to information regime, planned for summer 2002.

We announced in the local government White Paper, "Strong Local Leadership Quality Public Services", published in December 2001, that local authorities were best placed to define what constitutes a key decision.

Rail Strikes (Disabled People)

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps he has taken to ensure full access of people with disabilities to transport facilities during industrial action by staff of train operators. [42216]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* On 6 February the Strategic Rail Authority published its revised Code of Practice, "Train and Station Services for Disabled Passengers". All licensed operators on the national rail network are required to review their Disabled Peoples Protection Policies to reflect the revised code. The code requires that any buses or other substitute transport arranged on a pre-planned basis must be accessible to disabled people and the SRA will expect that to be reflected in the revised policies which the operators put forward for approval.

Railways

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the public sector administration cost associated with the rail sector was in each of the last five years. [44988]

Mr. Byers: The table shows the gross administration costs of the railways related public sector bodies and the total staff costs of the British Railways Board (BRB) over each of the last five years.

On 1 February 2001 the SRA legally assumed all the functions of OPRAF, most of the residual functions of the BRB and some functions of the DTLR railways directorate and of the ORR. The SRA administration figure includes staff costs for the British Transport Police that were previously paid by the BRB and for the Rail Passenger Councils that were previously paid by the ORR.

£ million

	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Gross administration costs					
DTLR (railways directorate)	2.1	2.5	2.6	2.7	2.7
Office of Passenger Rail Franchising (OPRAF)[1]	8	7	8	11	14
Strategic Rail Authority (SRA)[2]	—	—	—	—	15
Office of the Rail Regulator (ORR)	8	8	8	12	13
Total staff costs					
British Railways Board[1]	762	102	85	77	69

Notes:
1. The 2000–01 figures for OPRAF and BRB cover the 10 months to 31 January 2001.
2. Staff costs for the two months to 31 March 2001. Taken from table 4, page 92 of the SRA annual report 2000–01.

Railtrack

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what discussions he or his Department have had with the Rail Regulator on the structure and funding of the successor company to Railtrack in administration. [43638]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 15 March 2002]:* The successor for Railtrack is a matter for the administrator. Bidders need to put forward their proposals on structure and funding to him.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what powers Railtrack plc has while in administration, to be involved in any bid for another company, or part of another company; [44207]

(2) while it remains in administration, under what powers money could be provided to Railtrack plc by

(a) the Secretary of State, *(b)* the Office of the Rail Regulator, *(c)* the Strategic Rail Authority or *(d)* other financier, for the purchase of another company or part of another company including Global Crossing UK. [44208]

Mr. Byers: Copies of the loan agreement were placed in the House Library on 17 October 2001. The loan provides sufficient funding to continue on a 'business as usual' basis during the administration period, before the loan is replaced through commercial debt. Under the terms of the loan agreement, Railtrack plc cannot enter into any contract or obligation requiring expenditure or the undertaking of a liability in excess of £10 million without my prior written consent.

The Rail Regulator has no power to provide funding to Railtrack plc for the purchase of assets outside of the regulatory framework.

Section 211 of the Transport Act 2000 provides powers for the Strategic Rail Authority to provide financial assistance to secure the provision of railways services or assets. This function must only be exercised in the manner outlined in section 207 of the Act.

Finance raised through other sources is a matter for the administrator.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps he is taking to ensure that companies bidding for Railtrack pay equal bid costs. [44801]

Mr. Jamieson: This is a matter for the respective bidders.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how he will ensure that Ernst and Young obtain the best deal for Railtrack shareholders. [44799]

Mr. Jamieson: This is a matter for the administrator.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps he is taking to ensure that private companies have an equal opportunity to bid for Railtrack. [44798]

Mr. Jamieson: The bidding process is a matter for the administrator. For its part, the Government have taken steps to ensure both that all potential bidders are aware of the principal issues my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State would consider in exercising his powers in respect of any transfer scheme proposed by the administrator and that the bid based on the concept of a company limited by guarantee is not unfairly advantaged in terms of access to information from Government.

Details were given in my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Gedlin (Mr. Coaker) on 31 October 2001, *Official Report*, columns 669–71W and in my reply to the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Mr. Grayling) on 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 790–91W.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions who is paying the bidding costs of the company limited by guarantee for Railtrack. [44800]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Transport to the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Mr. Grayling) on 12 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 214W.

Global Crossing

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what representations he has received from Railtrack plc or its administrators with regards to the possible purchase of the whole of Global Crossing UK or part of it by *(a)* Railtrack plc on its own, *(b)* a bid involving Railtrack plc or *(c)* other companies or bodies; [44204]

(2) what assessment he has made as to the possibility of establishing a special purchase vehicle for the purpose of purchasing, or being involved in any purchase of, Global Crossing UK or part of it; and if he will make a statement; [44210]

(3) what powers the SRA has to purchase or be involved in the purchase of Global Crossing UK or part of it; and if he will make a statement; [44209]

(4) what representations he has received from the Health and Safety Executive with regard to the possible purchase of Global Crossing UK, or any part of it, by *(a)* Railtrack plc *(b)* the SRA and *(c)* other company, either on their own or as part of a joint bid; [44211]

(5) what assessment he has made as to the possibility of Railtrack plc, while in administration, purchasing or being involved in the purchase of Global Crossing UK or part of it; and if he will make a statement; [44206]

(6) what representations he has received from SRA with regards to the possible purchase of the whole or part of Global Crossing UK by *(a)* the SRA on its own, *(b)* a bid involving the SRA or *(c)* other companies or bodies. [44205]

Mr. Byers: No representations have been received from the Health and Safety Executive, the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA), or Railtrack or its administrators on this subject. I have not made any assessment of either the use of a special purpose vehicle for purchasing any part of Global Crossing UK or of Railtrack in administration doing so. Section 211 of the Transport Act 2000 sets out the SRA's powers in relation to the provision of railway services and assets.

Maritime and Coastguard Agency

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the current IT system was implemented into the Maritime and Coastguard Agency. [44973]

Mr. Jamieson: The current Maritime and Coastguard Agency's (MCA) IT system was implemented in June 2000.

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions for what reason there is not a central database of Maritime and Coastguard Agency registered vessels in the UK. [44972]

Mr. Jamieson: The Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) has a central database of vessels registered in the UK. It is managed by the agency's Registry of Shipping and Seamen (RSS) in Cardiff and is one of the oldest and most prestigious shipping registers in the world.

The agency is implementing an information integration programme that will allow staff to view, simultaneously, related information about UK registered vessels from other sources as well as the RSS, making more effective use of the information at the agency's disposal.

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how long it has taken to install the current IT system into the Maritime and Coastguard Agency. [44980]

Mr. Jamieson: The current Maritime and Coastguard Agency's (MCA) IT system was installed during May and June 2000.

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the cost was of implementing the most recent IT system into the Maritime and Coastguard Agency; and which outside organisations advised its implementation and helped introduce the system. [44979]

Mr. Jamieson: The Maritime and Coastguard Agency's (MCA) current IT system was procured using Government competitive tendering procedures. A five-year contract was awarded to BT at a total cost of approximately £2.8 million. BT advised on installation and the introduction of the system.

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many non-UK owned, UK registered vessels were inspected by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency in each of the last five years; from which countries they came; and what categories of vessels were inspected. [44981]

Mr. Jamieson: The Maritime and Coastguard Agency's (MCA) database for recording ship inspections does not have sufficiently comprehensive details on vessel ownership to provide this information.

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many vessels are registered with each Maritime and Coastguard Agency office in the UK. [44971]

Mr. Jamieson: The Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) manages the UK Shipping Register at its Register of Shipping and Seamen (RSS) office in Cardiff. The Register is being computerised in a process that will continue into 2003. The number of merchant and fishing vessels recorded on the Register at the end of February 2002 was:

	Number
Merchant[1]	3,789
Fishing[1]	7,059

[1] Vessels

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what systems are in place for port authorities to provide the Maritime and Coastguard Agency with information concerning vessels entering each port in the UK. [44974]

Mr. Jamieson: A variety of arrangements are place for each Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) Marine Office to obtain information from port authorities on vessels entering each port in the UK. The Agency is working with port authorities to ensure that information received is timely and consistent.

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to implement the proposals outlined in the 19 report from the Committee on Public Accounts on Ship Surveys and Inspections (HC608), that inspectors check of all areas of ships inspected; and what plans he has to install all the data concerning vessel inspections into a central database. [44975]

Mr. Jamieson: My Department and the Maritime and Coastguard Agency are actively considering the recommendations set out in the Committee's 19th Report and will prepare a formal response in accordance with the usual procedures and timetables.

Multi-modal Studies

Mrs. Fitzsimons: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he has considered the recommendations of the North West Regional Assembly following completion of the South East Manchester Multi Modal Study; and if he will make a statement. [45713]

Mr. Spellar: I have today written to the Leader of the North West Regional Assembly and a copy of this letter has been placed in the House of Commons Library.

The South East Manchester Multi Modal Study was commissioned by the Government as part of their 10-year Plan for Transport. The study looked at ways to improve all forms of transport in the area to reduce congestion, make roads safer and modernise public transport services.

I have today written to the North West Regional Assembly and agreed to:

the provisional acceptance of the Alderley Edge bypass

the provisional acceptance for a £35 million Quality Bus Corridor to improve bus services in South East Manchester

provide an extra £7.445 million for Greater Manchester and £1.5 million for Cheshire to spend in 2002–03 on improvements to include:

- Improvements to bus and rail facilities
- Improved signing, management and maintenance of the road network to improve journey reliability
- More facilities for cyclists and pedestrians
- Better management of freight
- Investment to support urban regeneration

ask the Highways Agency to draw up plans to improve the M60/M67/A57Denton interchange.

invite the Greater Manchester Passenger Transport Executive and local authorities to continue the detailed development of other schemes, which will include:

A6 bypass

Poynton bypass

A555 MALRW (Manchester Airport Link Road West)

Possible Metrolink Extensions

ask the Strategic Rail Authority to continue to work with Greater Manchester Passenger Transport Authority and local authorities to develop detailed assessments of the benefits of expanding the rail system and explore funding through existing mechanisms.

invite local authorities to develop transport change proposals, including:

A campaign to encourage the use of public transport

A strict enforcement of Land Use Policy to promote development decisions which reduce car dependency

Urban regeneration that maximises the attractiveness and potential of existing centres as places of employment, retail and leisure opportunities to reduce car dependency and promote social inclusion.

An announcement on a further extension of the Metrolink System to Stockport will be made as soon as possible.

The outputs of the study will be balanced across transport modes and across the South East Manchester area. The most deprived neighbourhoods and more affluent car owning neighbourhoods are all set to benefit from the additional transport investment involved. Improvements are designed to help reduce road congestion and accidents; increase rail use by up to 50 per cent. in peak periods and 100 per cent. off peak; increase bus use by 8 per cent. in peak periods and 30 per cent. in off peak periods and increase use of the Metrolink. I am also pleased to say that proposals for encouraging the use of public transport and improving air quality through the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions have also been welcomed by environmental groups.

I welcome the solutions proposed by the study. It is an excellent example of how multi-modal transport solutions can be devised to address complex and deep seated transport problems. We have seen that a wholly roads based solution would have added to, rather than alleviated, the long-term traffic problems in the area. Instead the study has identified a balanced strategy which will deal with congestion problems for motorists, but which does so by investing across all modes of transport and in a sustainable way.

Slot Allocations

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to review the European Union rules on slot allocation and protection; and if he will consider changing the PSO criteria to take more account of vulnerable geographically isolated rural locations. [45139]

Mr. Jamieson: A proposal by the European Commission to amend EC Regulation 95–93 which sets out the rules for allocating airport slots was published last year. This is currently being discussed by member states. The UK Government has consulted with interested parties and is currently developing its strategy with regard to the Commission's proposals. Any changes to the rules for imposing public service obligations will need to be agreed at the European level.

Planning

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the Government will be issuing a White Paper on Planning. [44726]

Ms Keeble: The consultation period for the Planning Green paper closed on Monday 18 March. To date this department has received around 13,000 representations. Following careful consideration of these responses the Government intends to make a policy statement on the planning system before the summer Parliamentary recess.

Social Landlords

Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to engage social landlords in tackling antisocial behaviour. [46092]

Ms Keeble: My Department will publish a consultation paper shortly.

Council Housing

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the changes to Government methodology for calculating empty or vacant council housing since 1997. [44987]

Mr. Byers: Local authorities are asked each year via annual Housing Investment Programme (HIP) returns to give the number of their own dwellings that are vacant at 1 April, whether they are within the authorities area or not. For 1 April 2001, rather than explicitly asking for their vacant dwellings outside their area, this figure was obtained by subtracting the number of their vacant dwellings in their area from the total number of their vacant dwellings.

There have been no other changes.

Homelessness

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many households there were in bed and breakfast accommodation arranged by local authorities under the homelessness provisions of the 1985 and 1996 Housing Acts, for each English region and for Wales, in the first quarter of 1997 and the last quarter of 2001. [44986]

Mr. Byers: Information reported by local authorities in England on the number of households accommodated in bed and breakfast hotels under statutory homelessness provisions on 31 March 1997 and 31 December 2001 is presented.

National information on the number of households in various types of temporary accommodation, including bed and breakfast, is provided in a quarterly Statistical Release published by the Department; corresponding information at local authority and regional level is set out in associated Supplementary Tables. Copies covering recent quarters are available in the Library, and also via the Department's website. The latest editions, published on 14 March, present statistics up to the end of December 2001.

I recently announced a new commitment to ensure that by March 2004 no family with children will be placed in B&B other than in an emergency. This was accompanied

by changes in housing benefit subsidies to make leasing self-contained temporary accommodation more cost-effective, and an additional £35 million from DTLR to help local authorities find alternatives to B&B.

Homeless households resident in bed and breakfast accommodation[1]

	As at 31 March 1997	*As at 31 December 2001*
North East	80	60
North West	150	120
Yorkshire	60	210
East Midland	40	80
West Midland	60	230
Eastern	90	460
London	2,830	8,700
South East	550	1,270
South West	230	990
England	4,100	12,110

[1] Includes households accommodated pending completion of initial inquiries by the local authority, and a small number of households found to be intentionally homeless for whom accommodation has been provided for a limited period.

Source:

DTLR P1(E) housing activity return (quarterly)

For corresponding information about Welsh authorities, I refer the hon. Member to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the average cost of placing a family in bed and breakfast accommodation is; and what the total cost was in each of the last 10 years. [44714]

Ms Keeble: Information reported to the Department by local authorities about expenditure on accommodation provided under homelessness legislation does not identify average unit costs. Latest available information is published by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) in their report "Homelessness Statistics 1999–2000 Actuals". Based on information supplied by local authorities in England, the average gross weekly charge (before deduction of any rent rebate) per B&B unit during 1999–2000 was £276.92.

Total estimated expenditure by local authorities in each of the past 10 years, based on information supplied to CIPFA, was as follows:

Local authority expenditure on bed and breakfast provision: England

	Gross	*Net*
1990–91	135,695,391	80,624,379
1991–92	144,496,027	73,219,805
1992–93	117,012,354	49,095,854
1993–94	65,675,858	21,233,760
1994–95	50,691,885	16,573,119
1995–96	55,775,348	19,592,951
1996–97	51,190,208	17,483,026
1997–98	56,689,680	24,075,766
1998–99	117,837,868	53,840,470
1999–2000	151,651,900	70,804,741
2000–01	[1]—	[1]—

[1] Not yet available

Notes:

1. B&B accommodation includes privately owned or managed hotels/guest houses with some shared facilities, but excludes hotel annexes of self-contained accommodation where meals are not provided.
2. Expenditure excludes any apportionment of central or departmental administration.
3. Net expenditure takes into account income arising from charges to clients, and housing benefit subsidy.

Source:

Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy Homelessness Statistics—"Actuals" annual reports

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State recently announced a new commitment to ensure that by March 2004 no family with children will be placed in B&B other than in an emergency. This was accompanied by changes in housing benefit subsidies to make leasing self-contained temporary accommodation more cost-effective, and an additional £35 million from DTLR to help local authorities find alternatives to B&B.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Regulatory Impact Assessment Report

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he intends to reply to the National Audit Office report entitled "Better Regulation: Making Good Use of Regulatory Impact Assessments". [43101]

Mr. Leslie: Officials are continuing discussions with the National Audit Office about progressing recommendations in their report ("Better Regulation: Making Good Use of Regulatory Impact Assessments"). The Public Accounts Committee heard evidence on the National Audit Office Report on 26 November 2001. When the Public Accounts Committee's report and recommendations are published the Government will subsequently respond by Treasury Minute in the normal way.

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the Public Service Agreement targets which have been revised and those which have been introduced since the publication of the 2001 departmental report. [43253]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: There has been only one agreed change or revision to the Cabinet Office's public service agreement targets as listed in the Cabinet Office 2001 departmental report "Cabinet Office—The Government Expenditure Plans 2001–02 to 2003–04 Cm5119".

The service delivery agreement target number 8 which covered 'securing successful delivery of the Government's anti-drugs strategy and targets' was transferred along with UK Anti-Drugs Co-ordination Unit to the Home Office as a result of the post-election machinery of Government changes.

A copy of "Cabinet Office—The Government Expenditure Plans 2001–02 to 2003–04 Cm5119" is held in the House of Commons Library and is available via the Cabinet Office website.

The Cabinet Office departmental report for 2002 which will be published before the summer recess will also detail the Department's performance against its agreed public service agreement targets.

Departmental Benchmarking

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what his Department's response is to the recommendation of the NAO report on modern policy making that ongoing benchmarking of Departments should be undertaken. [43113]

Mr. Leslie: Benchmarking is a powerful tool to support performance improvement, which can be applied in a wide range of ways. One approach is to compare the performance of an organisation against an ideal, in order to identify areas for improvement. This approach has been adopted for he Departmental Change Programme, being developed by the Office of Public Services Reform in the Cabinet Office. Departments will be reviewed against a model of high performance, which includes a module on policy making, to inform he generation and implementation of an integrated change programme.

Centre for Management and Policy Studies

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many staff are employed in the Centre for Management and Policy Studies; what their roles are; and what liaison they undertake with other Departments. [43118]

Mr. Leslie: 366 staff are employed in the Centre for Management and Policy Studies (CMPS). This figure includes 261 staff from the Civil Service College which ceased to be an executive agency on 1 April 2000 and now is a directorate of CMPS.

The staff in CMPS work with other units in the Cabinet Office and Departments to help government to learn better, ensure that the civil service is cultivating the right skills and culture for effective delivery, and promote new ways of developing and delivering policy through the sharing of knowledge and evidence from here and abroad.

CMPS is also the largest single provider of open training programmes for Government.

Energy Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on energy costs incurred by his Department in each of the last 10 years. [42447]

Mr. Leslie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my right hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Alun Michael) on 19 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 268W.

Legal Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what legal costs have been incurred by his Department in each of the last four years. [34291]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: Estimated legal costs incurred by the Department over the last four years can be broken down as follows.

	£000
1997–98	43
1998–99	53
1999–2000	69
2000–01	[1]173

[1] This includes expenditure of £111,500 incurred for residual HMSO liabilities, Security Facilities Division restructuring costs and Cross Cutting CMF—contractual work for the Government 'Gateway' project.

Catering Services

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the cost was of *(a)* in-house canteen and *(b)* other catering services provided by his Department in each of the last four years. [38924]

Mr. Leslie: For the financial year 2001–02, Eurest (formally known as Sutcliffe Catering) provide departmental in-house canteen services at an estimated cost of £161,000. In-house canteen costs for previous financial years are not held centrally, and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

The expenditure figure of £161,000 does not include expenditure undertaken by the Centre for Management and Policy Studies, the Government Office for the Regions and the Central Office of Information as this information is not held centrally, and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

European Union Directives

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the European Union directives and regulations relating to his Department that have been implemented in each of the last four years, specifying *(a)* the title and purpose of each, *(b)* the cost to public funds of each and *(c)* the cost to businesses of each. [39120]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: The Women and Equality Unit in the Cabinet Office has been responsible for implementing the Burden of Proof Directive (EC Directive 97/80/EC) . However, the relevant statutory instrument, which came into force on 12 October 2001, was laid before Parliament by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and Minister for Women, who has overall responsibility for women and equality issues.

Directive 97/80/BC has effect in UK law by Council Directive 98/52/BC and is implemented in the UK through the Sex Discrimination (Indirect Discrimination And Burden of Proof) Regulations 2001. Its aim is to ensure that any measures implementing the principle of equal treatment are made more effective, thereby providing victims of sex discrimination with effective access to justice. The directive also defines the concept of indirect discrimination.

We do not hold cost information in the form requested in part *(b)* of the question and that information could be assembled only at disproportionate cost.

Departments are required to produce regulatory impact assessments (RIAs) for all proposals, including those originating in European legislation, likely to impose significant costs on business, charities or voluntary organisations. DTI prepared an RIA for the regulations in

question, which showed the cost to an employer who is not discriminating should be nil. A copy of the RIA has been placed in the House Libraries.

Accommodation Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the cost was of hotel accommodation for departmental staff working away from home in each of the last four years. [41061]

Mr. Leslie: Estimated expenditure on hotel accommodation incurred by departmental staff while on official business since 1997 is as follows:

Year	*£000*
1997–98	132
1998–99	122
1999–2000	172
2000–01	206

The Department is responsible for meeting the subsistence costs for staff who necessarily incur expenses while away from their office on official business. All hotel accommodation expenditure incurred meets the value for money criteria as set out in Chapter 9 of the Cabinet Office Management Code.

The rise in hotel accommodation expenditure is mainly a result of the Cabinet Office's widening span of responsibilities in recent years. There has been a corresponding rise in necessary travel on official business by an increased staff resource. See following table:

Year	*Percentage increase in staff numbers*[1]
April 1997 to April 1998	3.4
April 1998 to April 1999	47.0
April 1999 to April 2000	12.0
April 2000 to April 2001	5.0

[1] Agencies staff numbers excluded

The increases in staff numbers have been in existing units whose roles have expanded and in new management units that have been introduced through new Government initiatives. In particular the increase between April 1998 and April 1999 is due to expansion of existing policy units such as the Social Exclusion Unit and Performance and Innovation Unit; and the transfer of units to the Cabinet Office such as the Women's Unit and the UK Anti-Drugs Co-ordination Unit.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Individual Learning Accounts

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will conduct a new tendering process for *(a)* advice on the shape of a new ILA scheme and *(b)* delivery of a new ILA scheme. [40317]

John Healey *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* I confirmed to the House on 6 November 2002 that there will be a replacement for the ILA programme. We are currently using Segal Quince Wickstead to conduct a stakeholder consultation exercise seeking views on the shape and delivery mechanism of the new scheme. The new scheme will build on the strengths of the ILA and take into account the findings of the current consultation exercise which are due in early April. In relation to the delivery of the new scheme we are currently considering a number of options. We will announce our plans in due course.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills who her Department's advisers were on the establishment of the ILA; and what advice they gave on the need for validation on accreditation of learning providers. [37536]

John Healey: The Department appointed KPMG Consulting to assist in the design and development of the national framework of individual learning accounts. KPMG sought a range of views from stakeholders, including learning providers, to help inform the policy-making process of the Department.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many complaints about ILA money being illicitly drawn down were passed by Capita to her Department for investigation in each month since January 2000; how many of those investigations have been completed in each month; and how many of her staff worked on the investigation of complaints. [37538]

John Healey: The individual learning account national framework was launched in September 2000. Prior to the national framework launch, each Training and Enterprise Council had responsibility for the operational nature of the programme in their area. The Department does not hold complaint information during this period.

Between 4 September 2000 and 31 January 2002, the Individual Learning Account Centre received some 18,000 complaints, many stemming from issues relating to the operational policy of the programme. Of this number, some 8,000 complaints involved potential abuse of the programme and were referred by Capita to the Department for investigation. Included in the 8,000 are some 5,900 complaints received relating to money taken from an ILA account without the individual's knowledge or consent.

No monthly breakdown relating to complaints requiring investigation is available from commencement of the programme. All allegations about money being illicitly drawn down are followed up by the Department and where evidence of potential fraud is found the complaint is passed to the Department's Special Investigation Unit for further investigation and referral to the police if appropriate. One investigation has been completed. Currently, there are 37 staff involved in work relating to investigations.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many complaints involving potential fraud in the ILA scheme were received by her Department in each month since January 2000; and how many investigations of those complaints were *(a)* undertaken and *(b)* completed in each month. [37540]

John Healey: On the number of complaints received involving potential fraud in the ILA scheme, I refer to my answer given to Parliamentary Question 37538. All serious complaints are subject to follow-up and where evidence of potential fraud is found the complaint is passed to the Department's Special Investigation Unit

(SIU). The SIU are currently dealing with 105 registered learning providers against whom 3804 complaints have been received. One further case was completed in February 2002. The table gives the information requested on investigations.

	Cases logged
November 2000	1
July 2001	5
August 2001	9
October 2001	2
November 2001	30
December 2001	6
January 2002	31
February 2002	19
March 2002	3
Total	106

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many complaints about the quality of ILA learning providers were received by her Department in each month since January 2000; and how many investigations of those complaints were *(a)* undertaken and *(b)* completed in each month. [37539]

John Healey: Information specific to the quality of learning is not collected separately. As at 31 January 2002, 517 complaints had been recorded, expressing dissatisfaction with learning providers and a further 47 relating to general learning provider issues. During the early months of the programme complaints were few and as such, no complaint categorisation system was put in place. The figures quoted are as a result of a system introduced in March 2001.

Complaints received about the quality of learning in themselves do not result in an investigation. Investigations are put in place to deal with potential abuses of the programme.

Public-Private Partnerships (Consultants)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the total external spending by her Department was on public-private partnership consultants in each of the last four years; how many full-time equivalent consultants were employed over this period; how many billed consultancy days there were per year; what the implied average cost of each PPP consultant was; how many consultancy firms were used by her Department over this period; and if she will make a statement. [43201]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 1 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 634W. The only Private Finance Initiative with which my Department is involved is a Public Private Partnership to deliver the Connexions Card. Therefore the same figures apply. In addition, since 25 January, my Department has spent an additional £56,183.03 on public private partnership consultants. This equates to one full-time equivalent, and consisted of 49 billed consultancy days, at an average cost per consultant of £1,146.59. We have again used four consultancy firms.

Private Medical Insurance

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many employees in *(a)* her Department and *(b)* her Department's agencies and non-departmental public bodies have had private medical insurance provided for them in each year since 1997–98; what the total cost is; and if she will make a statement. [32317]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 6 February 2002]:* The Civil Service Management Code specifically precludes the provision of private medical insurance as a part of any structured remuneration package for civil servants. Consequently, private medical insurance is not a feature of the Department for Education and Skills' (DfES') terms and conditions of employment.

The employees of DfES' non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) are not civil servants. Four of DfES' NDPBs—the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI), Construction Industry Training Board (CITB), Engineering Construction Industry Training Board (ECITB) and Learning and Skills Council (LSC)—offer private medical insurance to some employees.

Neither the CITB nor ECITB are publicly funded. The ALI and LSC are both obliged to offer private medical insurance to some employees under the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) regulations. The total number of employees covered and the annual costs of private medical insurance provision since 1997–98 is as follows:

Year	*Employees*	*Cost (£000)*
1997–1998[1]	8	6.7
1998–1999[1]	9	9.0
1999–2000[1]	8	8.5
2000–2001[1]	9	9.4
2001–2002[2]	1,215	514.0

[1] CITB and ECITB.
[2] ALI and LSC. Figures for the CITB and ECITB are not yet available.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what additional support is given to local education authorities to meet the costs resulting from the requirement to educate the children of asylum seekers. [44488]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Local education authorities receive financial support, through the Education Standard Spending Assessment, for the cost of educating children of asylum seekers in the same way that it does for all pupils on school rolls. The Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant, part of the Department's Standards Fund, is available to help schools address the needs of minority ethnic pupils at risk of underachievement and support pupils, including children of asylum seekers, for whom English is an additional language. All LEAs are eligible for this funding, which in this financial year is providing around £154 million of support.

In addition, in 2000–01, £1.5 million was made available to support the education costs of the children of asylum seekers dispersed to Home Office designated "cluster areas". This funding was rolled forward into this financial year and increased to £2,377,000.

Congestion Charging

Kate Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many schools, broken down by *(a)* primary, *(b)* secondary and *(c)* special, are within the congestion charge zone in London. [44372]

Mr. Timms: There will be 40 maintained nursery/primary schools, nine maintained secondary schools and five maintained special schools within the proposed congestion charge zone in London.

These figures are estimated using postcode details of schools and the proposed central zone described in the Transport for London Street Management website on 18 March 2002.

School Accidents

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) how many *(a)* deaths and *(b)* serious accidents have occurred in practical lessons in schools in England in each of the last 10 years; and if she will make a statement; [44719]

(2) what guidelines exist on class sizes for practical lessons in schools. [44720]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: My Department does not collect information on deaths and serious accidents in practical lessons in schools.

Sizes of practical groups and pupil-teacher ratios are matters for local education authorities and schools. They should take account of assessments of potential hazards; the ages, abilities, aptitudes and any special educational needs of the pupils; and relevant safety regulations. My Department's "Area Guidelines for Schools" (Building Bulletin 82), published in 1996, carries recommendations for classroom area/pupil space. Further recommendations can also be found in the Department's "Design and Technology Accommodation in Secondary Schools" (Building Bulletin 81), "Art Accommodation in Secondary Schools" (Building Bulletin 89), "Guide to Safe Practice in Art and Design" (1995), and "Safety in Science Education" (1996). The Association for Science Education has published guidance, and advice is also available on request from the Consortium of Local Education Authorities for the Provision of Science Services.

Departmental Expenditure Limits

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer of 14 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 607–08W, what changes have since been made to the departmental expenditure limit. [45865]

Estelle Morris: The Departmental Expenditure Limit (DEL) for the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), including the Office for Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools (OFSTED), which has a separate Estimate, has been decreased by £210,000 from £20,304,478,000 to £20,304,268,000.

The impact of this reduction on the resources element of the DEL is set out in the following table:

£000

		Resources				*Capital*	
	Change	*New DEL*	*Of which: Voted*	*Non-voted*	*DEL*	*Of which: Voted*	*Non-voted*
RfR 1	–210	17,014,918	6,675,052	10,339,866	2,820,374	1,851,123	969,251
RfR 3	0	125,833	125,833	0	80,470	80,470	0
RfR 4	0	98,073	98,073	0	0	0	0
Total change	–210	—	—	—	—	—	—
Ofsted	0	152,019	152,019	0	12,581	12,581	0

The DfES Spring Supplementary Estimate included a transfer of provision from the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (DTLR) for Neighbourhood Surveys. It was subsequently discovered that this transfer was not included by DTLR in their Spring Supplementary or in their parliamentary answer announcing changes to their DEL.

The administration costs limits remain unchanged as follows:

Original

	£000
DfES (RfR1)	219,730
Sure Start (RfR3)	3,890
Children and Young People's Unit (RfR4)	2,491
Ofsted	27,095

Stolen Equipment

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer of 22 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 818–19W, on stolen equipment, what criminal proceedings have been undertaken for cases of theft against her Department, stating in each case *(a)* whether the proceedings (i) led to a criminal conviction and (ii) were unsuccessful, *(b)* the cost incurred by her Department in pursuing a conviction and *(c)* the value of items recovered; and if she will make a statement. [41506]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 18 March 2002]:* My Department has not undertaken any criminal proceedings for cases of theft since 1 May 1997.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Bovine Tuberculosis

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what further steps she is taking to combat the rise of bovine tuberculosis. [43980]

Mr. Morley: On 31 January movement restrictions were placed on cattle herds which had missed a six or 12-month TB test after the lifting of movement restrictions, in annually tested parishes. This measure was introduced in response to a veterinary risk assessment which has shown that herds undergoing these kinds of tests have historically had the greatest risk of bovine TB infection. In addition the backlog of TB tests that have arisen during the foot and mouth outbreak are being prioritised and where possible extra resources are being diverted to carry out this work.

Foot and Mouth

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what non-domesticated animals other than brown rats have been implicated in the spread of foot and mouth; and what steps were taken to destroy them on infected farms. [39490]

Mr. Morley: There is no direct evidence that wildlife contributed to the spread of foot and mouth last year, either as mechanical carriers, or through contracting and carrying the virus. Pest control activities on infected premises and farms considered to be dangerous contacts was limited to baiting for rats.

National Forest

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether a conclusion has been reached on the review of the National Forest Company. [46215]

Mr. Morley: The quinquennial review of the National Forest company has been completed. It has concluded that the company, a non-departmental public body sponsored by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, should continue to be responsible for delivering the National forest Strategy which is contributing strongly to the government's sustainable development agenda. Since its creation in 1995 the Company has for example achieved an expansion of woodland cover in the National Forest area, covering 200 square miles in Derbyshire, Leicestershire and Staffordshire, from 6 per cent. to 12 per cent. Detailed changes to the company's operations will be made in order to maximise effective delivery and value for money. A full report of the review is available at www.defra.gov.uk.

Fish Quotas

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the statement by the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on 27 February 2002, *Official Report*, European Standing Committee A, column 25, whether the levy for the over-quota fish was paid to the producers' organisations whose members were recently prosecuted in Plymouth; whether the Department has undertaken the correct checks to ensure that the relevant procedure has been followed, pursuant to the requirements laid down in the Council Regulations governing the operations of producers' organisations; and whether correct procedures have been followed to ensure that these organisations are protected should the Commission carry out external checks. [44101]

Mr. Morley: From evidence we have in the form of sales notes, it appears that levy was paid to the South Western Fish Producers' Organisation on the landings both declared and undeclared. In the first instance, any remedial action regarding such levy payments is a matter for the PO.

Food Prices

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what information she collects on changes in farmgate and supermarket prices; and if she will make a statement; [43834]

(2) if she will list the monthly changes over the last 24 months of *(a)* the farmgate price and *(b)* the supermarket price of a 35 lb lamb. [43835]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 15 March 2002]:* Information on farmgate prices is collected from a variety of sources including my Department's own surveys of milk and egg processors, DEFRA Agricultural Market Reports, the Home Grown Cereals Authority, the British Potato Council and the Meat and Livestock Commission.

Price indices based on these data are published monthly as "Agricultural Price Indices, United Kingdom".

Retail prices are estimated from data on expenditure and volume of purchases as collected in the Expenditure and Food Survey (formerly the National Food Survey). These data are not published monthly as the sample size is insufficient. Approximate prices for selected commodities can be estimated from expenditure and consumption data that are published in the quarterly Statistics News Release. Annual average prices are given in the annual report on the survey (NFS 2000 is the latest).

Monthly movements in retail prices for food, as with other items, are best monitored by reference to the Retail Price Index published by the Office for National Statistics.

Information for the API for sheep and the RPI for home-killed lamb for the period January 2000 to December 2001 is given in the following table in terms of three-month moving averages. Agricultural producer prices were 7 per cent. lower at the end of the period than at the beginning while retail prices were 2.8 per cent. higher.

Retail prices lag several months behind producer price movements and show less volatility.

All foods as purchased by consumers will differ to some extent from the ex-farm commodity. Meat as retailed will have been de-boned, cut, trimmed of most fat and packaged. These additional processes affect the validity of a direct comparison between the consumer and farmgate prices.

Producer and retail price indices: sheep and home-killed lamb[1]

Date	*Agricultural producer prices*[2]	*Retail prices*[3]
2000		
January	100.0	100.0
February	108.3	103.9
March	115.0	107.0
April	115.1	109.4
May	110.8	110.6
June	102.0	109.3
July	94.2	105.9

Producer and retail price indices: sheep and home-killed lamb[1]

Date	*Agricultural producer prices*[2]	*Retail prices*[3]
August	89.4	102.9
September	88.0	100.9
October	88.6	100.6
November	91.8	100.2
December	103.2	101.4
2001		
January	115.9	104.3
February	115.7	109.4
March	112.7	112.7
April	105.7	114.8
May	107.9	114.6
June	98.6	113.1
July	90.0	108.9
August	82.1	105.4
September	79.0	103.4
October	83.6	102.9
November	93.0	102.8
December	—	—

[1] 3-month moving averages (December 1999-February 2000 = 100)
[2] DEFRA: Agricultural Price Indices, United Kingdom (www.defra.gov.uk)
[3] ONS: Consumer Price Indices (www.statistics.gov.uk)

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Accountancy Contracts

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the contracts agreed by her Department with the five largest accountancy firms since May 1997; and what was the total value of contracts with each. [42097]

Dr. Howells: I refer my hon. Friend to the answers given to the hon. Member for Bath (Don Foster) on 7 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1116W and to the hon. Member for Perth (Annabelle Ewing) on 15 March 2002, *Official Report*, columns 1279–80W.

Justices of the Peace

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many members of staff at her Department are justices of the peace; and if she has a strategy for her Department to encourage members of staff to become justices of the peace. [44546]

Dr. Howells: The Department keeps no central records of the number of staff who are justices of the peace. Staff involved in magisterial duties are granted up to 18 days special leave with pay each year.

Regeneration Schemes (English Heritage)

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) which English Heritage supported regeneration schemes have *(a)* applied for EC state aid, *(b)* been successful and *(c)* been refused in the last 12 months; [43513]

(2) if she will make a statement on EU state aid rules and English Heritage-supported projects. [43514]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 15 March 2002]:* English Heritage's main historic buildings, monuments, parks and gardens programme, which supports the repair of individual buildings, parks and gardens, was notified to the European Commission as possible state aid in July 2001. We are awaiting the Commission's assessment of the programme's compatibility with the EC Treaty. Grants to individual enterprises from English Heritage's Heritage Economic Regeneration schemes do not require notification as they are compatible with the de minimis block exemption regulation.

Golden Jubilee

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) how much money has been received in the form of donations to fund the Golden Jubilee events in each of the past three years; and if she will make a statement; [44578]

(2) if she will list *(a)* the donors sponsoring the Golden Jubilee events and *(b)* the amount of money each donor has contributed in each of the past three years; and if she will make a statement. [44579]

Tessa Jowell: I refer the hon. Member to my reply of 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 265W. These are matters for Lord Sterling, who started fundraising last summer and has so far raised over £4.5 million.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the groups expected to march in the Golden Jubilee procession on 4 June; and if she will make a statement. [44591]

Tessa Jowell: The Queen's Golden Jubilee Weekend Trust, chaired by Lord Sterling, announced the details on 13 March 2002.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans have been made for cleaning up after major Golden Jubilee events; and if she will make a statement. [44581]

Tessa Jowell: For events taking place in the Royal Parks during the Jubilee Weekend of 1 to 4 June, cleaning up will be the responsibility of the event organisers and the Royal Parks Agency. For events in Westminster and the City of London, responsibility will fall to Westminster city council or the Corporation of London as appropriate.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many visitors are expected to attend the *(a)* fireworks display on 3 June, *(b)* ceremonial procession from Buckingham Palace on 4 June, *(c)* Golden Jubilee Festival in the Mall on 4 June and *(d)* Queen's balcony appearance at Buckingham Palace on 4 June; and if she will make a statement. [44566]

Tessa Jowell: Previous experience of similar events shows that it is impossible accurately to predict the numbers that will attend, but many tens of thousands are expected.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps have been taken to encourage neighbourhood street parties to celebrate the Queen's Golden Jubilee; and if she will make a statement. [44586]

Tessa Jowell: The Golden Jubilee Office distributed 20,000 Golden Jubilee Celebrations Toolkits to councils, Citizens' Advice Bureaux, libraries, a wide range of organisations across England, Scotland and Wales and the media. A further 13,500 copies have subsequently been requested and demand continues to be high.

The Celebrations Toolkit is also available to be downloaded from the official Golden Jubilee website (www.goldenjubilee.gov.uk).

In addition, representatives from Buckingham Palace and the Golden Jubilee Office are delivering joint briefings across the United Kingdom. To date, they have briefed over 1,200 organisations. More briefings are planned.

On 6 March, the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions issued guidance to local authorities in England about their powers to close roads for events such as street parties and suggesting ways of ensuring that undue burdens are not placed on event organisers. This was announced in a joint press release from the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to commission statues in commemoration of the Queen's Golden Jubilee; and if she will make a statement. [44567]

Tessa Jowell: The Government have no plans to commission statues to mark the Queen's Golden Jubilee. The Government are working closely with Buckingham Palace to facilitate the celebrations in a way that embraces the six themes for the Jubilee: celebration; giving thanks; service; involving the whole community; looking forward as well as back; and the Commonwealth, while adhering to Her Majesty's wish that there should be no undue expenditure from public funds. It is for local communities to decide how they wish to celebrate the Jubilee.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) of 6 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 986W, on the Golden Jubilee, what the objectives are of each initiative for the celebrations; if she will outline the project plans; how many people are working on each of these initiatives and plans; and if she will make a statement. [44565]

Tessa Jowell: The objective of each of the 61 initiatives that are being delivered through 12 project plans is to facilitate the celebrations for the Queen's Golden Jubilee in a way that embraces the six themes for the Jubilee: celebration; giving thanks; service; involving the whole community; looking forward as well as back; and the Commonwealth, while adhering to Her Majesty's wish that there should be no undue expenditure from public funds. It is for local communities to decide how they wish to celebrate the Jubilee.

Some of the initiatives have yet to be announced and I will, therefore, write to the hon. Member outlining them in due course.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to the answer from the Secretary of State for the Home Department to the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) of 14 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 622W, on the Golden Jubilee, what plans she has to apply for a special grant for exceptional additional costs which could not be met from within existing budgets for the Queen's Golden Jubilee and for how much; and if she will make a statement. [44562]

Tessa Jowell: I have no such plans.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much the Department has spent on the Queen's Jubilee in each of the past three years; how the money was allocated; and if she will make a statement. [44589]

Tessa Jowell: No DCMS expenditure was incurred before 2001–02 for which £4.017 million was transferred to my Department by the Home Office from their existing vote.

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to her answer of 13 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 1156W, ref. 41453, what the definition is of employment with the 999 emergency services for the purpose of eligibility for the award of the Queen's Golden Jubilee Medal. [44253]

Tessa Jowell: To be eligible for the medal, emergency personnel must have completed five years' service on 6 February 2002 with one of the '999' emergency services which include the police, ambulance and fire services, the Coastguard, mountain rescue and the RNLI.

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport for what reasons prison officers will not be awarded the Golden Jubilee Medal. [44421]

Tessa Jowell: The medal is being issued to members of the armed forces and Royal Fleet Auxiliary and to the '999' emergency services. As the Prison Service is not an emergency service, prison officers will not be eligible for the medal.

BBC News 24

Mr. Pope: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the terms of reference will be for the review of BBC News 24. [45863]

Tessa Jowell: The independent review of News 24 which I have asked Richard Lambert, formerly editor of the *Financial Times*, to conduct will have the following terms of reference:

The independent reviewer shall:

consider whether, in delivering its News 24 service, the BBC is acting in accordance with the facts and assurances upon which approval to proceed with the service was given;

have regard, in reaching any conclusions, to:

(a) the BBC's own report on the performance of News 24 and to any subsequent evidence provided by the Corporation; and

(b) views submitted by any other interested parties in response to the BBC's report;

submit a report to the Secretary of State, in publishable form, by the end of June 2002, setting out his conclusions and, if appropriate, making any recommendations he believes necessary to ensure that News 24 is operated in line with the original approval.

I am today placing on my Department's website, www.culture.gov.uk, the BBC's own report on the operation of News 24: this sets out the basis on which the service was approved. I am arranging for copies to be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Richard Lambert is writing to a range of organisations who may wish to comment to him. I would encourage all those with an interest to contribute their views.

Free Television Licences

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will estimate the number of households *(a)* entitled to and *(b)* receiving the free TV licence for the over-75s in each year since its introduction. [43365]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 14 March 2002]:* The Government introduced free television licences for people aged 75 or over on 1 November 2000. An estimated 3.4 million households previously paying the full licence fee are now entitled to a free licence. Three million free licences were issued in the financial year 2000–01. 3.2 million free licences were issued between April and December 2001 and the forecast take-up of the concession for the year as a whole is 99 per cent. In addition, approximately 500,000 people living in residential homes and sheltered housing, who previously qualified for the £5 Accommodation for Residential Care concessionary fee, now receive their licence free of charge; we believe this represents the great majority of those eligible, though precise figures are not available.

Mrs. Irene Adams: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many pensioner households in Paisley, North are benefiting from free television licences for the over-75s. [43930]

Dr. Howells: TV Licensing, which administers the free television licence scheme for the BBC as Licensing Authority, is not able to provide geographical breakdowns of the number of free licences issued. However, estimates based on the 1991 Census indicate that there were approximately 3,800 people aged 75 or over in the Paisley, North constituency.

Communications Bill

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when she will publish the Communications Bill. [43330]

Dr. Howells: The Government intends to publish the draft Communications Bill around the end of April.

Art Market

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment her Department has made of the impact of *(a)* resale artists' rights, *(b)* taxation and *(c)* EU regulations on the European and UK art markets. [43052]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I have been asked to reply.

The latest Government assessment on artists' resale rights was contained in Explanatory Memorandum 5665/01, of 1 March 2001. The EU Directive of artists' resale rights will not be implemented in the UK until 1 January 2006 and the implementation process will include updating of this assessment.

No other assessments of the art market have been made.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what representations she has received concerning the impact of taxation and EU regulations on the European and UK art markets; and if she will make a statement. [43051]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I have been asked to reply.

The Department has received no representations about the impact of taxation and EU regulations on the European and UK art markets since negotiations on the artists' resale rights in 2001. The Government's response to these representations was covered in Explanatory Memorandum 5665/01, of 1 March 2001.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what estimate her Department has made of the size of the UK's share of the international art market in each of the last five years. [43053]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I have been asked to reply.

The Department has made no such estimates.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Zimbabwe

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the suspension of Zimbabwe from the Councils of the Commonwealth. [46034]

Mr. Straw: I refer my hon. Friend to the statement I made earlier today in the House.

India (Ian Stillman)

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many times the UK high commissioner for India met the Stillman family during their recent stay in Delhi to discuss the case of Ian Stillman. [44807]

Mr. Bradshaw: Our high commissioner in New Delhi did not meet Ian Stillman's family during their recent visit. However, Mr. Stillman's family did meet senior officials at the high commission on 1 March and 5 March 2002.

We are doing all we can to assist Mr. Stillman's family. My noble Friend Baroness Amos met Mr. Stillman's sister on 5 February 2002 to discuss the case. The Head of our consular division in London also met Mr. Stillman's family on 14 January 2002 and 14 May 2001.

Celebrations

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what arrangements his Department has made to celebrate *(a)* St. Patrick's Day, *(b)* St. George's Day, *(c)* St. Andrew's Day and *(d)* Her Majesty the Queen's Golden Jubilee; and how his Department celebrated St. David's Day. [42303]

Mr. Bradshaw *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* There were no special arrangements made for St. David's Day or St. Patrick's Day. Neither are there special arrangements being made to celebrate St. George's Day and St. Andrew's Day.

The FCO is sponsoring the tour of The Queen's Golden Jubilee Baton through 23 Commonwealth countries. It left London on Monday 11 March, Commonwealth Day, and will return to the UK on 5 June. Our missions overseas

will arrange events and encourage publicity to support the Baton's passage, supported by local Commonwealth Games associations and the British Council.

Additionally, there will be eight open days from April to October when the FCO will be open to view by members of the public. It is one of the "String of Pearls" historic public buildings that will be open to the public, along the banks of the Thames in central London.

We have issued general guidance to all our missions overseas on the celebrations of the Golden Jubilee. Many of our embassies and high commissions will use the occasion to enhance their annual Queen's birthday party. Missions will also hold additional events using publicity materials specifically prepared for the Jubilee in the FCO, taking into account The Queen's desire that there should be no undue expenditure from public funds.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he will list the official visits within the UK outside London made by each Minister in his Department in 2001, giving for each *(a)* the origin and destination and *(b)* the mode of travel used; and what guidance is provided to Ministers in his Department on choice of mode of travel for official visits; [38194]

(2) if he will list the official visits to *(a)* Paris and *(b)* Brussels made by each Minister in his Department in 2001 and the mode of travel used; and what guidance is provided to Ministers in his Department on the choice of mode of travel for such visits. [38156]

Mr. MacShane: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary at the Cabinet office on 6 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 421W.

Age Discrimination

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his Department's policy is towards age discrimination. [42577]

Mr. Bradshaw: In line with the recommendations of the Performance and Innovation Unit Report "Winning the Generation Game", the FCO has examined its retirement ages. As a result, clerical and support staff are now able to work until 65 and junior and middle managers to 63.

Equipment Leasing

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the equipment leasing arrangements entered into by his Department in each of the last four years; and what the cost is to public funds in each case. [39080]

Mr. MacShane: This information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

External Contracts

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which non-accounting and non-information technology external organisations have won new contracts with *(a)* his Department and *(b)* executive agencies in each of the past five years. [38747]

Mr. MacShane *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* This information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

PRIVY COUNCIL

European Union Directives

Mr. Bercow: To ask the President of the Council if he will list the European Union directives and regulations relating to his Department that have been implemented in each of the last four years, specifying *(a)* the title and purpose of each, *(b)* the cost to public funds of each and *(c)* the cost to businesses of each. [39116]

Mr. Robin Cook: My Department has been required to implement the working time directive. The regulations give workers rights relating to total hours worked, breaks between days worked and over a working week or fortnight, and a meal break during the working day. This directive has been implemented at no cost to public funds, as it is part of both line manager and personnel responsibilities. There has been no cost to business.

Criminal Damage

Mr. Bercow: To ask the President of the Council what the cost has been of criminal damage to his Department's buildings in each of the last four years. [44847]

Mr. Robin Cook: No such damage has been reported during the period mentioned.

Crèche Facilities

Mr. Bercow: To ask the President of the Council what crèche facilities are provided by his Department; and at what cost. [44868]

Mr. Robin Cook: My Department has no crèche facilities.

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the President of the Council (1) if he will list the public service agreement targets which have been revised and those which have been introduced since the publication of the 2001 departmental report; [43249]

(2) which public service agreement targets scheduled to be met in 2002 will not be achieved by the due date. [44821]

Mr. Robin Cook: Like other small Departments, the Privy Council Office is not required to have a public service agreement.

Human Rights Act

Mr. Bercow: To ask the President of the Council how many cases have been brought against his Department under the Human Rights Act 1998; and what has been the cost in *(a)* legal fees to defend cases and *(b)* compensation payments. [45070]

Mr. Robin Cook: No cases have been brought against my Department under the Human Rights Act 1998.

Age Discrimination

Mr. Bercow: To ask the President of the Council what his Department's policy is towards age discrimination. [42576]

Mr. Robin Cook: My Department is planning to review its policies and procedures to integrate age discrimination and has a commitment that there should be no unfair treatment of staff on the basis of age. The Privy Council Office has implemented the recommendations of the Performance and Innovation Unit report 'Winning the Generation Game' in particular that permanent staff can stay on up to the age of 65 subject to operational requirements.

My Department currently employs two staff who are beyond retirement age: bot are fee paid and employed for their skills and to meet the needs of the department. My Department has also taken advantage of the New Deal for Over-50s.

Energy Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the President of the Council if he will make a statement on energy costs incurred by his Department in each of the last 10 years. [42448]

Mr. Robin Cook: Energy costs for my Department are as follows:

2000–01—£11,818.04

2001–02 (costs to date)—£9,436.70.

Figures for the other years requested can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

My Department monitors weather conditions when deciding whether to switch the heating on or off and has reduced its gas consumption by 10 per cent. for 2001 as stated in our service delivery agreement.

Government Bills

Norman Baker: To ask the President of the Council if he will list the average number of days of consideration for Government Bills in *(a)* the House of Commons and *(b)* the House of Lords in each parliamentary Session since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [42125]

Mr. Robin Cook *[pursuant to his reply, 11 March 2002, c. 706W]:* I regret to say that there was an error in that I had understood the times given for consideration of Bills in the Lords to include time spent in Grand Committee, which they did not. I give a corrected version[1] of the entire answer as follows, which I hope will be for the convenience of Members.

House of Commons

Session	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Government Bills considered—floor	53	31	40	26
Time taken debating	781 hrs 53 mins	396 hrs 38 mins	565 hrs 5 mins	243 hrs 35 mins
Average time per Bill	14 hrs 45 mins	12 hrs 48 mins	14 hrs 8 mins	9 hrs 22 mins
Government Bills considered—Standing Committee	31	26	37	17
Sittings (Standing Committee)	228	207	341	121
Average sittings per Bill	7.35	7.96	9.22	7.12

House of Lords

Session	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Government Bills considered on floor	50	29	42	27
Time taken debating	806 hrs 54 mins	622 hrs 48 mins	791 hrs 33 mins	223 hrs 38 mins
Average time per Bill	16 hrs 8 mins	21 hrs 28 mins	18 hrs 51 mins	8 hrs 17 mins
Government Bills considered in Grand Committee	6	4	9	2
Time taken debating	35 hrs 29 mins	21 hrs 30 mins	19 hrs 47 mins	36 hrs 54 mins
Average time per Bill	5 hrs 55 mins	5 hrs 23 mins	2 hrs 12 mins	18 hrs 27 mins

[1] Supplied by the Journal Offices in the Lords and Commons.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Publicity

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General if she will list the publicity and advertising campaigns run by her Department in each of the last four years, specifying the *(a)* purpose, *(b)* cost to public funds, *(c)* number of staff involved and *(d)* method of evaluation in each case. [39094]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* In my own Department, the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers, there have been no publicity or advertising campaigns in each of the last four years.

In the Departments for which the Attorney General is responsible, details are as follows:

Crown Prosecution Service

The Crown Prosecution Service has not run any publicity or advertising campaigns in each of the last four years.

Details of the publicity costs incurred by the Crown Prosecution Service in each of the last four years were provided in my reply to PQ number 36156.

Treasury Solicitor's Department

The Treasury Solicitor's Department has not been involved in any specific publicity and advertising campaigns over the last four years. However, the

Department does incur advertising and publicity costs in its normal course of business. Details of these costs over the last four years were given in my reply to PQ number 36156.

Serious Fraud Office

The Serious Fraud Office has not run any publicity or advertising campaigns in each of the last four years. Details of the publicity costs incurred by the Serious Fraud Office in each of the last four years were provided in my reply to PQ number 36156.

Public Appointments

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Solicitor-General how many appointments to public bodies have been made through her Department *(a)* from April 2000 to March 2001 and *(b)* since 31 March 2001; and how many of these were (i) men and (ii) women. [42156]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 12 March 2002]:* My own Department, the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers has not made any appointments to public bodies *(a)* from April 2000 to March 2001 or *(b)* since March 2001.

In those Departments for which the Attorney General is responsible, details are as follows:

Crown Prosecution Service

The Crown Prosecution Service has not made any appointments to public bodies *(a)* from April 2000 to March 2001 or *(b)* since 31 March 2001.

Treasury Solicitor's Department

The Treasury Solicitor's Department has not made any appointments to public bodies *(a)* from April 2000 to March 2001 or *(b)* since 31 March 2001.

Serious Fraud Office

The Serious Fraud Office has not made any appointments to public bodies *(a)* from April 2000 to March 2001 or *(b)* since 31 March 2001.

EU Directives

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General if she will list the European Union directives and regulations relating to her Department that have been implemented in each of the last four years, specifying *(a)* the title and purpose of each, *(b)* the cost to public funds of each and *(c)* the cost to businesses of each. [39129]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* My own Department, the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers has not been responsible for the implementation of any EU directives or regulations in the last four years.

In the Departments for which the Attorney-General is responsible, details are as follows:

Crown Prosecution Service

The Crown Prosecution Service has not been responsible for the implementation of any EU directives or regulations in the last four years.

Treasury Solicitor's Department

The Treasury Solicitor's Department has not been responsible for the implementation of any EU directives or regulations in the last four years. Members of the Department have however assisted in the implementation of directives and regulations which are the responsibility of the Departments they advise.

Serious Fraud Office

The Serious Fraud Office has not been responsible for the implementation of any EU directives or regulations in the last four years.

Catering Services

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General what the cost was of *(a)* in-house canteen and *(b)* other catering services provided by her Department in each of the last four years. [38930]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* My own Department, the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers does not provide an in-house canteen, or other catering services for staff.

In the Departments for which the Attorney-General is responsible, details are as follows:

Crown Prosecution Service

The Crown Prosecution Service has one in-house canteen, which is located at its headquarters building in London. The service is contracted out to a commercial firm, following a competitive tender. The annual cost to the CPS of this facility during the last four years has been as follows:

Year	*£*
1997–98	42,182
1998–99	56,527
1999–2000	49,193
2000–01	57,865

Costs are reviewed by regular contract management meetings with the contractor and by competitive tender.

Treasury Solicitor's Department

The Treasury Solicitor's Department does not have an in-house staff canteen. The total amounts spent on catering services for hospitality, training and meeting refreshments in each of the last four years were are follows:

Treasury Solicitor's Department

£4,263.19 in 1998–99

£6,537.34 in 1999–2000

£6,041.71 in 2000–01

£5,376.63 in 2001–02 (to date).

Government Property Lawyers

£84.73 in 1998–99

£7.62 in 1999–2000

£0 in 2000–01

£0 in 2001–02 (to date)

Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate

£0 in 1998–99

£0 in 1999–2000

£0 in 2000–01

£1,461.35 in 2001–02 (to date).

Serious Fraud Office

The Serious Fraud Office does not provide an in-house canteen, or other catering services.

Rail Journeys (Staff)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General if she will make it her policy that rail journeys undertaken by staff in her Department should ordinarily be on standard class tickets. [40440]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 7 March 2002]:* In relation to my own Department, the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers and the Departments for which the Attorney General is responsible, section 8 paragraph 8.2.1 of the civil service management code requires Departments and agencies to ensure that staff use the most efficient and economic means of travel in the circumstances, taking into account any management benefit or the needs of staff with disabilities.

The Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers is fully committed to ensuring that staff use the most efficient and economic means of travel commensurate with meeting operational needs.

Crown Prosecution Service

The Crown Prosecution Service's travel and Subsistence policy already makes it clear that official travel should always be conducted in the most effective and economic manner and normally by public transport.

The main principles of the Crown Prosecution Service's travel and subsistence policy are:

No reimbursement is appropriate when no extra expense is incurred;

All official journeys must be necessary, duly authorised, and undertaken in the most economical manner consistent with the efficient conduct of official business;

Payment from public funds will normally be based on the cost of the journey by the most economical route and the most reasonable mode of conveyance;

The Department may refuse claims for unreasonable expenses, or expenses which could have been avoided if the journey had been better planned.

The Crown Prosecution Service grants entitlement to first class travel to all staff at Level C, Pay Bank C2/ Level B, Pay Band B3 and above. This entitlement is a contractual right that forms part of the terms and conditions of service for those Crown Prosecution Service staff members. On a number of occasions, the Department has considered the removal of this right but has withdrawn from that approach because of the cost associated with a buy-out of the contractual right.

Furthermore, staff entitled to standard class travel only, may be allowed to travel first class in the following circumstances:

When required to travel overnight;

When necessarily travelling with a civil servant entitled to first class travel or a non-civil servant travelling first class;

When the Department is satisfied that it is not practicable for the member of staff to obtain a seat in standard class.

Treasury Solicitor's Department

It is departmental policy in the Treasury solicitor's Department that all staff, regardless of grade, must have full regard to the need for economy in travelling and must always consider using standard class on trains. Only more senior staff may travel using first class, though junior staff may accompany them if they need to work together during the journey.

Serious Fraud Office

It is departmental policy in the Serious Fraud Office that all staff, regardless of grade, must have full regard to the need for economy in travelling and must always travel standard class unless they can obtain better prices for first class travel, or there are compelling reasons not to travel standard class.

Department of Public Prosecutions for Northern Ireland

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Solicitor-General what the size is of the annual caseload of the Department of Public Prosecutions for Northern Ireland in each tier of court in the last year for which figures are available; and what her estimate is of the annual caseload based on the full implementation of proposals relating to the office set out in the Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill. [44451]

The Solicitor-General: In 2001 the numbers of persons appearing per tier of court in Northern Ireland in proceedings prosecuted by the Director of Public Prosecutions for Northern Ireland were as follows:

Court	*Number of cases*
Magistrates court	4,664
Crown court	753
County court appeals	776
Court of appeal	59
Case stated	4
Judicial review	6

Information currently available from the Police Service of Northern Ireland estimates that a caseload of some 80,000 files per year will require to be considered by the Public Prosecution Service which is to be established under the terms of the Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill.

TREASURY

Internet Service Providers (VAT)

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how much VAT he estimates his announcement on 14 March means will not have to be paid by AOL; and how much VAT for identical services will have to be paid by *(a)* BT Open World and *(b)* Freeserve; [45009]

(2) with reference to his announcement of 14 March concerning the VAT treatment of internet service providers, if he will place in the Library a list of the *(a)* consultations Customs and Excise and the Treasury made with UK ISPs, together with copies of the responses to the consultation and *(b)* meetings which Her Majesty's Customs and Excise and Treasury Ministers and officials had with persons employed by or on behalf of AOL. [45157]

Mr. Boateng: As part of their review of the VAT treatment of internet service packages, Customs sought input from a range of interested bodies, including major internet service providers. However, this process was not undertaken as a formal consultation exercise, and there are therefore no formal consultation responses available for publication. Customs are debarred by statute form disclosing details of individual taxpayers' or companies' affairs.

Statistics

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of the population of the travel to work areas covering *(a)* the Isle of Wight, *(b)* Bournemouth, *(c)* Southampton and *(d)* Portsmouth work outside their travel to work area. [45010]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Mr. Len Cook to Mr. Andrew Turner, dated 21 March 2002:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question about travel-to-work-areas. (45010)

The Labour Force Survey (LFS) provides estimates of employment rates according to the travel-to-work-area (TTWA) in which people are resident. Although information about people's workplace is available from the LFS also, this could only be analysed by TTWA at disproportionate cost.

Employment Statistics (St. Helens)

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of the work force in *(a)* St. Helens, South, *(b)* the St. Helens metropolitan borough council area, *(c)* Merseyside, *(d)* Manchester, *(e)* the north-west, *(f)* other regional development area regions and *(g)* England in (i) 1996, (ii) 1997, (iii) 1998, (iv) 1999, (v) 2000 and (vi) 2001, were employed in (A) manufacturing, (B) hotel and catering, (C) retailing, (D) finance and business services, (E) IT, (F) wholesale and distribution, (G) construction and (H) other services. [44490]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Mr. Len Cook to Mr. Shaun Woodward, dated 21 March 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent question about the percentage of the workforce in various industries and geographies. (44490)

The available figures are for employee jobs and cover the years 1996 to 2000. Estimates are arranged according to the Standard Industrial Classification, 1992 (SIC92). SIC92 industries do not correspond exactly to those specified in the question and regional development areas are not available.

I am placing an extract from the Nomis database that provides a close match for your requirement in the House of Commons library. You should note, however, that this does not cover the whole economy. The Nomis database is available to Members and is accessible by library staff.

Annual Employment Survey Rescaled (1996,1997); Annual Business Inquiry (1998–2000)
ONS Crown copyright reserved [from Nomis on 20 March 2002]
Analysis: Number of employees expressed as a percentage of employees in all industries
Sex: persons

Percentage

Industry	*St. Helens, South*	*St. Helens*	*Merseyside*	*Manchester*	*North-west Government office region*[1]	*England*
Industry: 15–37: Manufacturing						
1996	26.8	25.1	14.8	9.6	20.3	17.6
1997	22.0	21.1	15.1	8.9	20.0	17.1
1998	23.9	21.9	14.1	8.4	19.2	16.6
1999	22.2	21.8	13.7	8.0	18.3	15.7
2000	19.0	18.9	13.2	8.1	17.8	15.1
Industry: 55: Hotels and restaurants						
1996	5.6	6.1	5.6	6.5	6.3	6.2
1997	8.3	7.5	6.1	6.6	6.7	6.3
1998	7.7	8.0	7.1	6.7	6.8	6.3
1999	6.8	6.5	6.1	6.3	6.5	6.4
2000	5.0	5.0	5.0	6.2	6.5	6.3
Industry: 52: Retail trade, except of motor vehicles						
1996	13.0	12.3	11.4	8.7	10.9	10.4
1997	13.6	13.2	11.9	8.8	10.6	10.3
1998	14.9	15.0	12.9	9.4	11.4	10.8
1999	13.9	15.2	12.1	8.7	11.5	10.7
2000	14.7	15.3	12.9	9.2	11.6	10.8
Industry: 65–67, 74: Finance and business services						
1996	10.7	9.0	12.4	20.1	12.0	14.9
1997	10.0	8.4	12.6	22.1	12.8	15.3
1998	8.0	7.0	11.5	21.2	12.6	15.3
1999	10.9	9.0	12.0	21.6	12.7	15.4
2000	11.4	9.0	12.5	22.1	12.5	15.8
Industry: 72: Computing and related activities						
1996	0.3	0.3	0.6	0.7	0.8	1.3
1997	0.4	0.5	0.8	1.1	0.9	1.4
1998	0.4	0.4	0.8	1.0	1.1	1.6
1999	0.5	0.6	1.2	1.2	1.3	1.9
2000	0.6	0.6	1.3	1.7	1.4	2.1

Annual Employment Survey Rescaled (1996,1997); Annual Business Inquiry (1998–2000)
ONS Crown copyright reserved [from Nomis on 20 March 2002]
Analysis: Number of employees expressed as a percentage of employees in all industries
Sex: persons

Percentage

Industry	*St. Helens, South*	*St. Helens*	*Merseyside*	*Manchester*	*North-west Government office region*[1]	*England*
Industry: 51: Wholesale trade/commission trade, etc.						
1996	3.3	4.3	3.5	4.7	4.5	4.8
1997	3.3	4.4	4.0	5.5	4.8	5.0
1998	3.2	4.1	3.2	5.7	4.8	4.9
1999	3.4	5.8	3.7	4.8	4.7	4.9
2000	3.7	5.5	3.8	4.8	4.7	4.9
Industry: 45: Construction						
1996	4.2	4.7	3.2	2.4	3.8	3.6
1997	6.3	5.9	3.8	2.3	4.4	4.1
1998	5.8	6.0	4.0	3.0	4.5	4.3
1999	6.1	5.2	3.2	2.9	4.4	4.4
2000	7.9	7.3	5.0	2.5	4.8	4.3
Industry: 93: Other service activities						
1996	1.4	1.2	1.0	0.5	1.0	1.1
1997	1.2	1.4	1.1	0.7	1.1	1.1
1998	1.6	1.6	1.2	0.7	1.0	1.1
1999	1.6	1.4	1.0	0.9	1.2	1.2
2000	1.6	1.4	1.1	1.0	1.2	1.2

[1] Including Merseyside

Notes:

1. The percentages are based on aggregates from which agriculture class 0100 (1992 SIC) have been excluded.
2. The numbers in the industry descriptions correspond to industries contained in the Standard Industrial Classification, 1992.

Governor of the Bank of England

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by what date he intends to announce the appointment of the next Governor of the Bank of England; and if he will make a statement. [44404]

Ruth Kelly: The term of office of the current Governor of the Bank of England runs until June 2003. The appointment of the next Governor will be announced in good time to ensure a smooth transition.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Benefits (Administration)

Phil Hope: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps he is taking to improve the performance of local authorities in administering housing benefit and council tax benefit. [46218]

Malcolm Wicks: Improving the administration of housing benefit and council tax benefit is a key part of our reform programme.

We are today launching a set of comprehensive performance standards covering the full range of administration. For the first time local authorities will know exactly what it is we are expecting them to achieve. A copy of the product has been placed in the Library and this month two copies of the package will be sent to every English, Welsh and Scottish authority administering these benefits.

Local authorities will now be able to undertake a comprehensive self-assessment against the standards, to determine how far they deliver these benefits effectively and securely.

The standards cover seven functional areas and deliberately address the full range of administrative activity, not just speed, accuracy and security. They will provide a basis for measuring performance in administering housing benefit and council tax benefit, enabling local authorities to conduct a self-assessment to determine their own level of performance and to work in an environment of continuous improvement.

In addition, the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate will assess performance against these standards using an authority's self-assessment as part of the inspection process.

The performance standards demonstrate our determination to improve the standard of housing benefit and council tax benefit administration, as part of our wider drive to reduce barriers to work, promote dignity and security in retirement and to protect the system against fraud and error.

Benefit Fraud

Phil Hope: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he will publish the inspection report of the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate in respect of the city of Salford council. [46217]

Malcolm Wicks: The Benefit Fraud Inspectorate's report on the city of Salford council was published today and copies of the report have been placed in the Library.

The report finds the city of Salford council to be a poorly performing authority in almost all aspects of benefits administration and counter fraud activity.

BFI reports finding evidence of good policies and procedures, but these were undermined by inadequate implementation or monitoring. For example, a benefit take-up policy existed but there was limited evidence of implementation.

The report identifies a range of examples of poor administration. This includes an inadequate management checking regime, poor standards for verifying claims for benefit, and failure to process all new claims within 14 days of receiving all the necessary information.

Procedures for dealing with changes to claimants' circumstances were found to be flawed and a failure to apply the law was likely to lead to over and under-payments of benefit.

The council had no policy on overpayments. The lack of quality management information and a lack of managerial or supervisory involvement contribute to poor overpayment recovery. In March 2000 the council's recorded overpayment debt stood at almost £5 million and was rising year on year.

While the city of Salford council had a positive counter fraud strategy and had provided officers with a good procedures manual, investigation quality was found to be inadequate. There was no control over investigations, nor over the workload of each investigator which was found to be excessive.

The report makes recommendations to help the council address weaknesses and to improve the administration of housing benefit and council tax benefit, as well as counter fraud activities.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is now considering the report and will be asking the council for its proposals in response to the findings and recommendations of the BFI.

Kirklees Metropolitan Council

Phil Hope: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he will publish the inspection report of the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate in respect of Kirklees metropolitan council. [46216]

Malcolm Wicks: The Benefit Fraud Inspectorate's second report on Kirklees metropolitan council was published today and copies of the report have been placed in the Library.

The BFI first inspected and published a report on the performance of Kirklees metropolitan council on 29 May 1999. It found that the council was performing poorly. Following publication of this first report, the council accepted the recommendations and drew up an action plan to improve performance. BFI's second report finds that Kirklees has largely failed to implement its own action plan and has not fully addressed any of the major recommendations included in the first BFI report. Inspectors consider that the council's performance in administering benefit and countering benefit fraud has got worse since the first inspection.

Poor performance was identified in many areas of benefit administration. A failure to improve the verification of benefit claims; no improvement on previously slow processing times for new and renewal claims; a deterioration of procedure for dealing with the overpayment of benefit; and a lack of supervisory management were all reported by inspectors. At the time of the inspection there was a backlog of around 7,000 cases awaiting assessment and 65,000 documents awaiting filing.

On counter fraud work, the report notes failures by the council to introduce and implement a counter fraud strategy and to introduce and implement a prosecution policy. There was also increased potential for internal fraud, fewer fraud staff and a lack of management within the counter fraud teams.

The BFI considers that Kirklees metropolitan council's inadequate response to the findings of the first inspection casts grave doubts on its commitment to provide an efficient and secure benefits system.

The report makes recommendations to help the council address weaknesses and to improve the administration of housing benefit and council tax benefit, as well as counter fraud activities.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is now considering the report and will be asking the council for its proposals in response to the findings and recommendations of the BFI.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he plans to implement the recommendations on housing benefit reforms set out in the Housing Green Paper, "Quality and Choice: A decent home for all". [32620]

Malcolm Wicks: We have a three-stage strategy for reforming housing benefit and dealing with the legacy of neglect we have inherited. The first stage, which is now well under way, is to radically improve HB administration and bear down on fraud.

The HB help team is working in partnership with local authorities to support them in improving the administration of HB. We are already seeing real improvements in administration as a result of the team's work and the on-going programme of inspections by the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate. We also want to help more authorities deliver a high standard of HB service by sharing good practice. We are developing a dedicated website to do so and we plan to make available shortly on CD a "toolkit" which the help team has developed.

In April we will publish performance standards for the full range of HB administration. These standards offer local authorities practical guidance on effective and secure administration of benefit. Local authorities will be able to self-assess their performance against standards.

We have already increased HB administration subsidy for the year 2001–02 to £166 million, in 2002–03 it will increase to £170 million and to £174 million in 2003–04. This three-year settlement provides local authorities with stability, enabling them to plan more effectively for the future administration of HB and council tax benefit.

With the introduction of the pension credit, we are removing the need to reclaim HB every year for pensioners aged 65 and over. For those over 65, we will be making awards for five years. The HB income threshold will also be raised by the maximum amount of

the pension credit savings reward, to an expected level of £113.80 for single pensioners in 2003 and we will treat pensioners' capital more generously.

Introduced nationally from April 2002, our new anti-fraud incentive scheme, puts more emphasis on prevention of fraud, as well as its detection. And we are working to get an accurate and robust measurement of fraud in the system, through the HB reviews begun last April. In time we expect to gain sufficiently reliable information from the reviews of the level of loss in the system to be able to measure progress against an agreed target.

The second stage, which is already beginning, is to restructure rents. This is an essential prerequisite to the third stage of reform, instituting fundamental changes to the structure of HB. Fundamental reform of HB has to be built on the platform of the first two stages if it is to succeed, as was clearly set out in the Housing Green Paper.

Relocation Expenses

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his policy is on the payment of relocation expenses to staff in his Department. [41023]

Maria Eagle: Relocation expenses are available to DWP staff in the event of a compulsory and permanent transfer which necessitates a move of home. In determining whether these expenses are available to individual staff, alternative options such as local recruitment or redeployment are considered first to ensure that these transfers are cost effective.

The financial assistance available would normally cover all necessary legal, removals and estate agents' costs. Assistance from a specialist relocation company in marketing homes is also available. On-going assistance may also be forthcoming if a member of staff relocates to a dearer housing, as determined by the use of Valuation Office data, resulting in increased housing costs. All new housing costs are closely compared to those at the original home to ensure that comparable property types are used. These expenses and controls are in line with the central guidance in section 8 of the Civil Service Management Code.

Employment (Disabled People)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many *(a)* private companies, *(b)* charitable and voluntary and *(c)* public sector organisations based in the Buckingham constituency have adopted the two ticks symbol. [43296]

Maria Eagle: Employers who wish to apply for two ticks status are assessed by our disability employment advisers. The two ticks disability symbol helps employers show that they are committed to employing people with disabilities, and also helps people with disabilities to identify which employers have a positive attitude to their abilities.

The information requested is in the table.

Organisations in the Buckingham parliamentary constituency using the two ticks disability symbol

Type of organisation	*Number*
Private sector companies	4
Charitable and voluntary organisations	0
Public sector organisations	2

Age Discrimination

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer of 4 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 28W, on age discrimination, how much money has been allocated to the Age Positive Campaign; how many *(a)* companies, *(b)* academic institutions and *(c)* research or lobby organisations have signed up to the campaign; how many workers are employed by the companies that have signed up to the campaign; how many companies expect to sign up to the campaign; how he monitors organisations that have signed up to comply with the campaign; how many people are employed to monitor organisations that have signed to comply with the campaign; and how many companies have been removed from the Age Positive Campaign after being found to be not maintaining the campaign's code. [41842]

Maria Eagle *[holding answer 12 March 2002]:* The Age Positive budget for 2001–02 is £1 million and is used to develop and promote the business case for non-ageist employment practices to all employers and individuals across Great Britain.

Those who wish to actively support the Age Positive campaign do not formally sign up to it. They are encouraged to provide positive case studies and may apply to become age positive champions. To become an age positive champion, a potential applicant must submit strong evidence of commitment to age positive practice. Officials of this Department vet applications from potential champions.

Organisations that do not have in place a wide enough range of age positive practices to be accepted as champions are still often able to provide useful case studies illustrating particular age positive aspects of their employment policies. Age positive champions play a vital role in the campaign. By promoting their own best practice and highlighting the practical business benefits of a mixed age workforce they encourage other employers and individuals to tackle age discrimination in the workplace. There are currently 32 age positive champions and around 50 case studies, although both figures are steadily increasing. The newest feature of the campaign is the age positive website www.agepositive.gov.uk

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Civil Servants

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, if she will set out for each civil service grade within her *(a)* Department and *(b)* Department's executive agencies the (i) total number of staff employed, (ii) number aged (A) 16 to 25, (B) 26

to 35, (C) 36 to 45, (D) 46 to 60 and (E) over the age of 60 years, (iii) number of registered disabled and (iv) number of ethnic minorities. [39151]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I refer the hon. Member to the written answer given to him by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office on 13 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 1072W.

Solicitors

Mr. Cameron: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, if he will make a statement on the Office for the Supervision of Solicitors and its role in reviewing complaints against solicitors. [44393]

Mr. Wills: Solicitors are members of a self-regulating professional body, the Law Society. The Office for the Supervision of Solicitors (OSS) is a separate organisation set up by the Law Society to handle complaints against members. The Government have warned the OSS that failure to make significant improvements in performance could result in the powers to appoint a Legal Services Complaints Commissioner being activated.

Mr. Cameron: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what steps he is taking to review the self-regulation of solicitors; and if he will make a statement. [44392]

Mr. Wills: The legal profession is independent of Government and as such it is the professional bodies which, in the first instance, are responsible for the regulation of their members. The Government have no current plans to alter this. However, we are aware of concerns about the standard of complaints handling by the Office for the Supervision of Solicitors (OSS). For this reason, the Government have already taken reserve powers to impose standards for complaints handling on the legal professional bodies. These powers would allow for the establishment of a new post, the Legal Services Complaints Commissioner, whose function would be to set targets for the handling of complaints by failing bodies. The Lord Chancellor is considering the OSS's performance against targets and any decision about the appointment of the Commissioner will be made in due course.

HEALTH

Nursing Home Residents

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how his figure for self-financing residents of nursing homes in England and Wales was arrived at. [8333]

Jacqui Smith: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The Department of health conducted a survey of nursing homes, via health authorities' registration departments, in June and July of last year to establish the number and location of those paying their nursing home fees from their own resources (self funders). The results of the survey are available on the Department's website at www.doh.gov.uk/jointunit/freenursingcare/index.htm. A total of 42,700 self-funders were identified through this survey.

Lymphoedea

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about the treatment in the NHS available to sufferers of lymphoedea. [9815]

Jacqui Smith: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

Treatment, and where it is delivered, will depend on whether the patient has primary or secondary lymphoedema. Health authorities, in partnership with primary care groups/trusts, have the responsibility for deciding what services to provide for their populations including those with lymphoedema. They are best placed to understand local health needs and commission services to meet them.

Maternity Units

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research he has commissioned into the difference in morbidity rates between mothers who have given birth in midwife-led maternity units and those who have given birth in other types of maternity units; and if he will make a statement. [10014]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 29 October 2001]:* I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The Department has not commissioned any such research.

The Maternity and Neonatal Workforce Group is considering different models of care, including midwife-led units, in order to inform the maternity services section of the Children's National Service Framework.

Psychiatric Nursing

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the factors underlying the fall in the number of community psychiatric nursing episodes from 1996–97 to 1999–2000. [12718]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 6 November 2001]:* I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The factors underlying the fall in the number of community psychiatric nursing episodes from 1996–97 to 1999–2000 include the number of new professional community based roles; increase in the number of people with mental illness receiving first assessment and initial

therapeutic interventions in primary care settings; and mental health service users and carers using NHS Direct and Walk-in Centres for advice and in a crisis.

Adoption and Children Bill

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what and how many representations he has received from individuals and voluntary adoption agencies regarding his proposed changes of access to birth information records as set out in the Adoption and Children Bill. [19206]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 29 November 2001]:* I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 192W.

We have received many representations from individuals and organisations on access to information in relation to adoption and the provisions in the Adoption and Children Bill. As the hon. Member is aware, the Government have responded to the representations made to it and to the Special Standing Committee for the Bill by amending the provisions for access to birth record information.

Stoke Mandeville Hospital

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he now intends to announce a decision on the proposed merger of the Stoke Mandeville Hospital and the South Buckinghamshire NHS trusts. [25504]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 9 January 2002]:* I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, column 192W.

The merger of Stoke Mandeville Hospital NHS Trust and South Buckinghamshire NHS Trust has been proposed by the Trusts and Buckingamshire health authority. Ministers have agreed, in principle, that the public should be consulted on the proposal before any decision is made. The timing of the consultation is currently being finalised.

Emergency Services (Midlothian)

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the Government are doing to deter callers from dialling for an ambulance when there is no emergency; and how many hoax calls were made in the Midlothian constituency from 1995 to date. [27179]

Ms Blears: I apologise to my hon. Friend for the delay in responding to this question. I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

NHS ambulance trusts in England continue to undertake work to inform their local population about appropriate use of emergency ambulance services.

Ambulance services do not have to send an ambulance vehicle in response to 999 calls which do not require emergency care. Such calls will continue to receive a consistent and appropriate response based on national clinical standards. A fully crewed frontline ambulance will always be sent to life-threatening emergencies.

Responsibilities for Scotland are a matter for the Scottish Executive.

Delayed Discharges

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the average time patients experiencing delayed discharges were delayed for each of the last three quarters. [27253]

Jacqui Smith: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

No information was collected centrally about the length of delay for patients with delayed discharge until the first quarter of 2001–02. The information on the breakdown in length of delay for patients of all ages in Q1 of 2001–02 has been placed in the Library. No information was collected centrally about the length of delay for patients with delayed discharge until the first quarter of 2001–02. The information on the breakdown in length of delay for patients of all ages in the first and second quarters of 2001–02 has been placed in the Library. For equivalent information for the third quarter I refer the hon. Member to the response I gave the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) on 18 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 159W.

Surgery (Cancellations)

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average percentage of operations cancelled for non-clinical reasons as a proportion of admissions was in the last 12 months. [40049]

Mr. Hutton: Data on the number of patients whose operations are cancelled by hospitals for non-clinical reasons at the last minute are shown in the table.

Year	*Cancellation as a percentage of elective admissions*
2001–02 Q2	1.6
2001–02 Q1	1.6
2000–01 Q4	1.7
2000–01 Q3	1.4

Care Homes

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimates he has made of the number of *(a)* residential, *(b)* nursing and *(c)* dual registered homes

beds that will be (i) available and (ii) required in the (A) private and (B) public sector in each of the next five years. [39441]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply which I gave to the hon. Members, the Member for Cheadle (Mrs. Calton) and the Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock) on 12 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 1009W.

The extra funding which we are making available to councils is designed to enable them to ensure that there is sufficient capacity in the system to meet individual long-term care needs.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on which date he agreed to test new private finance initiative employment models; if he will set out the model of facilities employment which is being tested; and if he will identify the pilot sites where the model is under test. [40560]

Mr. Hutton: In December 2001 an agreement was reached with Unison, private sector contractors and the Department on the terms under which portering, domestic, catering, laundry and security at three private finance initiative pilots (Queen Mary's hospital Roehampton, Barking/Havering and Stoke Mandeville hospital) will continue. The pilots are for staff in these five facilities to retain all their national health service employment terms, but be managed by the private sector.

Hospital Appointments

Mr. Simmonds: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hospital appointments were not attended in England in each of the last four years; and what measures are in place to reduce this number. [40462]

Mr. Hutton: The number of patients who did not attend consultant out-patient appointments from 1997–98 to 2000–01 are given in the table. Information up to quarter 2 of 2001–02, is available on the Department website at www.doh.gov.uk/hospitalactivity.

Total number of did not attends (DNAs) at all consultant out-patient clinics, England, 1997–98 to 2000–01

Year	*Total number*
2000–01	5,954,819
1999–2000	5,882,510
1998–99	5,648,971
1997–98	5,629,429

Note:
Did Not Attends (DNAs) are counted for those patients who gave no advance warning for their non-attendance.
Source:
Department of Health form KH09

The Department has introduced the national booked admissions programme to offer patients a pre-booked appointment and a choice of date and time that is suitable to them. Booking systems have proven to significantly reduce the number of patients who do not attend appointments.

As stated in the NHS plan, by the end of 2005 all out-patient appointments will be pre-booked, allowing patients to book convenient appointment times. Since March 2001 every acute NHS trust has been offering booked appointments in at least two specialties or high volume procedures. £50 million was allocated to the national booked admissions programme in 2001–02.

Foreign Referrals (Southampton University NHS Trust)

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the scope of current pilot schemes for foreign referrals will be extended to include Southampton University NHS Trust; and if he will make a statement. [40794]

Mr. Hutton: Since rulings of the European Court of Justice in July last year it has been clear that national health service bodies, including health authorities, primary care trusts and acute trusts, may commission treatment for NHS patients overseas. However, given that commissioning treatment overseas involves a number of difficult clinical, quality and legal issues the Department has advised NHS bodies contemplating sending patients abroad to contact the pilot sites first to obtain the benefit of their experience.

The pilot scheme for foreign referrals concludes next month. Further guidance on overseas treatment will be sent to the NHS, drawing on the experience of the pilot.

We are exploring the possibility of a small number of NHS bodies putting in place arrangements to commission overseas care on behalf of the rest of the NHS in England.

Health Spending

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans the Government have to bring United Kingdom health spending into line with the EU average; and if he will make a statement. [40814]

Mr. Hutton: The European average for health spending has remained at between 7.9 and 8 per cent. of gross domestic product for a number of years. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has stated that, as long as the economy remains strong, we will reach the European Union average by 2005. Current spending plans will raise the level of United Kingdom total health expenditure to 7.6 per cent. of gross domestic product by 2003–04. Spending beyond this period will be decided in the coming spending review.

A and E Safety Equipment

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health against what agents the *(a)* personal protective equipment and *(b)* decontamination shelters provided to hospital accident and emergency departments can protect. [40812]

Mr. Hutton: The chemical personal protective equipment (PPE) currently being made available to hospitals (and ambulance service staff) fully meets the NHS specification (NHSCPPE/2001) which was developed to ensure that health services personnel are protected during the decontamination of chemically contaminated casualties and able to provide life saving first aid during the decontamination process. The PPE has been tested against 15 liquid industrial chemicals in a standard test battery (ATSM F1001–99a) chosen to represent a broad range of liquid classes and properties. It has also been tested against a representative sample of chemical warfare agents.

The purpose of the mobile decontamination facilities currently being made available to hospitals (and ambulance service staff) is to provide privacy and shelter for chemically contaminated casualties during the decontamination process. These facilities are not intended to provide protection against chemical agents for either health service personnel or the chemically contaminated casualty. Health service personnel will be protected by wearing PPE, while casualties will be given appropriate medical treatment once they have been decontaminated.

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much the provision of *(a)* personal protective equipment and *(b)* decontamination equipment to hospital accident and emergency departments has cost in each of the last three years [40811]

Mr. Hutton: A total of £150 million has been invested in the Accident and Emergency (A&E) Modernisation Programme in three waves since 1998. It is the biggest investment in A&E services since the start of the national health service. The final wave of funding was made available to the NHS in January 2001.

The investment has provided various improvements to A&E services which include decontamination facilities. However, there is no complete breakdown in terms of cost as to specific details within a scheme.

A £5 million capital allocation has been made in 2001–2002 to secure, through national contracts, the provision of mobile decontamination units and personal protective equipment (PPE).

Leukaemia

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much has been spent on treating chronic myeloid leukaemia with a combination of cytosine therapy and interphon alpha by health authority year by year since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [41603]

Yvette Cooper: The information requested is not available.

Hospices

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what his estimate is of the number of beds freed within the NHS by the transfer of patients to hospice care in the last 12 months; [41731]

(2) how much of the money at present allocated for the treatment of terminal cancer patient care will be directed to hospices; and if he will make a statement. [41732]

Yvette Cooper: In the NHS Cancer Plan we pledged that the national health service contribution to the costs of specialist palliative care (including hospices) would increase by £50 million by 2004. This investment is intended to help tackle inequalities in access to specialist palliative care and enable the NHS to increase their contribution to the cost hospices incur in providing agreed levels of service. The level of funding voluntary hospices receive is a matter for local decision based on a strategic view of local palliative care services. We have required all cancer networks to develop costed strategic investment plans for palliative care, which will inform the wider NHS planning process through Health Improvement Programmes and Service and Financial Frameworks for 2002–3.

Information on the number of beds freed within the NHS by the transfer of patients to hospice care is not available centrally. There are approximately 2,000 hospice beds in the voluntary sector and over 400 beds in the NHS in England. About 120,000 people die annually from cancer in England; approximately 50 per cent. of these die in hospital, 13 per cent. die in hospices and 25 per cent. die in their own homes.

NHS Vacancies

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS vacancies there were for *(a)* medical and dental staff, *(b)* qualified nurses, *(c)* professions allied to medicine and *(d)* administration and estates staff in (i) England and (ii) each health authority in (A) each year since 1997, (B) 1979 and (C) 1992. [40068]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested has been placed in the Library.

Waiting Times

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the waiting time for occupational therapy for arthritis sufferers at *(a)* the Southampton University Hospital NHS Trust, *(b)* the Royal Bournemouth and Christchurch Hospitals NHS Trust and *(c)* the Poole Hospital NHS Trust. [41691]

Ms Blears: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the waiting time is from referral to first appointment with a consultant rheumatologist at *(a)* the Southampton University Hospital NHS Trust, *(b)* the Royal Bournemouth and Christchurch Hospitals NHS Trust and *(c)* the Poole Hospital NHS Trust. [41644]

Ms Blears: The information requested is shown in the table.

Out-patient average (median) waiting times for rheumatology—December 2001

Code/Trust name	*Average (median) waiting time (in weeks)*
RD3	
Poole Hospital NHS Trust	6.10
RDZ	
Royal Bournemouth and Christchurch Hospitals NHS Trust	6.33
RHM	
Southampton University Hospitals NHS Trust	6.32

Notes:
1. The average waiting time is calculated as the median waiting time of those patients seen during the quarter for a first out-patient appointment in rheumatology specialty following GP referral.
2. Data are for quarter ended December 2001.

Source:
QM08 waiting times return.

Bladder Cancer

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what national guidelines exist to govern the procedures and follow up intervals for patients treated for primary cancer of the bladder; [41466]

(2) what research he has conducted into the guidelines followed by other EU countries on the treatment of primary cancer of the bladder. [41465]

Yvette Cooper: The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) is commissioning a comprehensive package of guidance on cancer services covering all cancers which health authorities and NHS trusts will be expected to implement.

NICE guidelines are based on the best available research evidence and expert professional advice. Research may be commissioned by NICE, or consist of existing material, including guidelines and best practice in other countries.

NICE is expected to issue service guidance on urological cancer this summer.

Redundancy Packages

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 12 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 327W, on the costs of staff redundancy packages arising as a consequence of organisational change in the NHS, if he will make it his policy to collate details of these costs by region; and what data his Department collates on the costs of staff redundancy. [44086]

Mr. Hutton: In accordance with Her Majesty's Treasury financial reporting guidelines, information on provisions for premature retirement pensions are separately identified in the published annual accounts of national health service trusts and health authorities. There are currently no plans to extend these reporting requirements or routinely collate data by region as this would unduly add to the administrative burden for the NHS.

Free Nursing Care

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 13 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 1138W, on free nursing care, what estimate he has made of the number of assessments a person in receipt of free nursing care will need in the time they are in a care home. [44676]

Jacqui Smith: Based on an average length of stay in a nursing home of 30 months, one would expect three to four reviews to be made following the initial assessments.

Correspondence

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when his Department intends to respond to the letter of 23 January from the hon. Member for Aylesbury (ref. PO 003020). [45141]

Ms Blears: A reply was sent on 21 March.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to reply to the letter of 17 December 2001 from the hon. Member for North Shropshire on funding for the minor injuries unit at the RJ and AH Orthopaedic hospital, Gobonea. [44681]

Yvette Cooper: A reply was sent on 6 March.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 25 March 2002

NORTHERN IRELAND

Fair Trade

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether fair trade products are sold in his Department. [39832]

Dr. John Reid: No fair trade products are sold in the Northern Ireland Office.

Community Integration

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what measures the Government have taken in Northern Ireland to assist in the integration of the Catholic and Protestant communities. [41588]

Mr. Browne: Section 75(2) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 states that

> "... a public authority shall, in carrying out its functions relating to Northern Ireland, have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group."

As an example of this the Government are committed to the implementation of the Patten recommendations, which are designed to make the police service more widely accepted throughout the community and more representative of the whole community.

A cross-community Policing Board has been established; recruitment to the new Police Service of Northern Ireland is now taking place on the basis of 50 per cent. Catholic and 50 per cent. non-Catholic. A new badge for the police service has been agreed, containing symbols which show parity of esteem for both sides of the community.

Press and Public Relations

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people were employed in a press or public relations function in his Department on 1 January in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999, *(d)* 2000, *(e)* 2001 and *(f)* 2002. [39943]

Dr. John Reid: Information is not held in the format requested.

The number of people employed in the Information Service Division of the Northern Ireland Office between 1997 and 2002 is as follows:

	Number
1 April 1997	37
1 April 1998	40
1 April 1999	52
1 April 2000	52
1 April 2001	36
1 January 2002	35

VIP Police Protection

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people in Northern Ireland receive VIP police protection; how many officers are involved in providing this service; and what the annual cost of providing this service is. [22920]

Jane Kennedy: The Chief Constable has advised me that 91 persons receive some level of police protection. This involves approximately 400 police officers whose duties range from escorting, close protection, to static security at private homes.

The annual cost of providing this level of protection is approximately £21 million. This figure comprises basic police pay and allowances, overtime and vehicle costs as applicable.

Decommissioning

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent progress has been made towards decommissioning. [43845]

Jane Kennedy: IICD reported, on 23 October 2001, that it had witnessed an event, which it regarded as significant, in which the IRA had put a quantity of arms completely beyond use. It also confirmed that the weapons decommissioned included arms, ammunition and explosives.

We now want to see further decommissioning by the IRA, and decommissioning by all other terrorist groups.

Northern Ireland Prison Service

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the NI Prison Service will publish its 2002–05 Corporate and Business Plan; and what performance targets have been set for 2002–03. [46331]

Jane Kennedy: The Northern Ireland Prison Service's Corporate and Business Plan for 2002–05 was published today and I have placed copies in the Library of the House. The following key performance targets have been set for the 2002–03 year:

1. 100 per cent. security for top and high risk prisoners.
2. 99.7 per cent. security for medium and low-risk prisoners.
3. The number of staff assaulted by prisoners is less than a ratio of six per 100 prisoners.
4. The number of prisoners assaulted by prisoners is less than a ratio of 8.8 per 100 prisoners.
5. An average of at least 18 hours constructive activity per week for each sentenced prisoner.
6. An average of at least 9.5 hours constructive activity per week for each remand prisoner.
7. To ensure an average minimum of 70 per cent. of prisoners serving six months or more, including 90 per cent. of life sentence prisoners, is working to a sentence plan.
8. Deliver at least 85 per cent. of the planned training days associated with the agreed corporate training priorities.
9. Achieve an average minimum of five days development and training per member of staff.
10. Expenditure is within the budget allocated.
11. Lay the Annual Report and Audited Accounts before Parliament prior to the summer recess.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

PFI/PPPs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the difference was between the price offered in reaching preferred bidder stage and the final contract price for the five largest PFI contracts let by her Department in each of the last four years; and if she will make a statement. [45599]

Clare Short: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 29 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 224W.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the difference was between the price offered in reaching preferred bidder stage and the final contract price for PPP contracts let by her Department in each of the last four years; and if she will make a statement. [45614]

Clare Short: DFID has not offered any public-private partnerships in the last four years. The public-private partnership for CDC has not yet been launched or bids invited.

Unpaid Advisers

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the names of the unpaid advisers appointed by her since she took office, stating in each case *(a)* the date of their appointment, *(b)* the duration of their appointment and *(c)* the project or projects on which they have been engaged. [43389]

Clare Short: No unpaid advisers have been appointed by me since taking office.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Non-governmental Organisations

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Solicitor-General if she will list non-governmental organisations operating in the south-west region that receive public funds from her Department; and what amount of annual funding they received in the most recent year for which figures are available. [39183]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* The Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers, and the Departments for which the Attorney-General is responsible, namely, the Crown Prosecution Service, the Treasury Solicitor's Department and the Serious Fraud Office, do not provide funding for non-governmental organisations in the south-west region.

Flexible Working

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General how many and what proportion of the staff of her Department are *(a)* job sharing, *(b)* term working and *(c)* engaged in another form of flexible working. [42429]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 14 March 2002]:* In my own Department, the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers, there is currently no job sharing, term working or staff engaged in any other form of flexible working.

In the Departments for which the Attorney-General is responsible, details are as follows:

Crown Prosecution Service

The numbers and proportion of Crown Prosecution staff currently engaged in job sharing, term working and other forms of flexible working are as follows:

Job sharing—14 staff (0.2 per cent.)

Term working—24 staff (0.4 per cent.)

Part-time—1,292 staff (20 per cent.).

The Crown Prosecution Service recognises the need for all staff, particularly those with care responsibilities, to try to find the right balance between work and domestic commitments.

Job sharing and term time working are just a couple of the alternative and flexible working patterns that employees are welcome to take up.

The Department operates a flexible working hours scheme that is open to both full and part-time members of staff. The scheme allows staff to vary their times of arrival and departure, subject to management needs.

The Department also considers applications for term time working by members of staff. In addition, although not recorded as term time working, the Department considers sympathetically any requests for unpaid special leave and/or change in working pattern during school holidays.

In addition to part-time working, job sharing and term time working, the Department will shortly be issuing policies on working compressed hours and home working. Although these policies have yet to be formally promulgated, a number of staff already practise these forms of flexible working.

When advertising vacancies, Crown Prosecution Service area branches are encouraged to welcome applications from people working different patterns. However, there are some instances where this is not possible due to the nature of the work.

Treasury Solicitor's Department

The numbers and proportion of Treasury Solicitor's Department staff currently engaged in job sharing, term working and other forms of flexible working are as follows:

Job sharing—2 staff (0.4 per cent.)

Term working—1 person (0.2 per cent.)

Part-time—37 staff (7 per cent.)

Flexi-timers—46 staff (8.8 per cent.).

The Treasury Solicitor's Department recognises the need for all staff, particularly those with care responsibilities, to try to find the right balance between work and domestic commitments.

Serious Fraud Office

The Serious Fraud Office does not currently have any staff working on a job share or term basis, although these options are available. However, the Department currently has four members of staff working compressed hours (ie five days in four, or ten days in nine). Three of the Department's members of staff work part-time and six work on a part home/part office basis. The Serious Fraud Office also operates a flexi-time system which enables the majority of staff to structure their working day to suit their own circumstances.

The Serious Fraud Office recognises the need for all staff, particularly those with care responsibilities, to try to find the right balance between work and domestic commitments.

Accommodation Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General if she will list for 1997–98 and each subsequent financial year the amount spent by *(a)* her Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* its non-departmental public bodies in respect of hotel and other similar privately-provided accommodation (i) in the UK and (ii) abroad for (A) Ministers, (B) staff and (C) other persons; if she will list the proportion of this cost incurred in respect of (x) food and (y) alcohol in each case; and if she will list the average cost per hotel room or similar unit of accommodation provided in each case. [34385]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 11 February 2002]:* In my own Department, the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers, the following sums were spent on hotels and other similar privately provided accommodation in 1997–98 and subsequent financial years.

Subsistence UK

£11,791 in 1997–98—of which sum £9,192 arose from the additional costs created by the review of the CPS carried out by Sir Iain Glidewell.

£3,641 in 1998–99

£2,843.04 in 1999–2000

£5,107 in 2000–01

£3,975.63 in 2001/02.

Subsistence abroad

£1,043.82 in 1997–98

£610.32 in 1998–99

£2,037.55 in 1999–2000

£996.62 in 2000–01

£260.80 in 2001–02.

The accounting system used by the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers does not divide these costs to show the amounts spent on hotels, food and alcohol. It would not be possible to provide details on the cost of hotels without incurring disproportionate cost.

Crown Prosecution Service

In the financial year 1997–98 and each subsequent financial year the Crown Prosecution Service has spent the following amounts on hotels and other similar privately provided accommodation:

£261,000 in 1997–98

£290,000 in 1998–99

£395,000 in 1999–2000

£623,000 in 2000–01.

This expenditure relates only to CPS staff.

The CPS also reimburses prosecution witnesses who have to stay overnight in order to give evidence at court. The rates applied to such reimbursement are the same as the rates applied to staff expenditure. Expenditure since 1997–98 has been as follows:

£294,000 in 1997–98

£344,000 in 1998–99

£324,000 in 1999–2000

£354,000 in 2000–01.

The Department does not maintain separate records for expenses incurred in the UK and abroad. It would not be possible to identify the cost of food without incurring disproportionate cost. Staff may claim a meal and incidental travel cost allowance of £25 and a personal incidental expenditure allowance of £5 per night, while away from home on official business.

The Department does not pay for alcohol for members of staff who travel on official business.

It is not possible to list the average cost per hotel room. From November 1999 new maximum rates were applied to the cost of bed and breakfast of up to £95 per night in London and other metropolitan areas and £65 per night elsewhere.

The marked increase in staff expenditure in 2000–01 compared with the previous years was a result of the aftermath of the Hatfield rail crash and the consequent disruption to public transport. Because of the extended journey times, particularly between the two headquarters' sites in London and York, officers were required to stay overnight more frequently.

Treasury Solicitor's Department

The total amounts spent on both travel and subsistence by the Treasury Solicitor's Department, HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate (since April 2001) and the Government Property Lawyers' Agency in the last four years were as follows:

Treasury Solicitor's Department

£308,000 in 1997–98

£327,000 in 1998–99

£202,000 in 1999–2000

£396,000 in 2000–01

£318,000 in 2001–02 (to 31 December)

Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate

£130,000 in 2001–02 (to 31 December)

Government Property Lawyers' Agency

£13,000 in 1997–98

£10,000 in 1998–99

£37,000 in 1999–2000

£1,000 in 2000–01

None in 2001–02.

The contract management and financial analysis systems currently in place at the Treasury Solicitor's Department mean that the Department could not provide the detailed information requested without incurring disproportionate cost. These systems are being upgraded as part of the improvement in financial management on which the Department has embarked. Most of the improvements should be concluded in the course of the financial year 2002–03.

Serious Fraud Office

In the financial year 1997–98 and each subsequent financial year the Serious Fraud Office has spent the following amounts on hotel and other similar privately provided accommodation:

Staff UK

£81,454.47 in 1997–98

£72,168.63 in 1998–99

£62,899.98 in 1999–2000

£91,391.53 in 2000–01

113,500.55 in 2001–02 (to date)

Staff abroad

£48,252.72 in 1997–98

£20,459.23 in 1998–99

£34,664.19 in 1999–2000

£67,487.77 in 2000–01

50,528.58 in 2001–02 (to date)

Witnesses UK

£21,607.48 in 1997–98

£93,015.87 in 1998–99

£11,880.96 in 1999–2000

53,725.28 in 2000–01

£5,879.36 in 2001–02 (to date).

The Serious Fraud Office does not have either agencies or non-departmental public bodies and does not provide financial support to Ministers.

The Department does not pay for alcohol for members of staff who travel on official business.

Details of the breakdown between expenditure on food and accommodation and the average cost of such accommodation could not be made available without incurring disproportionate cost.

Appointments

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Solicitor-General if she will list the appointments she has made since 7 June 2001. [46171]

The Solicitor-General: I have made no appointments as Solicitor-General during the period in question.

Stolen Equipment

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Solicitor-General, pursuant to her answer of 23 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 878W, on stolen equipment, what criminal proceedings have been undertaken for cases of theft against her Department, stating in each case *(a)* whether the proceedings (i) led to a criminal conviction and (ii) were unsuccessful, *(b)* the cost incurred by her Department in pursuing a conviction and *(c)* the value of items recovered; and if she will make a statement. [41512]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 18 March 2002]:* In relation to my own Department, the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers, I am not aware of any equipment having been stolen from the Department since 1 May 1997.

In the Departments for which the Attorney General is responsible, details are as follows:

Crown Prosecution Service

Since May 1997 no criminal proceedings have been brought by the Crown Prosecution Service in connection with the stolen equipment listed in reply to Mr. Menzies Campbell's question. No items have been recovered.

Treasury Solicitor's Department

No criminal proceedings were undertaken in any of the cases of theft against the Department detailed in response to Mr. Menzies Campbell's question, and no items were recovered. Three of the thefts were reported to the police, and the remainder were investigated internally. The internal investigations did not identify any individuals against whom proceedings could be taken, and the stolen items could not be traced.

Serious Fraud Office

No criminal proceedings were undertaken in relation to any of the cases of theft against the Serious Fraud Office listed in response to Mr. Menzies Campbell's question, and no items were recovered.

Parental Leave Directive

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General what estimate she has made of the *(a)* financial costs and *(b)* benefits to her Department of the Parental Leave Directive. [42492]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 14 March 2002]:* In my own Department, the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers all staff are on secondment from other Departments. Matters relating to parental leave are dealt with by their parent Departments.

In the Departments for the which the Attorney-General has responsibility, details are as follows.

Crown Prosecution Service

With effect from 1 April 1998, the Crown Prosecution Service's policy on special leave was amended to allow three months parental leave on the grounds of the birth or adoption of a child to all staff who have been employed by the Department for 12 months or longer. This entitlement is available for each child, and can be taken before the child's 8th birthday. In relation to adoption, the leave can ben taken up to eight years after the child is first placed with the family for adoption, or until the child's 18th birthday if that is sooner.

In relation to a child with a disability, parental leave may be taken up to the child's 18th birthday.

At present, the Department does not retain data relating specifically to parental leave and is therefore unable to quantify the financial costs of the Parental Leave Directive.

It is known that during the period from 1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001, 11 members of staff took paternity leave, which amounted to approximately 120 days absence. However, the grades of the staff taking paternity leave were not recorded and therefore the Department cannot give an estimated cost for that period.

Treasury Solicitor's Department

The Treasury Solicitor's Department estimate that there will not be a material financial cost to the Department as a result of the Parental Leave Directive. The cost to the Treasury Solicitor's Department since December 1999 has been £3,083.85.

The benefits of parental leave to the Department have been to reinforce the Department's policy of assisting staff in maintaining a balance between work and home life.

Serious Fraud Office

The Serious Fraud Office has yet to receive an application for parental leave from any of its staff. However, the Department considers the financial implication of granting parental leave to be minimal, as the leave is unpaid.

The Serious Fraud Office sees the benefits of parental leave as being (i) to offer staff more family friendly options and thus improve morale and motivation within

the Department, (ii) to improve recruitment and retention, (iii) to promote Government policies and (iv) to comply with legislation.

Age Discrimination

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General what her Department's policy is towards age discrimination. [42564]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 14 March 2002]:* My own Department, the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers, is a small department of fewer than 35 staff. Staff are seconded to LSLO from other Government Departments and so the age range from which LSLO draws its staff depends upon the age policy of other Departments. Within that limitation, LSLO does not discriminate on grounds of age and there is no age bar in relation to recruitment. Currently the ages of staff at LSLO ranges from under 25 to over 60.

In the Departments for which the Attorney-General is responsible, details are as follows:

Crown Prosecution Service

The Crown Prosecution Service is currently in the process of a complete review of Departmental policy on age, with a view to issuing revised policy later this year. The revised policy will take into account the current need for all employers to adopt a flexible approach to the recruitment and retention of older workers.

Historically the CPS has welcomed all job applications regardless of age, but has maintained a less flexible policy on age retirement. Guidance issued by the Cabinet Office (based on the non-statutory Code of Practice published by the former DfEE) encouraged the review of current policies on recruitment, conditions of service based on age or length of service, and retirement. The CPS review aims to bring all age-related policies in line with the code of practice.

Treasury Solicitor's Department

The Treasury Solicitor's Department does not discriminate on grounds of age and there is no age bar in relation to recruitment.

The minimum age at which staff can retire and receive an immediate pension payout is 60. The Treasury Solicitor's Department includes age equality in its diversity programme and allows staff to stay on at work to the age of 65, subject to satisfactory performance and the business needs of the agency.

Serious Fraud Office

There are no age restrictions placed upon applicants for Serious Fraud Office positions. However, applicants are asked to note that the Department's normal retirement age for staff at all grades is currently 60.

DEFENCE

Correspondence

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what was, for each year since 1995, the total number of *(a)* letters from hon. Members, *(b)* letters from members of the public and *(c)* parliamentary questions from (i) hon. Members and (ii) Lords dealt with by his Department; what percentage took (A) more than one month and (B) more than three months to provide a substantive answer; and if he will make a statement; [7029]

(2) what was, for each year since 1995, the average response time for providing a substantive answer to *(a)* hon. Members' correspondence, *(b)* correspondence from members of the public and *(c)* written parliamentary questions in the (i) Commons and (ii) Lords. [7028]

Dr. Moonie: The information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

General information on the volumes of correspondence received across Whitehall and on overall performance is published by the Cabinet Office. Figures for 2000 were published on 6 April 2001, *Official Report*, columns 324–28W and on 19 July 2001, *Official Report*, columns 454–56W.

The Ministry of Defence aims to answer all ordinary written parliamentary questions within five working days, and named day written parliamentary questions on the day named.

Staff Retirement

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many staff left the service of his Department and its agencies in the year ended 31 March 2001; how many left before attaining the formal retirement age of 60 years; and in respect of how many his Department and its agencies assumed responsibilities for making payments until retirement age. [37555]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office on 13 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 1071W.

During the period 1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001, 798 employees left the Ministry of Defence on grounds of either early retirement or early severance for which benefits were paid under the civil service compensation scheme.

Official Visits

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will list the official visits within the UK outside London made by each Minister in his Department in 2001, giving for each *(a)* the origin and destination and *(b)* the mode of travel used; and what guidance is provided to Ministers in his Department on choice of mode of travel for official visits; [38183]

(2) if he will list the official visits to *(a)* Paris and *(b)* Brussels made by each Minister in his Department in 2001 and the mode of travel used; and what guidance is provided to Ministers in his Department on the choice of mode of travel for such visits. [38147]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Mr. Leslie) on 6 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 421W.

International Security Assistance Force

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what programme he has made for identifying the

successor lead nation for the international security assistance force for Kabul and its surrounding area under the terms of Annex 1 to the Bonn agreement; and if he will make a statement. [41896]

Mr. Hoon: We continue to negotiate with Turkey for the handover of the International Security Assistance Force lead nation.

Parental Leave Directive

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of the *(a)* financial costs and *(b)* benefits to his Department of the Parental Leave Directive. [42474]

Dr. Moonie: It is the Ministry of Defence's policy to encourage civilian staff, at all levels, to take full advantage of family-friendly and work-life provisions such as the Parental Leave Directive. Records on the grant of special leave under the Parental Leave Directive are not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, since this category of special leave is unpaid, then, administrative costs aside, there are no direct financial consequences to the MOD.

External Advisers

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much he has spent on external advisers in connection with the transfer of parts of DERA to the private sector. [42340]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 8 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 577W, to the hon. Member for North Thanet (Mr. Gale).

Celebrations

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what arrangements his Department has made to celebrate *(a)* St. Patrick's Day, *(b)* St. George's Day, *(c)* St. Andrew's Day and *(d)* Her Majesty the Queen's Golden Jubilee; and how his Department celebrated St. David's Day. [42302]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* The Ministry of Defence does not make any formal arrangements for National Saints' Days except for the flying of flags from certain Government buildings where the facility to do so exists. On such occasions the Union flag is hoisted, and where there are two suitable masts the National flag may be flown together with the Union flag on buildings located in England, Scotland and Wales on the appropriate "named day". St. Patrick's Day is not a "named day". The armed forces have similar arrangements, though in addition certain units may unofficially acknowledge a particular Saint's Day for historical or traditional reasons.

With regard to the arrangements for the Queen's Golden Jubilee I refer the hon. Member to the reply my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport gave on 11 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 58–59W, to the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo).

Regulatory Impact Unit

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members his Department employs in its regulatory impact unit; and if he will make a statement. [42920]

Dr. Moonie: As a non-regulatory Department, the Ministry of Defence does not have a dedicated regulatory impact unit. However, issues relating to regulatory impact are addressed by two civilian members of staff as part of their wider remit to assess the potential impacts of EU legislation on the MOD.

Defence Agency Staff (Scotland)

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many people work for the Central Data Management Authority; how many are employed in Scotland; and what the personnel costs of the agency are; [27824]

(2) how many people work for the Central Data Management Authority; how many are employed in Scotland; and what the personnel costs of the agency are. [27821]

Dr. Moonie: The Central Data Management Authority is not an agency, but a branch within the Director General Information organisation, which is itself part of the Ministry of Defence headquarters.

The CDMA branch has a complement of 14 staff.

The annual personnel budget is £0.528 million (financial year 2002–03), calculated using current MOD capitation rates.

None of the CDMA branch staff are employed in Scotland.

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the public service agreement targets which have been revised and those which have been introduced since the publication of the 2001 departmental report. [43247]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence's service agreement remains as published in the 2000 Spending Review White Paper (Cm 4808, July 2000).

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which public service agreement targets scheduled to be met in 2002 will not be achieved by the due date. [44823]

Dr. Moonie: Information about progress on PSA targets was published in the Ministry of Defence Performance Report 2000–01 (Cm 5290, November 2001). A summary of progress made since then will be included in the Government's Expenditure Plans 2002–03 to 2003–04 for the MOD, due to be published in the spring.

Nuclear Tests

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimates he has made of the number of cancer cases caused by radioactivity released from nuclear bombs in testing in the 1950s and 1960s. [43402]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence has commissioned epidemiological studies into the health of those British personnel who participated in British atmospheric nuclear tests which took place in the 1950s and 1960s.

The National Radiological Protection Board carries out studies into the exposure to radiation of the population of the United Kingdom as a whole, including fallout from weapons testing, and publishes reports on this subject. This does not include estimation of the rates of cancer that might arise.

Aviation Repairs

Mr. John Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to review the competition process for deep aviation repair work within his Department. [43805]

Mr. Ingram: I am satisfied that our acquisition strategy for aviation repair work is coherent, provides best value for money for the British taxpayer and ensures fair treatment for all competitors in this field. I therefore have no plans at present to review the competition process.

Mr. John Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) for what reason the Defence Aviation Repair Agency was not awarded the contract for Tornado rudder, air intake, windscreen and wing nibs under the Tornado Tiger Team; [43804]

(2) what assessment he has made of the process by which BAE Systems was selected to undertake Tornado rudder, air intake, windscreen and wing nibs within the Tornado Tiger Team. [43802]

Mr. Ingram: The intended support solution for the Tornado rudder, air intake, windscreen and wing nibs work, a prime contract with BAE Systems with the Defence Aviation Repair Agency (DARA) acting as repair sub-contractor, was developed by a joint team that included representation from the Defence Logistics Organisation, BAE Systems, HQ Strike Command and DARA. The process was fair and fully transparent to all those involved but in the event, DARA was unable to agree acceptable prices. The eventual prime contract, which was awarded to BAE Systems, represents best value-for-money and incentivises BAE Systems to manage sub-contract arrangements accordingly.

Defence Aviation Repair Agency

Mr. John Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the ability of the Defence Aviation Repair Agency to achieve its targets for the financial years *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03. [44575]

Mr. Ingram: For 2001–02, end of year performance against the Defence Aviation Repair Agency (DARA) Key Targets will be independently audited and reported in the Agency Annual Report and Accounts. While DARA will continue to strive to meet its targets, at this stage it is too early to give an accurate forecast.

For 2002–03 the Key Performance Indicators are still being developed, and will be announced in the House shortly.

Porton Down

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many films made by the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down had been transferred to the Imperial War Museum as of 14 February. [43455]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 9 May 2001, *Official Report*, column 196W. No further films have been transferred since that date.

Senior Armed Forces

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion *(a)* now, *(b)* five years ago and *(c)* 10 years ago of senior officers in each of the armed forces attended (i) independent and (ii) state schools; and if he will make a statement. [43855]

Mr. Ingram: This information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

HMS Sheffield

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the cost is of keeping HMS Sheffield *(a)* in reserve and *(b)* in mothballs; when its Royal Navy service will end; how many personnel are involved in keeping it in service and at what cost; and if he will make a statement. [43924]

Mr. Ingram: The estimated costs of holding HMS Sheffield at extended readiness from November 2002 until September 2004 is £3.3 million. This figures includes £0.8 million for the costs of the 13 RN personnel directly involved in maintaining her in service. On current plans HMS Sheffield will be withdrawn from service towards the end of this decade.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many answers to parliamentary questions are more than *(a)* two weeks and *(b)* three months outstanding; and if he will make a statement. [43927]

Dr. Moonie: The information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Approximately 3,200 parliamentary questions have been tabled to the Ministry of Defence during the current session. Ministers aim to answer ordinary written parliamentary questions within five working days and named day parliamentary questions on the day requested.

Fighter Jets

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the Royal Air Force's total inventory is of *(a)* Harrier GR7s, *(b)* Tornado GR1s and *(c)* Jaguar GR1s; and how many of each are operationally available. [43635]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 15 March 2002]:* On 13 March 2002 there were 74 Harrier GR7 aircraft in the departmental fleet (the total number of aircraft owned by the Ministry of Defence), of which 55 were assigned to the Actual Operating Fleet (the total number of aircraft allocated to meet the fleet task); 23 Tornado GR1 aircraft in the departmental fleet, of which 14 were assigned to

the Actual Operating Fleet, and 51 Jaguar GR1 aircraft in the departmental fleet, of which none were assigned to the Actual Operating Fleet.

Overseas Territories/Sovereign Bases

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the military presence is on each *(a)* British Overseas Territory and *(b)* Sovereign Base; and what plans there are to change that presence in each case. [44033]

Mr. Ingram: There is no permanent military presence on Anguilla, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Montserrat, Pitcairn Islands, St. Helena, Tristan da Cunha, South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands, or the Turks and Caicos Islands.

The military presence on the Falkland Islands comprises: Joint Headquarters and support elements; offshore patrol vessel; Roulement Infantry Company; one Tornado F3 flight; one VC10 tanker; one C-130 Hercules; Rapier Squadron; one helicopter squadron (Sea King and Chinook); air support services.

The military presence on Gibraltar comprises: Joint Headquarters and support elements; two coastal patrol vessels; RAF Gibraltar; Royal Gibraltar Regiment.

The British Indian Ocean Territory has a naval party of approximately 40 personnel. There are approximately 25 service personnel on Ascension Island, with support provided by a civilian Multi-Activity Contract. A small number of service personnel are on loan or secondment in Bermuda and British Antarctic Territory.

The military presence on the Sovereign Base Areas in Cyprus comprises: Joint Headquarters; signals units and Cyprus Joint Support Unit; two Sovereign Base Area HQs; two Resident Infantry Battalions; one Engineer Squadron; one Gazelle helicopter Flight; Port and Maritime elements; RAF Regiment personnel; one Wessex Squadron; RAF Akrotiri.

Helicopter operations on Cyprus will be transferred to a Commercially Owned, Military Registered arrangement next year.

There are no current plans to make significant changes to the military presence in other areas, but all commitments are subject to periodic review to meet changing requirements.

Snagge Report

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 11 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 655W, on the Snagge report, if the report was produced using his Department's facilities; to whom it was submitted; when he took a decision on its publication; and if he will make a statement on his policy with regard to the publishing of unsolicited reports which he regards as *(a)* misleading and *(b)* accurate. [44257]

Mr. Ingram: The report written by Colonel C. E. M. Snagge, although unsolicited from the then 2 Division based in York, was an official, internal document submitted to Headquarters Land Command. As such it was taken into account when the future location of the divisional headquarters was being considered. As I said in my answer on 11 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 655W, however, the report contained partial opinion. A balanced view, setting out the rationale for the decision, was set out in the Consultation Document "Land Command Restructuring of Divisions/Districts" which was issued to trade union representatives on 30 October 1998. A copy of this report will be placed in the Library of the House.

Ministry of Defence policy on the release of information follows the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. The decision to withhold Colonel Snagge's report was taken in accordance with Exemption 2 of the Code, which relates to internal discussion and advice, when I answered the hon. Member's question on 28 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 146W.

Irish Sea (Submarines)

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what investigations his Department has carried out following the two fishing boat accidents in the Irish Sea on 31 January and 14 February; what the result of those investigations has been; and what further action will be taken to ensure that action plans are in place in fishing ports to address similar accidents in the future; [44466]

(2) what investigations have been carried out into submarine activity in the Irish Sea, with particular reference to the area between St. John's Point at Killough, County Down and Dundalk, County Louth; and what the result of those investigations has been. [44467]

Mr. Ingram: Royal naval submarines operating in waters frequented by UK fishing vessels are governed by a code of practice, mutually agreed by the Royal Navy and the UK fishing industry, which is designed to ensure the safety of fishing vessels. Additionally, it is mandatory for royal naval and allied submarines to report their position once a fishing vessel incident is reported. I can confirm that, following internal investigations, no submarines were operating in the vicinity of either of the two incidents referred to. The Marine Accident Investigation Branch have confirmed that they are satisfied with this conclusion.

The Royal Navy will, in general, respond to such incidents if requests for assistance are received from the Coastguard or the Marine Accident Investigation Branch.

Apache Helicopters

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the progress of the integration of the Hellfire missile on to the Army's Apache helicopters. [44659]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 19 March 2002]:* Trials of the helicopter and its weapons systems are progressing satisfactorily. We expect the Hellfire missile to be integrated on the helicopter and cleared for training by the end of this year.

Development Expenditure

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the net book value of development expenditure at the end of each year in the period 1997–98 to 2002–03; and if he will show the development expenditure made in each year. [44662]

Mr. Ingram: The information requested is shown in the table.

£ billion

Year	Net book value of development expenditure[1]	Development expenditure made this year
1997–98	[2]—	[2]—
1998–99	[3]18.6	[2]—
1999–2000	[3]19.3	[3]1.3
2000–01	[3]19.9	[3]1.0
2001–02	[4]20.6	[4]1.3
2002–03	n/a	n/a

[1] As at 31 March of each year.
[2] Reliable data on development expenditure are unavailable in Resource terms for this period.
[3] These data are taken from the Departmental Resource Accounts for 1999–2000 and 2000–01.
[4] Estimate.
Notes:
1. All figures are expressed in billions and are rounded to the nearest decimal place.
2. n/a = data not yet available

Logistics

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the net book value was of *(a)* capital spares and *(b)* raw materials and consumables at the end of each month since April 2000. [44661]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 19 March 2002]:* The net book value of capital spares and raw materials and consumables held by the Ministry of Defence at the end of each month since April 2000 was as follows:

£000

Financial month and year	Capital spares	RMC
2000		
April	8,560,947	7,057,584
May	8,839,946	8,978,671
June	9,525,113	7,311,941
July	9,146,243	7,256,798
August	8,872,549	7,430,376
September	8,738,573	7,454,189
October	8,761,439	7,202,662
November	8,737,894	7,185,215
December	8,812,215	7,662,679
2001		
January	8,690,831	7,613,195
February	8,611,383	7,508,409
March	8,509,752	7,394,542
April	7,809,878	6,099,338
May	7,445,061	6,061,659
June	7,312,296	6,116,666
July	7,412,866	6,322,058
August	7,302,155	6,383,351
September	7,010,435	6,202,675
October	7,078,693	6,250,770
November	7,034,986	6,407,108
December	7,130,288	6,414,625
2002		
January[1]	7,034,578	6,212,182

[1] This is the last month for which figures are currently available.

The figures provided from April 2000 to March 2001 were consolidated within the Departmental Resource Accounts (DRAc) for that financial year, but the figures for stock were qualified by the Comptroller and Auditor General when the accounts were audited. The figures from April 2001 onwards will be consolidated within the next DRAc, which will be audited later this year.

Fleet Support Limited Company

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the Fleet Support Limited company has *(a)* met all contractual performance indicators and *(b)* delivered on time and to cost for all work on Fleet Maintenance and Repair in Portsmouth. [44757]

Mr. Ingram: The information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Since its formation in 1998, Fleet Support Ltd. (FSL) has undertaken an extensive programme of work on RN and RFA vessels in Portsmouth, during which period not every project has been delivered to time and cost. The reasons for this are complex, vary considerably across the projects concerned and are not necessarily the sole responsibility of the company in each instance. However, the company's performance overall in the last 12 months has been well within the performance indicators which the Warship Support Agency (WSA), as the provider of maritime logistics support, is tasked to achieve.

Iraq

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what injuries were sustained by members of the RAF in the threats and attacks on coalition planes in Iraq in 2001; and if he will make a statement. [44741]

Mr. Ingram: RAF aircraft patrolling as part of the international coalition's enforcement of the no-fly zones over Iraq are regularly attacked by Iraqi air defences, including anti-aircraft artillery and surface-to-air missiles. Owing to the skill of RAF aircrew, their training, equipment, tactics and support, none were hit in 2001, and no aircrew were injured. This record has been maintained this year to date.

Accommodation

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the average wait is by service personnel for accommodation in the private sector when DHE housing is unavailable has been in the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [44970]

Dr. Moonie: When service family accommodation is not available, the Defence Housing Executive authorises substitute service family accommodation. A Ministry of Defence accommodation agency contractor is then tasked to provide appropriate accommodation from the commercial rental market to meet the service applicant's required date.

From 1 January 2001 to 28 February 2002, there were 434 applications for SSFA. Of these, some 42 per cent. of applicants were housed, on average, eight days before their required date. The remaining 58 per cent. were housed, on average, 20 days after their required date.

MOD Housing

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the system is of upkeep for empty MOD housing; and if he will make a statement. [44968]

Dr. Moonie: Empty Ministry of Defence housing is maintained under the same contractual arrangements which MOD, through the Defence Housing Executive (DHE), employs to maintain all its housing stock in mainland United Kingdom. A contracted Works Services Manager provides a response repair service and, working with the DHE Property Manager, undertakes a programme of regular planned maintenance which is fulfilled according to available funds. A temporarily empty property required for service family occupation in the longer term would normally have priority over a property intended for disposal.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment has been made of the effectiveness of the fraud detection system for MoD housing; and if he will make a statement. [45439]

Dr. Moonie: The effectiveness of fraud detection, in the context of Ministry of Defence housing and related works, is kept under constant review. Line management is responsible for ensuring that appropriate procedures are followed and controls operated effectively. In addition, there is a rolling programme of compliance and risk based audits carried out independently of line management. Consultants are also employed to carry out additional audits of property management and to undertake initial investigations of suspected fraud or impropriety. Furthermore, the central Defence Finance Audit Unit is notified of all suspected cases of fraud and they may then call in the MOD Police.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how much money was spent on *(a)* single living accommodation and *(b)* married quarters in each year between 1992 and 1997; and if he will make a statement; [45441]

(2) how many complaints were made about *(a)* single living accommodation and *(b)* married quarters in each year between 1992 and 1997; and if he will make a statement. [45433]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Crèche Facilities

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what crèche facilities are provided by his Department; and at what cost. [44870]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence provides the following child care support for its civilian and military employees:

42 work place nurseries offering 1,700 full day care places for children aged three months to five years.

36 crèches (benefiting 700 children) providing occasional care and 70 pre-schools (benefiting over 2,000 children) providing education on a sessional basis, primarily for service families.

14 wrap around care schemes for five to 12-year-olds (benefiting 350 children) providing before and after school care to match the working day.

12 holiday play schemes providing full day care for five to 12-year-olds during school holidays (three are shared with other Government Departments) benefiting 500 children.

a child care voucher scheme for civilian employees in Glasgow benefiting about 80 parents.

The capital and running costs of child care schemes are funded by a variety of means including: money raised by parents, benevolent funds, local authorities, the civil service modernisation fund and the defence budget. However, no figures for the total costs are readily available, and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Freedom of Information Act

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment has been made of the implementation of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 in the MOD; and if he will make a statement. [44737]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence and armed forces are, with the exception of the Special Forces, subject to the Freedom of Information Act 2000. Work is under way to ensure that we are ready for implementation of the rights and obligations it creates. A pilot version of MOD's publication scheme was released in February and this is now being reviewed in light of comments from users and guidance which has recently been issued by the information commissioner under s.47(2) of the Act. More widely, the preparatory work will involve education of all relevant personnel about the key provisions; establishing or modifying procedures in order to support compliance; and ensuring that the status under the Act of all types of information held by MOD is understood both within the Department and, where appropriate, by external bodies. In addition, it is recognised that successful implementation will be dependent on developing a more open outlook and that achieving this culture change must also be an integral part of the agenda. In a Department as large and wide-ranging as MOD this represents a significant programme which, we assess, will require the full lead time provided by the implementation timetable which my noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor announced on 13 November 2001.

UN Peacekeeping

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what training and education the UK provides to service personnel from other countries engaged in UN peacekeeping and conflict resolution initiatives. [44745]

Mr. Ingram: Training and education are provided to service personnel from other countries engaged in UN peacekeeping and conflict resolution initiatives by the United Kingdom in various ways. A one-year post-graduate course in global security and a seven-week diploma course in managing defence in a democracy are offered at the Royal College of Military Science, Shrivenham and have been developed for foreign military and civilian students as part of the Ministry of Defence's Defence Diplomacy Mission. The Army has recently commenced a series of 10-day International Peace Supporting Briefing programmes with students attending from many parts of the world. The programme includes briefing on the structure and role of the British Army, the role of Government Departments and non-governmental organisations in peace support operations (PSO), PSO doctrine, civil/military co-operation, the role of the police and equipment and training issues. However, the Royal College of Defence Studies course and the Advanced Command and Staff course syllabi also contain elements relevant to UN peacekeeping and conflict resolution and

selected countries are invited to send students each year. Additionally, spare capacity on UK military training courses is offered to other countries as part of the UK MOD's Defence Diplomacy Mission. Examples of such training are as follows:

Initial Officer Training.

English Language Training.

First Aid and Combat Casualty Care (Royal Navy).

Anti-piracy—Board and Search Course (Royal Navy).

Combat Medical Technician (Army).

Regimental Medical Assistant (Army).

Helicopter Tactics Training (prior to Bosnia/Kosovo deployment) (Royal Air Force).

In addition to training conducted in the UK, overseas training is carried out by established British military advisory and training teams (BMATT). Most of this training is directly relevant to UN peacekeeping and conflict resolution initiatives and BMATTs are currently established in seven countries worldwide. The MOD also provides short term training teams (STTT) to supplement the training given by BMATTs or is provided for immediate local training needs in other areas of the world. Numerous STTTs are in place at any given time on deployments typically lasting for between two and six weeks.

Colchester Garrison

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the answers of 21 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 557W and of 28 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 23W, on Colchester garrison, how many representations he has received about the temporary portakabin type single living accommodation for soldiers; and if he will make a statement. [45379]

Dr. Moonie: Other than the hon. Member's question of 28 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 23W, I have received no representations about the temporary portakabin type, single living accommodation for soldiers at Colchester garrison.

Depleted Uranium

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions in the last 20 years depleted uranium shells have been fired at the Foulness ranges in Shoeburyness; and if he will make a statement. [44797]

Dr. Moonie: No depleted uranium (DU) shells have been fired at Foulness.

However, during the 1980s, approximately 200 rounds of small experimental DU projectiles, of up to 30 mm calibre, were fired in a purpose-built indoor facility at Foulness.

Experimental firings between 1982 and 1983 are confirmed by range records. Further to this, in his response of 9 March 2001, *Official Report*, column 358W, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence stated that DU firings may have continued at Foulness until 1986.

The building in which firing took place was designed to prevent any escape of particulate DU into the atmosphere. It was closed in the early 1990s and was decontaminated in 1997.

Colchester Corrective Training Centre

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many civilians are employed at the Military Corrective Training Centre in Colchester; and how many are in receipt of the prison environmental allowance. [45291]

Mr. Ingram: There are currently 30 civilians employed permanently at the Military Corrective Training Centre (MCTC) in Colchester, and all receive the prison environmental allowance. Two Ministry of Defence Guards Service staff are also provided to the MCTC on a rotational basis, but these staff do not qualify for the prison environmental allowance.

Decommissioning

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when *(a)* HMS Ark Royal, *(b)* HMS Invincible and *(c)* HMS Illustrious are to be decommissioned. [45488]

Mr. Ingram: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 15 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 125W, to my hon. Friend the Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle).

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the last Sea Harrier and RAF Harrier are to be taken out of service. [45490]

Mr. Ingram: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 28 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 1451–52W, to my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Dr. Palmer). Under the revised investment strategy for Joint Force Harrier, the Sea Harrier fleet will be withdrawn from service by 2006. The withdrawal of RAF Harriers from service will occur as they are replaced by the Future Joint Combat Aircraft and, on current plans, will be completed in 2015.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to convert one of the three aircraft carriers into a helicopter carrier after its decommissioning date. [45489]

Mr. Ingram: There are currently no plans to convert an aircraft carrier into a helicopter carrier after decommissioning. All three of our aircraft carriers have the capability to operate as a Landing Platform Helicopter as a secondary role.

Afghanistan

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if C130Js have flown into Afghanistan; and if the C130J Hercules deployed in Afghanistan have a full defensive aids suite. [45457]

Mr. Hoon: No C130Js have been flown into Afghanistan. All C130s operating into Afghanistan are provided with defensive aids. Details vary from air-frame to air-frame but we are confident that for all flights into Afghanistan self protection measures are adequate against the perceived threat.

Defence Medical Services

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what psychiatric and mental health service staff are employed in the Defence Medical Services. [45935]

Dr. Moonie: As at 1 January 2002, there were 11 Consultant Psychiatrists and 81 Registered Nurses (Mental Health) serving in the Defence Medical Services (DMS). In addition, there were 11 medical officers undergoing Consultant Psychiatrist training, and 20 mental health nurse trainees. Civilian mental health staff are also employed in the United Kingdom and overseas in support of the DMS, some of whom are filling vacant military posts.

Deployment

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the mean percentage is of the British Army which has been deployed on operations in each year since 1998. [45697]

Mr. Ingram: The mean percentage of the British Army deployed on operations in each year since 1998 is shown in the following table.

Calendar year	*Mean percentage of Army deployed on operations*[1]
1998	25
1999	24
2000	24
2001	21
2002[2]	20

[1] The mean percentage of the British Army deployed on operations for years 1998, 1999 and 2000 includes personnel from the Royal Irish (Home Service) and Mobilised Reserves.
[2] As at 1 March.

Ministerial Meetings

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what meetings were arranged for Defence Ministers to meet the US Assistant Secretary for Defence during his recent visit to London; and if he will make a statement on the outcome of the meetings. [45696]

Mr. Ingram: A meeting was arranged for 18 March 2002 between myself and the United States Assistant Secretary of Defence but because of business in the House, it did not take place. The Assistant Secretary did have discussions with officials.

Injuries

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many claims have been made for compensation from the MOD for muscular-skeletal injuries during Army training in each year since 1995 from *(a)* men and *(b)* women. [46261]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence does not record separately cases brought against the MOD for muscular-skeletal injuries during Army training. The information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Warships

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for modernising warship repair and maintenance. [46336]

Mr. Hoon: The Government have decided on arrangements which will secure better value for money for warship repair and maintenance for the Royal Navy.

The Ministry of Defence has considered a number of options, including internal proposals to improve efficiency, proposals for further improvements from the MOD trade unions, and proposals from the existing dockyard companies. All options offered significant benefits compared with the current cost of undertaking warship repair and maintenance, but the company proposals offered the best overall value for money.

I have therefore decided to proceed with partnering arrangements with the companies. Subject to the satisfactory conclusion of negotiations, contracts will be placed later this year with Devonport Management Ltd., Fleet Support Ltd. and Babcock Naval Services Ltd. (a newly formed subsidiary of BRDL) for the provision of engineering support and related services at the naval bases at Devonport, Portsmouth and the Clyde. The Ministry of Defence has also agreed with the dockyard companies that a larger proportion of the surface ship refit and repair programme will be opened up for competition, with corresponding improvements in value for money. Taken together, these approaches will deliver efficiency improvements of over £300 million over the next five years.

These arrangements will involve the transfer of nearly 3,000 posts to the partnering. The Ministry of Defence will work closely with trade unions to ensure this transfer can be achieved as smoothly as possible.

Defence Evaluation and Research Agency

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the work programme of DERA. [45368]

Dr. Moonie: DERA was disestablished on 1 July 2001 as part of the DERA PPP and two new organisations, Dstl and QinetiQ plc, were formed. The split of DERA, and thus the work programme, was done on the basis of capabilities; the principle being that the work that could not easily be transferred to the private sector remained within the Ministry of Defence, the rest became part of QinetiQ's business.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish the representations he has received from defence manufacturers on the transfer of parts of DERA to the private sector. [45685]

Dr. Moonie: On completion of formal consultation on the DERA PPP process in June 2000, 19 written responses had been received from industry, including defence manufacturers. An industry forum was subsequently held to provide an opportunity for a detailed discussion of the PPP proposals before decisions were made on the way ahead. Rather than publish the individual representations, which would require the approval of the relevant organisations, the key points have been summarised in the Ministry of Defence responses about consultation to the Defence Select Committee and trade unions. The summary was published by the Defence Select Committee in its fifth report of session 2000–01 titled "The Draft Defence Science and Technology Laboratory Trading Fund Order 2001 at Appendix 3". In general, industry

regarded the PPP proposals as workable and indicated a willingness to liaise with MOD to ensure that they were implemented in a way that best meets defence interests.

Consultation with industry has been a regular feature of the PPP process and has taken the form of informal workshops, meetings, briefings and seminars. Contact has generally been focused through the trade associations or other relevant professional bodies such as the Defence Industries Council, Defence Manufacturers Association and Association of Independent Research and Technology Organisations. Officials managing the PPP process are also in regular contact with the National Defence Industry Council's appointed industry liaison officer.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

National Lottery

9. **Alistair Burt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much the national lottery has raised to date; and how much has been spent in Bedfordshire. [43150]

Mr. Caborn: The national lottery has raised £12.19 billion at the end of December 2001 with £34,087,878 awarded to Bedfordshire to date.

19. **Mr. Wiggin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the distribution of New Opportunities Fund national lottery money, with specific reference to demographic area. [43160]

Tessa Jowell: The New Opportunity Fund's programmes are designed to ensure a fair geographic spread of lottery money. For some of its programmes, the fund targets particular areas in order to ensure that funding reaches those in the greatest need.

27. **Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what estimate she has made of the total value of national lottery ticket sales to date. [43169]

Mr. Caborn: The total value of national lottery tickets sold from the launch in November 1994 up to and including the draw for the main online game on 9 March 2002 was £36,494,475,733.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when she will give details of the outcome of her Department's discussions with national lottery distributors regarding increasing the efficiency of the distribution of lottery funding. [45716]

Mr. Caborn: The Department has agreed with distributors a series of measures with a view to halving the overall National Lottery Distribution Fund balance by 2004. We propose to identify any elements in the Statement of Financial Requirements or policy directions which hinder faster payment and a bolder forward commitment policy and make amendments where this is consistent with good financial management; and to review whether more discretionary powers need to be introduced into the financial directions to enable distributors to assess applications in a way more commensurate with the risk involved.

In addition, distributors have identified a range of methods which they may be able to use to reduce balances more quickly. These include adopting a bolder approach to commitment, leading to extra awards; improving systems for cash management; and reducing the time between an in-principle commitment being made and the first draw-down of funds. We will share best practice on measures employed by different distributors to reduce balances.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what criteria will be used for choosing which authorities are eligible to receive lottery money through the National Lottery Fair Share initiative; and if she will make a statement. [45901]

Mr. Caborn: Those local authority districts which will benefit from Fair Share have already been chosen according to whether they are deprived and are receiving less than the median per capita amount of lottery funding.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps she will take to help disadvantaged areas which do not receive a proportionate share of National Lottery awards and who have not been placed on the list of disadvantaged areas eligible for the National Lottery Fair Share initiative. [45900]

Mr. Caborn: Fair Share is one of several targeted initiatives operated by the lottery distributors. The Government are committed to ensuring that all areas benefit from lottery funding. We have challenged other lottery distributors to draw up their own lists of areas not receiving their fair share of lottery funding and target their resources on these.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how she will ensure that disadvantaged areas receive a proportionate level of lottery funding after the completion of the National Lottery Fair Share initiative in 2005. [45899]

Mr. Caborn: We will consider what further steps might be taken once we have begun to evaluate the effectiveness of Fair Share.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the cost is of setting up the National Lottery's joint community fund and New Opportunities Fund Fair Share project; if she will give a breakdown of these costs; and from which budget the costs will be taken. [45346]

Mr. Caborn: The New Opportunities Fund and the community fund are required to meet their running costs from their share of the National Lottery Distribution Fund. It is not possible at this stage to disaggregate the running costs that will accrue to the two distributors from administering Fair Share.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to her answer of 18 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 45W, what consideration she gave to including Tewkesbury in the list of areas under the targeted lottery initiative. [46132]

Mr. Caborn: The selection of Fair Share areas was a matter for the community fund and the new opportunities fund, based on broad criteria set by the Government.

Tewkesbury was not selected as a Fair Share area because it is not one of the 100 most deprived local authority districts in England.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to her answer of 18 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 45W, how much each of the 51 areas listed under the targeted lottery initiatives has received in National Lottery funding. [46131]

Mr. Caborn: The following table gives the value of lottery awards made in the 51 English Fair Share areas.

£

English local authorities	*Lottery award totals*
Ashfield	4,969,982
Barking and Dagenham	12,878,997
Barnsley	20,531,215
Basildon	2,615,620
Blackpool	8,346,303
Blyth Valley	4,150,301
Bolsover	7,637,701
Bolton	33,727,019
Bournemouth	9,244,798
Brent	138,228,766
Burnley	8,150,550
Darlington	6,843,302
Derby	23,905,119
Doncaster	60,909,039
Dudley	21,902,069
Ellesmere Port and Neston	5,795,148
Enfield	19,688,961
Great Yarmouth	6,803,257
Hyndburn	4,306,746
Kingston upon Hull, City of	41,257,139
Kirklees	35,868,837
Knowsley	14,368,675
Luton	11,508,015
North East Lincolnshire	7,109,709
North Somerset	11,905,771
Oldham	16,837,828
Pendle	5,077,803
Peterborough	19,032,272
Portsmouth	63,524,605
Rochdale	17,343,934
Rotherham	36,696,975
Salford	86,495,731
Sandwell	33,400,102
Sefton	18,576,783
Solihull	6,531,320
St. Helens	18,166,887
Stockton-on-Tees	18,566,799
Swindon	21,726,787
Tameside	11,754,532
Telford and Wrekin	19,684,276
Tendring	5,343,771
Thanet	10,434,744
Trafford	13,662,061
Wakefield	31,383,468
Walsall	34,700,659
Waltham Forest	16,941,245
Wansbeck	4,342,966
Waveney	4,595,907
West Lancashire	4,861,777
Wigan	23,675,368
Wirral	18,108,749

BBC

12. **Mr. Leigh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans her Department has for BBC finances. [43153]

Tessa Jowell: I have no plans to change the current financing arrangements for the BBC, but funding will be looked at as part of the process of reviewing the BBC's Charter, which expires in 2006.

International Year of Mountains

13. **Tony Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what support the Department is giving to Cumbria for celebrations during the international year of the mountains. [43154]

Dr. Howells: I intend to visit the National Mountaineering Exhibition at the Rheged Discovery Centre in June to celebrate the Cumbrian Mountain Festival that is being held in association with the United Nations International Year of Mountains to boost sustainable tourism in the county.

Museums and Galleries

14. **Mrs. Anne Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what action she plans to take in respect of museums in Cambridge following the museums and galleries task force. [43155]

Tessa Jowell: Resource: the Council for Museums, Libraries and Archives published on 7 March application forms and criteria for the selection of museums as regional hubs. Museum consortia in each region are invited to submit applications to Resource by 19 April. My Department is currently working with Resource to start implementing the Task Force recommendations with £10 million per annum which was allocated to Resource in the last spending review.

We will take the Task Force's recommendations into account in the current spending review, alongside other priorities.

James Purnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport whether she commissions independent assessments of how successfully the national museums and galleries meet their key performance indicators. [40332]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 6 March 2002]:* My Department recognises its role in ensuring that the national museums and galleries which it sponsors provide reliable performance indicator data. The funding agreements which are in place with all of our sponsored museums and galleries now incorporate information on the process to be adopted in validating reports on performance against targets. In addition, we expect the internal auditors of our sponsored museums and galleries to provide independent assurance that the methods of data collection are in accordance with agreed definitions and that they allow credible performance reporting.

Sports Clubs

16. **Mr. Swire:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on Government support for local sports clubs. [43157]

Mr. Caborn: Local amateur sports clubs make valuable contributions to improved health, the local economy and social inclusion. In order to help clubs attain the financial stability to develop these roles, my Department has been working with the Charity Commission and sports bodies on a possible tax exemption package that would extend charitable status to clubs on the grounds that they provide healthy recreation.

Healthy Living

17. **Mr. Kidney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what work her Department will carry out to support the Government's public health objective of promoting healthy living in 2002–03. [43158]

Tessa Jowell: My Department continues to support and emphasise the significant contribution sport, the arts and children's play provision can make to promoting a healthier society. Through our close involvement in the Cross-Cutting Review on Health Inequalities, we are also examining the ways in which our sectors can help to tackle the problems posed by health inequalities in this country.

Rugby League

18. **Andy Burnham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on support for grassroots rugby league from the national lottery. [43159]

Mr. Caborn: Total funding received from the National Lottery in England for grassroots rugby league is £8,717,584. The responsibility for lottery awards rests with the independent distributing bodies, such as Sport England, who make their funding decisions independently of the Government.

Arts Education

20. **Jonathan Shaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of the progress being made by the arts education pilot projects under the creative partnership scheme. [43161]

Tessa Jowell: Creative Partnerships is on course to begin in April when funding comes on stream. This new fund will offer school children in some of the most deprived areas in the country the opportunity to work with artists and other creative practitioners on sustained projects.

Football Grounds

22. **Hugh Bayley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what representations the Government have made to the Football Association and other football bodies about the sale of club grounds without making alternative provision for training and games. [43163]

Mr. Caborn: Neither I nor my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has made representations to the Football Association or the other football authorities about the sale of club grounds.

These are primarily commercial issues for clubs' managements. However, the Government fully appreciate that clubs' grounds are important parts of the communities they serve. That is why Supporters Direct was set up by the Government last year to advise and assist football supporters wishing to get involved in the responsible running of their football clubs.

Supporters Direct has recently been involved in setting up successful rescue packages for clubs whose primary assets, including their grounds, have been threatened.

Euro

23. **Paul Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport whether she has met the English Tourist Council to discuss the acceptance of euro notes and coins. [43165]

Dr. Howells: No, I have not. The British Tourist Authority have, in consultation with the UK's tourism industry and HM Treasury, issued guidance entitled "The Euro—A guide for small tourism businesses" to assist tourism firms. I have arranged for copies to be deposited in the Libraries of the House.

Film School, Newport

24. **Paul Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will visit the Film School at Newport, Gwent. [43166]

Dr. Howells: My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State has no current plans to visit the school.

Exercise

25. **Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will introduce an advertising campaign to encourage people to take up exercise and sport and to make the most of local council sporting facilities. [43167]

Mr. Caborn: I have no plans to introduce an advertising campaign to encourage people to take up exercise and sport and to make the most of local council sporting facilities.

Sport England's well publicised Active Sports initiative is a national programme designed to give eight to sixteen-year-olds the opportunity to enjoy their sport throughout the country. In addition Sport England's Active Communities initiative is seeking to encourage all sports providers to reach communities and individuals who have traditionally been excluded from sport or physical activity, and to encourage delivery within communities that do not have a strong sport and recreation infrastructure.

Regional Theatres

26. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps the Government are taking to support regional theatres in Lancashire and the north-west. [43168]

Tessa Jowell: This is a matter for the Arts Council of England and the Regional Arts Boards. As a result of last year's Theatre Review an extra £2.8 million was allocated to theatre throughout the north-west arts region. By 2003–04 over £7.5 million will be spent in revenue funding for theatre, representing an increase of 77 per cent. over 2000–01.

Portable Antiquities

28. **Tim Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on future funding for the portable antiquities scheme. [43170]

Tessa Jowell: I can confirm that my Department has agreed to fund all the present 14 posts for a further full year, pending the outcome of Resource's lottery bid.

Sports Coaching

21. **Jim Dobbin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the contribution of volunteers to sports coaching, with special reference to schools. [43162]

Mr. Caborn: My Department and the Home Office will shortly launch our joint Volunteering in Sport project. This project will make available £7 million of funding over the next two years to provide training and volunteering opportunities for people both young and old. The project will focus on existing School Sport Coordinator Partnerships where they exist. The trained volunteers are part of the Volunteer Investment Strategy and will form an additional resource to deliver the Government's commitment to an entitlement of a minimum of two hours per week high quality PE and sport to every pupil, by helping teachers run school sports clubs, festivals and competitions and supporting local primary school sport. Many of the volunteers will also be deployed in community sports clubs.

My Department and the Coaching Task Force are also currently exploring the opportunities for encouraging more parents and grandparents to become involved in coaching, particularly in relation to school sport.

Civil Servants

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will set out for each civil service grade within her *(a)* Department and *(b)* Department's executive agencies the (i) total number of staff employed, (ii) number aged (A) 16 to 25, (B) 26 to 35, (C) 36 to 45, (D) 46 to 60 and (E) over the age of 60 years, (iii) number of registered disabled and (iv) number of ethnic minorities. [39174]

Dr. Howells: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office on 13 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 1072W.

Sponsorship

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport which of her Department's projects have received sponsorship since 1997, including *(a)* details of the sponsor, *(b)* the nature of the project, *(c)* the date of the project, *(d)* the total cost of the project and *(e)* the amount of money involved in the sponsorship deal. [40825]

Dr. Howells: Details of the Department's projects which have benefited from sponsorship since 1997 are detailed in the table:

£

Sponsor	*Sponsorship*	*Project*	*Date*	*Total cost*
Lloyds TSB	10,000	Creative Industries Finance Conference: connecting creativity with capital	November 1999	18,982
Imagination Gallery	2,000			
British Trade International	11,750.00	Launch of Creative Industries Export Advisory Group Strategy Document—Exports: Our Hidden Agenda	November 1999	36,234
Granada Group plc	2,350.00			
Cameron Mackintosh Ltd.	587.50			
BBC Worldwide	176.25			
Publishers Association	176.25			
PACT	176.25			
Channel 5	176.25			
Commercial Companies Radio Association	176.25			
Database and Directory PA	176.25			
Design Council	587.50			
British Art Market Federation	587.50			
British Phonographic Industry	176.25			
British Music Rights	587.50			
ELSPA	587.50			
DBA	470.00			
Vivienne Westwood	470.00			
Institute of Practitioners in Advertising	470.00			
The Newspaper Society	176.25			
Deepend	484.69			
British Phonographic Industry	2,500.00	Creative Industries Finance Conference: Good Practice in Financing Creative Industries	October 2001	5,637.22
Advantage West Midlands	2,405.23			
University of Central England	731.99			

World Tourism Organisation

Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has for UK membership of the World Tourism Organisation. [44612]

Dr. Howells: The Government do not believe that there would be value for money in joining the World Tourism Organisation, membership of which would cost around £200,000 a year. However, DCMS does take an interest in the work of the World Tourism Organisation and offers co-operation in areas such as statistics and best practice in environmentally sustainable development.

Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what estimate she has made of the cost to the UK of membership of the World Tourism Organisation. [44613]

Dr. Howells: Membership of the Worlds Tourism Organisation is calculated by the WTO according to the level of economic development and the importance of tourism in each country. In 2000 the estimated cost to the UK of membership was around £200,000.

Historic Sites

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the sites of historic interest in Buckinghamshire which have received grant aid in the last five years, indicating *(a)* the date and *(b)* the amount awarded in each case. [43294]

Dr. Howells: The following table shows the grants which English Heritage has allocated to sites of historic interest in Buckinghamshire in the last five years.

Grants awarded to properties in Buckinghamshire 1 April 1996 to 31 March 2001

Property	*Location*	*Date*	*£*
St. Mary	Ashendon	3 May 1996	20,061
St. Lawrence	Winslow	10 May 1996	59,309
Stowe House phase IV	Buckingham	9 June 1996	89,092
Freeman Mausoleum	Fawley	12 June 1996	8,707
Stowe Landscape Gardens	Buckingham	17 March 1997	274,000
Chapel at Widmere Farm	Marlow	26 March 1997	2,122
St. Mary the Virgin	Ivinghoe	27 March 1997	29,314
All Saints Church	Middle Clayton	27 March 1997	18,186
Taplow Cross	Taplow	25 June 1997	2,301
Holy Trinity	Drayton Parslow	24 July 1997	37,367
All Saints	Marsworth	28 July 1997	51,929
St. Martin	Dunton	8 August 1997	10,450
All Saints	Soulbury	3 November 1997	60,000
Stowe School	Buckingham	18 November 1997	51,865
St. Mary	Hardwick	8 January 1998	39,000
Boarstall Tower	Boarstall	10 March 1998	50,650
Temple of Concord Stowe Landscape Gardens	Buckingham	27 March 1998	90,000
St. Mary the Virgin	Drayton Beauchamp	8 July 1998	32,088
Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary	Leckhampstead	9 July 1998	16,313
Chapel at Widmere Farm	Marlow	16 July 1998	13,680
St. Cecilia	Adstock	17 July 1998	23,100
St. Peter and St. Paul	Dinton	18 September 1998	20,000
Rotunda and Dido's Cave Stowe School	Buckingham	23 November 1998	163,000
Stowe School—North Collonade phase I	Buckingham	27 November 1998	400,000
Dropmore House, phase I	Burnham	31 March 1999	3,200
St. Mary	Mentmore	1 April 1999	21,400
St. John the Baptist	Preston Bissett	1 April 1999	32,962
St. Nicholas	Great Kimble	1 April 1999	132,800
St. Mary the Virgin	Aylesbury	27 April 1999	51,236
Lord Cobham's Monument Stowe Landscape Gardens	Buckingham	12 July 1999	84,000
Fane of Pastoral Poetry Stowe Landscape Gardens	Buckingham	12 July 1999	56,002
Holy Trinity	Bledlow	12 July 1999	18,330
All Saints	Wing	12 November 1999	85,331
Stowe School—North Collonade phase II	Buckingham	15 March 2000	260,000
St. Mary Magdelene	Great Hampden	22 February 2000	80,196
Old Nursery, Chenies Manor	Chenies	1 March 2000	35,562
Blenheim Pavilion, Clivedon	Taplow	29 March 2000	30,160
The Hermitage Stowe Landscape Gardens	Buckingham	29 March 2000	20,560
Hall Barn	Beaconsfield	12 April 2000	1,410
St. Edmond's Church	Maids Moreton	10 May 2000	20,269
St. Edward the Confessor	Shalstone	29 June 2000	15,900
St. Mary and St. Nicholas	Saunderton	30 June 2000	10,874
Repton Bridge, Stoke Park	Stoke Poges	13 October 2000	4,406
Dropmore House, phase II	Burnham	29 June 2000	5,600
St. John the Evangalist	Whitchurch	10 November 2000	113,268
St. Mary, North Marston	North Marston	10 November 2000	115,198
Lord Cobham's Monument Stowe Landscape Gardens	Buckingham	3 January 2001	98,400
The Grotto Stowe Landscape Gardens	Buckingham	28 March 2001	19,808
Captain Cooke's Monument Stowe Landscape Gardens	Buckingham	28 March 2001	15,200
Total			2,894,606

Tourism Satellite Account

Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to establish a tourism satellite account in line with the recommendation of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. [44611]

Dr. Howells: We are actively considering developing at least some of the components of a Tourism Satellite Account, but it will be costly and will have to be considered alongside the other priorities as part of the current spending review.

Golden Jubilee

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many meetings the ministerial group for the Queen's Golden Jubilee has had; what the group discussed during meetings; how many members the group is comprised of; and if she will make a statement. [44585]

Tessa Jowell: There has been one meeting of the ministerial group for the Queen's Golden Jubilee, which took place on 12 April 2000 to consider the planning of the celebrations. Since then a number of other issues have been considered by the group. In the interests of speedy resolution, these issues were dealt with and cleared through correspondence. They are also kept informed of all major developments in this way. There are 23 members of the group.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport which Department will pay for the Queen's Golden Jubilee medals; how much of the cost will be met by the public; and if she will make a statement. [44588]

Tessa Jowell: Responsible Government Departments and the devolved Administrations will bear the costs of their respective services' medals.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if commemorative coins will be minted to celebrate the Queen's Golden Jubilee; and if she will make a statement. [44563]

Tessa Jowell: The Royal Mint announced details of the design for the Golden Jubilee commemorative crown on 12 September 2001. The commemorative coin has been available for purchase since January and has a face value of £5.00.

Ofcom

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what relationship Ofcom will have with the devolved assemblies. [44486]

Dr. Howells: The Communications White Paper stated that Ofcom would be expected to develop good links with the relevant policy committees and executives of the devolved assemblies and with representatives of the English regions. We will expect Ofcom to consult closely with the devolved assemblies on how best to establish the most meaningful relationships with them and to build on some of the arrangements which some of the existing regulators have already established, such as holding regular meetings with assembly officials and establishing regular links between senior Ofcom representatives and the assemblies themselves.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the relationship will be between Ofcom and the OFT; and in the event of a dispute on jurisdiction who will decide. [44487]

Dr. Howells: As the White Paper made clear, Ofcom will be able to exercise powers under the Competition Act 1998 and the Fair Trading Act 1973 concurrently with the Director General of Fair Trading, in respect of communications matters. The Government are confident that Ofcom and the OFT will be able to work closely and constructively together in the exercise of these powers. This would reflect the existing relationship between regulators with concurrent powers and the OFT. The Competition Act moreover makes provision for formal co-ordination between the OFT and those regulators who have concurrent powers under that Act, including co-ordination of case handling under the Competition Act 1998 (Concurrency) Regulations 2000. The regulations provide that in the event of a dispute between the Director General of Fair Trading and any regulator as to which should handle a particular case, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will decide. To date my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has not been required to be involved in this way. The OFT and regulators have always been able to agree on who is best placed to deal with each case and therefore its allocation. The provisions for formal co-ordination will be applied to Ofcom in the same way as to other regulators having concurrent powers.

Communications White Paper

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what provision she plans to make for those *(a)* with disabilities, *(b)* with imperfect sight and *(c)* hard of hearing in implementing the White Paper on Communications. [44485]

Dr. Howells: The Government fully recognise the importance of access to communications services for people with disabilities.

As proposed in the White Paper, the forthcoming Communications Bill will extend to digital cable and digital satellite broadcasters the current requirements for broadcasters on digital terrestrial television to provide subtitling, sign language and audio description services on their channels.

More generally, Ofcom will be placed under a duty, wherever relevant, to have regard to the needs of persons with disabilities.

National Stadium

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport whether EU directives for the administration of public projects apply to the building of the national stadium at Wembley; and if she will make a statement on the national stadium. [44445]

Mr. Caborn: Responsibility for the development of the National Stadium project lies with the Football Association and their wholly owned subsidiary company Wembley National Stadium Ltd. (WNSL). The FA are

committed to making a significant equity investment in the project and to raising debt financing to fund the majority of construction and other related costs.

WNSL are required, under the terms of the lottery funding agreement concluded with Sport England, to fully comply with EU procurement legislation unless WNSL has been properly advised that EU procurement legislation does not apply. In such circumstances, the lottery funding agreement requires WNSL to adopt commercial competitive tendering procedures unless it can demonstrate to the satisfaction of Sport England that there is some overriding reason why that is not appropriate. I understand that WNSL's legal advisers advised WNSL in 1998 that EU procurement legislation does not apply to the national stadium project.

Mr. Bailey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps have been taken to ensure that an independent assessment is made of any future contract between Wembley National Stadium Ltd. and Multiplex to ensure value for money and conformity to best practice in corporate governance and procurement practice. [46246]

Mr. Caborn: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State set out the Government's position on the national stadium project to the House on 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 292. One of the conditions of Government support was that the Football Association and Wembley National Stadium Ltd. should commission an independent value for money assessment of the proposed contracts with Multiplex. That assessment is currently under way following the appointment by WNSL of Cyrill Sweet Ltd. to carry out this study. A copy of Cyrill Sweet Ltd.'s terms of reference were placed in the Library on 12 March.

Another of the Government conditions laid out on 19 December relates to corporate governance changes required of the Football Association and WNSL to produce a management structure capable of delivering a complex project within procedures acceptable to the public sector. The FA and WNSL are currently engaged in producing proposals to meet the Government's conditions and we expect the FA's work to be completed in April. The FA/WNSL proposals will be subject to scrutiny by Patrick Carter's review team and Sport England as well as by the Government.

Criminal Damage

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the cost has been of criminal damage to her Department's buildings in each of the last four years. [44827]

Dr. Howells: The Department for Culture, Media and Sport has no reported incidents of criminal damage at any building on the Departmental estate.

Crèche Facilities

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what crèche facilities are provided by her Department; and at what cost. [44860]

Dr. Howells: The Department offers holiday places at four Central London sites. The scheme operates during all main school holidays for children aged between five and 12 years. The cost per day is £26.00 of which the Department subsidises 50 per cent.

Correspondence

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the target time will be in 2002–03 for *(a)* Ministers to reply to letters from hon. Members and *(b)* officials in her Department to reply to letters received directly from members of the public. [44958]

Mr. Caborn: In 2002–03 we will continue to aim to answer all correspondence, whether it be from hon. Members or the general public, within 18 working days.

Landmark Projects

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the progress of each Landmark project supported by the Millennium Commission as part of the Millennium Celebration has been; which Landmark projects supported by the Millennium Commission have exceeded projected time and cost to be brought into operation; and if she will make a statement. [44734]

Tessa Jowell: This is a matter for the Millennium Commission. I will write to the hon. Member in my capacity as Chair of the Commission, and place copies of my reply in the Libraries of both Houses.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many, and which, Landmark projects depend on local authority money; how much money local authorities have provided; and if she will make a statement. [44744]

Tessa Jowell: This is a matter for the Millennium Commission. I will write to the hon. Member in my capacity as Chair of the Commission, and place copies of my reply in the Libraries of both Houses.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport which Landmark projects have failed to match the Millennium Commission funding with private finance; how much the shortfall is in each case; what has been done to fill the gap; and if she will make a statement. [44740]

Tessa Jowell: This is a matter for the Millennium Commission. I will write to the hon. Member in my capacity as Chair of the Commission, and place copies of my reply in the Libraries of both Houses.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport which Landmark projects *(a)* her Department and *(b)* the Millennium Commission have encouraged local authorities to support with council tax funds or their capital funding; how much money was provided; and if she will make a statement. [44742]

Tessa Jowell: I will write to the hon. Member in my capacity as Chair of the Commission, and place copies of my reply in the Libraries of both Houses.

Millennium Tower, Portsmouth

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much public money, excluding that provided by the Millennium Commission, has been spent on the Millennium Tower in Portsmouth; and if she will make a statement. [44743]

Tessa Jowell: I will write to the hon. Member in my capacity as Chair of the Commission, and place copies of my reply in the Libraries of both Houses.

Free Television Licences

Mr. Ivan Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many old age pensioners in the Harwich constituency have benefited from the introduction of free television licences. [45117]

Dr. Howells: TV Licensing, which administers the free television licence scheme for the BBC as Licensing Authority, is not able to provide geographical breakdowns of the number of free licences issued. However, estimates based on the 1991 Census indicate that there were approximately 12,900 people aged 75 or over in the Harwich constituency.

Register of Sports Facilities

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when she expects the register of sports facilities will be published; how this will be funded; and if she will make a statement. [45167]

Mr. Caborn: Information on sports facilities is currently held by a variety of organisations and a single database will enable more strategic Government investment in those areas and facilities which are most important. My Department is continuing discussions with Sport England on the scope, content, and cost of the proposed database and how the project will be taken forward. We will then be in a position to draw up a realistic timetable for the project.

Millennium Bridge

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what public funds have been expended in rectifying the defects in the Millennium bridge. [45136]

Tessa Jowell: This is a matter for the Millennium Commission. I will write to the hon. Member in my capacity as Chair of the Commission, and place copies of my reply in the Libraries of both Houses.

Bisham Abbey

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the bodies consulted by *(a)* Sport England and *(b)* her Department prior to the agreement of proposals to redevelop Bisham Abbey National Sports Centre. [45427]

Mr. Caborn: Given the historic nature of Bisham Abbey, Sport England have undertaken extensive consultation on the redevelopment of the National Sports Centre. Among the organisations consulted have been national governing bodies of sport, local sports clubs and other interest groups. The governing bodies and local sports clubs include: English Cricket Board, English Hockey Association, British Judo Association, Amateur Rowing Association, Rugby Football Union, Lawn Tennis Association, BAWLA, Football Association, Bisham Abbey Squash Club and Bisham Abbey Golf Club. In addition the interest groups consulted include Windsor and Maidenhead District Council, Bisham Parish Council, Environment Agency, English Heritage, the Council for Protection of Rural England, Bisham Abbey User Committee and local residents.

Officials from my Department hold regular meetings with members of Sport England to discuss issues relating to the English Institute of Sport and the National Sports Centres, including Bisham Abbey.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions she has had with Sport England on the re-development of Bisham Abbey National Sports Centre. [45446]

Mr. Caborn: Officials from my Department hold regular meetings with members of Sport England to discuss issues relating to the English Institute of Sport and the National Sports Centres, including Bisham Abbey.

Digital Heritage

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the preservation of the digital heritage of the United Kingdom. [45198]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 21 March 2002]:* Digital publications are continuing to increase in number and importance. The present system of legal deposit requires printed publications to be deposited in the British Library. In July 1998 the Working Party on the Legal Deposit of Non-print Publications chaired by Sir Anthony Kenny reported to the then Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport. Copies of the report have been placed in the Library. The report makes a convincing case for moving towards legislation for the legal deposit of non-print material. My Department continues to seek a legislative slot in which to bring the matter before the House. In the meantime a voluntary code of practice is in operation.

The national archive of the records of central Government and the courts of law for the United Kingdom is the Public Record Office, for which the Lord Chancellor is responsible. It has already instituted an electronic records programme for selection and preservation of the records of central Government.

New Millennium Experience Company

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list those individuals who have held shares in the New Millennium Experience Company since it became a non-departmental public body, and for each individual to state *(a)* the number of shares they held, *(b)* the percentage of the total shares in the company they held, *(c)* the date on which they became shareholders and *(d)* the date on which they ceased to be shareholders. [45199]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 21 March 2002]:* The information is as follows:

	(a)	*(b)*	*(c)*	*(d)*
Right hon. Roger Freeman MP	2	100	February 1997	May 1997
Right hon. Chris Smith MP	2	100	May 1997	June 1997
Right hon. Peter Mandelson MP	2	100	June 1997	December 1998
Right hon. Chris Smith MP	2	100	December 1998	January 1999
Lord Falconer of Thoroton QC	2	100	January 1999	—

Scottish Land Fund

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the grants made to date by the New Opportunities Fund through the Scottish Land Fund, the date of award and the amount awarded. [46233]

Mr. Caborn: In just under a year of operation, 47 grants worth a total of £4,838,472 have been made by the Scottish Land Fund using New Opportunities Fund funds. The table gives further details of all awards made to date.

Scottish Land Fund grants to date

Local authority	*Applicant*	*Grant type*	*Amount (£)*
April 2001			
Highland	Kinlochleven Land Development Trust	Development	90,000
Highland	Laggan Forest Trust Co. Ltd.	Development	73,172
April total			163,172
May 2001			
Moray	Deskford Community Association	Acquisition	12,000
Highland	Fernaig Community Trust	Development	57,796
Perth and Kinross	Comrie Millennium Footpath Association	Technical assistance	4,381
Aberdeenshire	Windyhills Community Group	Technical assistance	9,415
May total			83,592
July 2001			
Argyll and Bute	Ross of Mull Historical Centre	Acquisition	52,907
Argyll and Bute	Mull and Iona Community Trust	Acquisition	33,268
Eilean Siar	Port of Ness Harbour Ltd.	Acquisition	4,168
Moray	Burghead Amenities Project	Acquisition	19,108
July total			109,451
August 2001			
Highland	Abriachian Forest Trust	Development	94,000
Highland	Durness Development Group	Acquisition	15,670
Argyll and Bute	Tiree Rural Development Company	Development	50,000
Aberdeenshire	Woodhead and Windyhills Community Group	Acquisition	90,000
Highland	Glen Beag Woodland Steering Group	Technical assistance	300
Highland	Balmacara Square Management Committee	Technical assistance	964
Scottish Borders	Gordon Community Woodland Association	Technical assistance	720
Argyll and Bute	Kilchoman Community Group	Technical assistance	1,536
August total			253,190
September 2001			
Highland	Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust	Technical assistance	3,375
Highland	Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust	Development	20,310
South Ayrshire	Ballantrae Rural Initiative Care in the Community	Acquisition	26,690
Argyll and Bute	Gigha Land Steering Community Group	Technical assistance	2,974
September total			53,349
October 2001			
Highland	Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust	Development	62,519
Highland	Kells Croft Steering Group	Acquisition	12,475
Argyll and Bute	Gigha Land Steering Community Group	Acquisition	3,525,000
Highland	Fernaig Community Trust	Acquisition	11,873
October total			3,611,867
November 2001			
Highland	Acharacle Community Company	Acquisition	96,420
Renfrewshire	Howwood Community Woodland Group	Acquisition	13,870
Argyll and Bute	Iomairt Chille-Choman	Acquisition	30,358
Aberdeenshire	Mid Deeside Ltd.	Technical assistance	3,665
Aberdeenshire	Mid Deeside Ltd.	Technical assistance	4,350
Stirling	Trossachs Community Trust	Acquisition	20,000
Highland	North Sutherland Community Woodland Trust	Technical assistance	1,491
Renfrewshire	Howwood Community Woodland Group	Technical assistance	485
Highland	Strathnairn Community Woodland Project	Technical assistance	1,151
November total			171,790
January 2002			
Highland	Distillery Wood Association	Technical assistance	940
Perth and Kinross	Highland Perthshire Communities Land Trust	Technical assistance	2,910
Aberdeenshire	Strichen Community Park	Technical assistance	176
Scottish Borders	Gordon Community Woodland Association	Acquisition	69,971
Orkney	North Ronaldsay Trust	Acquisition	50,835
Argyll and Bute	Isle of Gigha Heritage Trust	Development	90,000
January total			214,832

Scottish Land Fund grants to date

Local authority	*Applicant*	*Grant type*	*Amount (£)*
February 2002			
Highland	Anagach Woods Steering Group	Technical assistance	399
Highland	Anagach Woods Steering Group	Technical assistance	799
Highland	Laggan Forest Trust Forestry Co. Ltd.	Technical assistance	1,000
Shetland	Sandwick Social and Economic Development Co.	Acquisition	25,265
Highland	Kingsburgh Forest Trust	Acquisition	148,805
Stirling	Loch Katrine Community Trust	Technical assistance	961
February total			177,229
Overall total			4,838,472

Tourism

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many inbound tourists to the United Kingdom there have been in *(a)* each of the last six months and *(b)* the last 12 months. [44269]

Dr. Howells: The latest available numbers of visits to the UK by overseas residents are given in the table.

Overseas residents visits to the UK

2001	*Million*
(a)	
July	2.6
August	2.6
September	2.0
October	1.8
November	1.8
December	1.5
(b)	
January-December	23.4

Source:
International Passenger Survey, Office for National Statistics

Swimming

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when the Government will respond to the Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport report "Testing the Waters: The Sport of Swimming". [46424]

Mr. Caborn: The Government's response to the report is being laid in the House today.

ELECTORAL COMMISSION COMMITTEE

Electoral Commission Plan (2002–07)

Mr. Watson: To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission what the outcome was of the committee's consideration of the commission's plan for 2002–03 to 2006–07. [46333]

Mr. Beith: At its meeting on 13 February, the Speaker's Committee approved the Electoral Commission's Corporate Plan 2002–03 to 2006–07. The plan, which gives details of the commission's aims and objectives, was laid before the House today. Copies will be available in the Vote Office and it will be possible to view the plan on the commission's website: www.electoralcommission.org.uk.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMISSION

Individual Learning Accounts

37. **Mr. Bacon:** To ask the Chairman of the Public Accounts Commission if he will make a statement on the resources made available to the National Audit Office for its inquiries into the individual learning account scheme. [43180]

Mr. Alan Williams: The Public Accounts Commission has provided funding for the National Audit Office which is consistent with the completion of some 50 major reports a year. During the course of each year the balance of the programme of reports is adjusted to reflect emerging issues, such as the Individual Learning Account scheme to which the hon. Member refers.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Contracts of Employment

40. **Mr. Ben Chapman:** To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, if he will make a statement on clergy contracts of employment. [43183]

Mr. Bell: In general, clergy in the Church of England serving in parishes, cathedrals and dioceses are office holders and do not have contracts of employment. However, some clergy serving as chaplains do so under contacts of employment, and the same applies to some clergy who are on the staff of diocesan bodies, the Church's national institutions, or other bodies connected with the Church.

Final Salary Scheme

42. **David Taylor:** To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, what recent submissions relating to the future of the final salary scheme for retired clergy have been made to the Commissioners; and if he will make a statement. [43185]

Mr. Bell: The Church of England is undertaking wide-ranging consultation on this subject. As yet it is unclear whether or not there is any desire for a move away from the current defined benefit pension arrangements.

Funding (Diocesan Resources)

Mr. Lansley: To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners,

what estimate he has made of the increase in funding within diocesan resources required in 2002–03 to replace Church Commissioners' funding. [43181]

Mr. Bell: Following the Commissioners' good investment performance in recent years, they plan to distribute an extra £10 million for parish ministry over 2002–04 and will increase their transitional relief to assist dioceses and parishes in meeting contributions for clergy pension by the same amount. They continue to meet the full cost of clergy pensions for service prior to 1998.

The relationship between the Church's funding partners remains fluid and it is not particularly meaningful to express part of diocesan expenditure as a replacement for Commissioners' funding. I refer the hon. Member to the Commissioners' annual report and to our correspondence for a fuller account of these matters.

Church Repairs

Miss McIntosh: To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, what recent discussions he has had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer to discuss the administration of grants to churches to cover the VAT element of the cost of repairs. [43847]

Mr. Bell: I have had no discussions recently about the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme, which is managed by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. However, I understand that a number of successful applications have already received moneys from the scheme.

Discussions with the Treasury continue on the wider question of a reduction of VAT payable on the repair and maintenance of listed church buildings. I understand the European Commission has indicated that it will consider this matter as part of its general review of reduced rates in 2003.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Civil Defence

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what changes he plans to *(a)* make and *(b)* discuss with his ministerial colleagues on the funding for local authorities in relation to their enhanced civil defence responsibilities. [44978]

Mr. Leslie: There have been no recent changes in the civil defence and emergency planning responsibilities of local authorities. The Government have decided to allocate a total of £18.97 million to local authorities in civil defence grant for 2002–03. Figures for subsequent years will be settled as part of this year's spending review.

Age Discrimination

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what his Department's policy is towards age discrimination. [42575]

Mr. Leslie: The Cabinet Office is an equal opportunities employer and is committed to a policy of equal opportunity for all.

It is the Department's policy that everyone should have equality of opportunity for employment and advancement on the basis of their ability, qualifications and suitability for work. There must be no discrimination on the grounds of age, disability, gender, marital status, sexual orientation, race, colour, nationality, ethnic origin or national origin.

The Cabinet Office's age retirement policy for grades below the senior civil service supports the recommendations of "Winning the Generation Game". Our normal age for retirement is 60 years but retention beyond this age up to age 70 is possible subject to departmental needs and continuing health and efficiency for most grades.

Yarl's Wood Fire

Andrew Selous: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make it his policy that Bedfordshire does not suffer a reduction in its civil defence grant following the Yarl's Wood fire. [45007]

Mr. Leslie: In accordance with the Civil Defence (Grant) Act 2002, grant will be allocated in accordance with a nationwide formula designed to be fair to all authorities. An announcement on the formula and the allocations to individual authorities will be made shortly.

Regulatory Impact Assessment

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, pursuant to the answer of 14 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 557W, for what reason the Government do not publish information on the relative performance of Government Departments with respect to regulatory impact assessment. [45494]

Mr. Leslie: The Government do not hold centrally information on the relative performance of Government Departments with respect to regulatory impact assessments.

Secondments

Dr. Cable: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the Cabinet Office policy is on the publishing of individual secondees' names; and if he will make a statement. [43668]

Mr. Leslie: My Department does not disclose names, under the Code of Practice on access to Government Information, exemption 12 "Privacy of Individuals".

Parental Leave Directive

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what estimate he has made of the *(a)* financial costs and *(b)* benefits to his Department of the Parental Leave Directive. [42480]

Mr. Leslie: The cost of the Department of the Parental Leave Directive is not held centrally, and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

The Cabinet Office currently has a number of policies and practices, including statutory entitlement to Parental Leave, that are designed to help staff strike a balance between their working and home responsibilities.

We believe that by offering such opportunities we are helping to aid recruitment and retention, improving morale and motivation, and decreasing staff absenteeism.

Human Rights Act

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many cases have been brought against his Department under the Human Rights Act 1998; and what has been the cost in *(a)* legal fees to defend cases and *(b)* compensation payments. [45071]

Mr. Leslie: My Department does not collect central records of cases in which the Human Rights Act 1998 is relied on. Human rights are now integrated in the general law and are rarely the sole basis for a challenge.

PFI/PPPs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the difference was between the price offered in reaching preferred bidder stage and the final contract price for PPP contracts let by his Department in each of the last four years; and if he will make a statement. [45609]

Mr. Leslie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him earlier today.

Stolen Equipment

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, pursuant to the answer of 29 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 253–54W, on stolen equipment, whether the computer equipment stolen from his Department was *(a)* new and unused and *(b)* used; and what was the nature of the data stored on such items in each case. [42647]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: Of the PCs and laptops stolen, 12 were new and unused. With regard to the used equipment, the data stored on the PCs would be limited to software, as files were stored on network servers. Laptops held software data and files; however, none of the files were of a sensitive nature.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 29 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 253–54W, on stolen equipment, what criminal proceedings have been undertaken for cases of theft against his Department, stating in each case *(a)* whether the proceedings (i) led to a criminal conviction and (ii) were unsuccessful, *(b)* the cost incurred by his Department in pursuing a conviction and *(c)* the value of items recovered; and if he will make a statement. [41499]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: Internal investigations of each reported case are carried out; however, to date no criminal proceedings have been undertaken in relation to any of the thefts recorded. None of the items has been recovered.

Celebrations

Tim Loughton: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what arrangements his Department has made to celebrate *(a)* St. Patrick's Day, *(b)* St. George's Day, *(c)* St. Andrew's Day and *(d)* Her Majesty the Queen's Golden Jubilee; and how his Department celebrated St. David's Day. [42297]

Mr. Leslie: The Cabinet Office has no specific plans to celebrate St. Patrick's Day, St. George's Day or St. Andrew's Day. The Union flag will, however, be flown from the Department's buildings on the latter two days. Together with St. David's Day, these are named days on which the flag must be flown from all Government buildings.

On arrangements for Her Majesty the Queen's Golden Jubilee, I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, my right hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Tessa Jowell) to the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) on 11 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 58–59W. Consideration is being given to flying the Union flag for the Jubilee, but in any event it will be flown on Coronation Day, 2 June, since this is a named day.

Other than by flying the Union flag, the Department has made no special arrangements for celebrating St. David's Day.

Public Bodies (Appointments)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if there is an age limit for *(a)* men and *(b)* women, for appointments to a public body in England and Wales; and if he will make a statement. [43940]

Mr. Leslie: The Code of Practice of the Commissioner for Public Appointments states that all public appointments should be governed by the overriding principle of selection based on merit, and that care must be taken, at every stage, not to discriminate on a number of grounds including age and gender.

Mr. Forth: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the appointments made by his Department since 1 May 1997 of chairmen of *(a)* non-departmental public bodies, *(b)* commissions, *(c)* inquiries, *(d)* agencies and *(e)* task forces; and if he will list their (i) term of office, (ii) salary and (iii) known political affiliation (A) past and (B) present. [33880]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: The following table includes information on appointments made to public bodies sponsored by Cabinet Office and appointments made by Ministers in Cabinet Office. The table does not include appointments to the Advisory Committees on Justices of the Peace in Lancashire, Greater Manchester and Merseyside, made by my noble Friend, Lord Macdonald of Tradeston and his predecessors as Minister for the Cabinet Office in the capacity of Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.

There were no such appointments to commissions, inquiries or agencies.

Appointee	Body to which appointed	Minister who made the appointment	Term of office: Date appointed	Term of office: Period	Term of office: Salary
Lord Haskins	Better Regulation Task Force	Minister for the Cabinet Office	September 1997 and September 2000[1]	3 years and 1 year (subsequently extended to March 2002)	Nil
Mr. David Arculus	Better Regulation Task Force	Minister for the Cabinet Office	March 2002	3 years	Nil
Miss Patricia Downs	Civil Service Appeal Board	Parliamentary Secretary	January 1998[1]	12 months	£260 per day
Mr. John Davies	Civil Service Appeal Board	Parliamentary Secretary	May 1999	3 years	£310 per day, plus an extra half-day's fee for every full day in attendance for hearings
Mr. Derek Dear	Advisory Committee on Advertising	Parliamentary Secretary	March 1998	3–6 years	Nil
Ms Julie Mellor	Equal Opportunities Commission	Secretary of State for Trade and Industry	February 1999 and February 2002[1]	3 years and 3 years	£62,500 per annum on appointment; £64,313 per annum wef 1 April 2000; £66,242 per annum wef 1 April 2001
Baroness Christine Crawley	Women's National Commission	Minister for Women	September 1999	3 years	£10,000 per annum plus expenses
The Lord Gillmore of Thamesfield GCMG	Advisory Committee on Business Appointments	Prime Minister	February 1999	3 years	Unpaid
The right honourable the Lord Mayhew of Twysden QC	Advisory Committee on Business Appointments	Prime Minister	June 1999	3 years	Unpaid
Lord Neill of Bladen QC	Committee on Standards in Public Life	Prime Minister	November 1997	3 years	£500 per day
Sir Nigel Wicks GCB CVO CBE	Committee on Standards in Public Life	Prime Minister	March 2001	3 years	£380 per day
Lord Stevenson of Coddenham CBE	House of Lords Appointments Commission	Prime Minister	May 2000	3 years	£5,000 per annum (waived)
Lord Thomson of Monifieth Kt	Honours Scrutiny Committee	Prime Minister	April 1999	No fixed term	Unpaid
Dame Elizabeth Butler-Sloss	Security Commission	Prime Minister	December 1999	3 years	Unpaid
Dame Janet Smith	Security Vetting Appeals Panel	Prime Minister	October 2000	3 years	Unpaid
Sir Michael Perry	Senior Salaries Review Body	Prime Minister	November 1998	2 years	Unpaid
Mr. John Baker	Senior Salaries Review Body	Prime Minister	February 2002	3 years	Unpaid

[1] Reappointed

For completeness, the following table details appointments made by the Prime Minister to public bodies sponsored by other Departments.

Appointee	Body to which appointed	Sponsor Department	Term of office: Date appointed	Term of office: Period	Term of office: Salary
Baroness Dean of Thornton-le-Flyde	Armed Forces Pay Review Body	Ministry of Defence	April 1999	3 years	Unpaid
Mr. Rupert Hambro	Museum of London	Department of Culture, Media and Sport	April 2001	5 years	Unpaid
Mr. Peter Scott	National Gallery	Department of Culture, Media and Sport	August 1999	5 years	Unpaid
Admiral Sir Jock Slater GCB	Imperial War Museum	Department of Culture, Media and Sport	September 2001	3 years	Unpaid
Ms Liz Forgan OBE	National Heritage Memorial Fund	Department of Culture, Media and Sport	April 2001	3 years	£32,130 per annum
Sir David Hardy	National Maritime Museum	Department of Culture, Media and Sport	October 2000	5 years	Unpaid
Sir Peter Williams	National Museum of Science and Industry	Department of Culture, Media and Sport	January 2001	18 months	Unpaid
Ms Paula Ridley OBE	Victoria and Albert Museum	Department of Culture, Media and Sport	November 1998	5 years	£227 per day
Mr. John Lewis	Wallace Collection	Department of Culture, Media and Sport	May 1998	5 years	Unpaid
Michael Blair QC	Doctors' and Dentists' Pay Review Body	Department of Health	March 2001	3 years	Unpaid
Professor Clive Booth	Nurses, Midwives and NHS Professions' Review Body	Department for Health	March 2001	3 years	Unpaid
Professor Jon Clark	Police Negotiating Board	Home Office	February 2000	4 years	Unpaid
Mr. Anthony Vineall	Schoolteachers' Review Body	Department for Education and Skills	February 2000	4 years	Unpaid

Information on political affiliation is not collected.

Information on the number, remit and membership of task forces, ad hoc advisory groups and reviews has been published by the Cabinet Office on a regular basis. The first report was published on 11 January 2000 and gives information for the period between 1 May 1997 and 31 October 1999. A second report was published on 27 July 2000, and covered the period 1 November 1999 to 30 April 2000. A third report was published on 13 December 2000 covering the period 1 May 2000 to 31 October 2000. The most recent report, "Task Forces, Ad Hoc Advisory Groups and Reviews", was issued in October 2001, and covers the period of the financial year 2000–01. Copies of these reports have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Advertising

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the publicity and advertising campaigns run by his Department in each of the last four years, specifying the *(a)* purpose, *(b)* cost to public funds, *(c)* number of staff involved and *(d)* method of evaluation in each case. [39097]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: The information requested is not held centrally, and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

For details of advertising expenditure over the last four years I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him today (PQ ref. 36166).

Publicity Expenditure

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the total real terms expenditure of his Department, its agencies and non-departmental public bodies on publicity in each of the years *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000, *(d)* 2000–01 and *(e)* 2001–02 (i) to date and (ii) as estimated for the whole of the present year; and if he will break these figures down to indicate expenditure on (A) advertising and (B) press and public relations. [36166]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: The information is not available in the form requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Details of departmental expenditure for advertising over the last four years and to date is as follows:

	£000
1997–98	144
1998–99	138
1999–2000	262
2000–01	464
2001-to date[1]	163

[1] This includes financial information from 1 April 2001 to 28 February 2002.

The increase in expenditure from 1998–99 to 2000–01 from £138,000 to £464,000 is due to expenditure on recruitment advertising for posts within the Department. These posts range from administration and junior management level through to the senior civil service. Also included is recruitment advertising expenditure for specialist placements within the Government Information and Development Centre.

Equipment Leasing

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the equipment leasing arrangements entered into by his Department in each of the last four years; and what the cost is to public funds in each case. [39077]

Mr. Leslie: The following leasing arrangements have been entered into by my Department and its agencies in each of the last four financial years.

£

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*Total*
Vehicles	10,089	14,064	51,397	40,949	116,499
Reprographic equipment[1]	160,000	414,155	215,514	514,867	1,304,536
Other equipment[2]	8,148	48,073	21,160	94,248	171,629
IT[3]	2,835	167,606	5,732	29,763	205,936
	181,072	643,898	293,803	679,827	1,798,600

[1] Reprographic equipment includes photocopiers and multi-function devices.
[2] Other equipment includes post room equipment, franking machines and fax machines.
[3] IT includes PCs and data tracking equipment.
Notes:
Women's Unit, Women's National Commission, PIU and CMPS joined Cabinet Office.
Office of e-envoy established.
All figures provided are for the full leasing term. They have been entered under the financial year in which the leasing arrangement was awarded.

Equipment should be leased when it offers better value for money than direct purchase bearing in mind the products whole life costs and quality to meet (but not exceed) the requirement. These costs include maintenance, running and disposal costs, not simply initial costs.

Press and Public Relations

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the annual budget for communications activities, including press, public relations, marketing and internal communications, was for his Department for each financial year from 1997–98 to 2001–02. [39925]

Mr. Leslie: The majority of the Cabinet Office's press office and internal communications activity, as well as management of its official website, is dealt with by the Department's Communication Group. Where appropriate the group also handles public relations.

The Group's annual budget, net of receipts, for each of the financial years since 1997–98 is as follows:

£

	Annual budget net of receipts
1997–98	1,629,000.00
1998–99	1,568,000.00
1999–2000	1,918,000.00
2000–01	2,400,000.00
2001–02	2,558,000.00

The increase in the budget, particularly between 1998 and 2001, is largely due to an increase in Cabinet Office activity and responsibilities relating to establishing new Units, increases in ministerial posts and the resultant additional communication activity.

For expenditure on marketing and external public relations, I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) on 29 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 252W.

Accountancy Contracts

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the contracts agreed by his Department with the five largest accountancy firms since May 1997; and what was the total value of contracts with each. [42111]

Mr. Leslie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) on 14 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 563W.

Workplace Smoking

Ms Walley: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he expects to announce the outcome of the consultation by the panel for regulatory accountability in respect of the approved code of practice on workplace smoking. [45205]

Mr. Leslie: The Panel for Regulatory Accountability did not undertake any public consultation in respect of the approved code of practice on workplace smoking.

However, the Health and Safety Commission completed a consultation exercise on whether to introduce an Approved Code of Practice, and announced, in September 2000, that it favoured the introduction of an Approved Code of Practice.

The Government is giving careful consideration to the Commission's proposals. As part of this process, the Health and Safety Commission has been asked to consider further both the implications of an Approved Code of Practice on the hospitality sector and small businesses generally, and the role the Public Places Charter could play.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Fair Trade

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the value of fairly traded *(a)* tea and *(b)* coffee used in his Department in each of the last five years. [17562]

Angela Eagle: The Home Office has not awarded any central contracts to purchase fairly traded products over the past five years. However each individual directorate and unit within the Department can purchase fairly traded tea and coffee from those companies that supply fair trade products.

The Department fully supports ethical trading in mainstream business and fair trade products will be purchased when they meet the criteria on procurement of goods and services.

The Home Office will be publishing an article on fair trade in the next edition of "Purchasing Matters", an internal periodical for all procurement staff. In addition the Home Office will be holding a purchasing symposium on the issue of fair trade in April. Both these initiatives will encourage fair trade purchasing in the Department.

Asylum Accommodation Centres

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consideration his Department gave to the capacity to gain rapid planning permission when identifying sites for the proposed asylum accommodation centres. [35640]

Angela Eagle: In identifying potential sites for accommodation centres, consideration has been given to a wide range of issues including planning considerations.

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which site in the Bicester area has been identified as a potential location for an accommodation centre for asylum seekers. [37078]

Angela Eagle: The prospective accommodation centre site in Bicester is on the land vacated by Ministry of Defence Logistics.

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 160W, on facilities at accommodation centres, what assessment has been made of the costs of providing transport for asylum seekers housed in accommodation centres to ensure they receive needed services which are not provided in-house at accommodation centres. [43024]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 18 March 2002]:* We have said we will provide for transport where necessary. We are considering the costs, which will depend on the location of the sites and the exact range of facilities on-site.

Yarl's Wood

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his oral statement on the fire at Yarl's Wood removal centre, 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 441, what representations he has received on access to the site by Bedfordshire fire and police services; and if he will make a statement. [41243]

Angela Eagle: In the immediate aftermath of the events at Yarl's Wood on 14–15 February 2002 a number of anecdotal claims were made in the media and elsewhere that the emergency services could not gain immediate access to the site. To date, these claims have not been

substantiated. It is likely that they arise from the fact that, on arrival at the scene, the first priority for the police was to establish perimeter security and also that firefighters could not be deployed within the site until a degree of order had been re-established. These issues will, of course, be considered by the separate inquiries being conducted by the Home Office, Bedfordshire Police, Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service, and Group 4.

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will provide a breakdown of the asylum seekers who were detained at Yarl's Wood removal centre on 14 February by *(a)* nationality, *(b)* gender, *(c)* length of detention, *(d)* the stage of application and immigration status at the time of application and *(e)* those aged under 18; and if he will make a statement. [41148]

Angela Eagle: The information requested is not readily available and could be obtained only by examination of individual case files.

Andrew Selous: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will ensure that the on-going policing requirements at the National Detention Centre of Yarl's Wood will not fall exclusively upon the Bedfordshire constabulary; [40851]

(2) if he will ensure that the *(a)* additional police costs and *(b)* costs incurred by retained firemen who have assisted with the Yarl's Wood fire will not be borne by the local authorities in Bedfordshire. [40853]

Angela Eagle: The Department is in discussion with Bedfordshire Police Authority about the policing costs of Yarl's Wood. The Government's position on this is clear. We will take whatever advice is necessary, and we will work with the police authority to protect their interests and those of the people they serve in Bedfordshire.

Policy responsibility for the funding of the fire service rests with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Mr. Byers).

Ministerial Design Champion

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what meetings the Ministerial Design Champion for his Department has attended in her capacity as Design Champion in the last month; and if he will make a statement. [41960]

Angela Eagle: Ministerial Design Champions meet at approximately four-month intervals. I, as Ministerial Design Champion for the Home Office, attended the most recent meeting on 17 January 2002. The next meeting will take place on 22 May 2002. The Design Champions Officials Group, which works to the Ministerial Champions Group, meets at regular intervals to support the work of Ministers.

I fully support the measures to underline the Government's commitment to the Better Public Buildings Initiative. My officials are working to deliver the Home Office action plan and I am pleased to have received a presentation from representatives of the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE), who outlined ways in which they can work with my officials on future design and construction across the Home Office estate. I have encouraged regular dialogue, both with CABE and other Government Departments, to address the common goals and to promote the sharing of best practice wherever possible.

Superintendent Ali Dizaei

Mr. Salter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many officers are allocated to the investigation into the affairs of Superintendent Ali Dizaei. [42745]

Mr. Denham: The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis informs me that 12 officers are currently allocated to the investigation of the affairs of Superintendent Ali Dizaei.

Metropolitan Police Service

Mr. Salter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which *(a)* members of the Metropolitan Police Independent Advisory Group, *(b)* business associates of those members and *(c)* companies related to them have been in paid employment of the Metropolitan Police service. [42741]

Mr. Denham: The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis informs me that the operating protocols of the Independent Advisory Group require members to declare any relevant pecuniary interest. Two members of the Independent Advisory Group are directors of Ionann Management Consultants Ltd., the company under contract to the Home Office to provide specialist support to the police service on community and race relations training. The other detailed information requested by the hon. Member is not collected by the Metropolitan Police Service.

Metropolitan Police (Internal Investigation)

Mr. Salter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will conduct an independent inquiry into the manner in which the Metropolitan police's Internal Investigation Command (CIB3) investigates black police officers. [42743]

Mr. Denham: We are currently considering representations on this issue from the National Black Police Association.

Experience Corps

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what initiatives are being undertaken by the experience corps volunteering in the constituency of Buckingham. [43287]

Angela Eagle: The Experience Corps Company began the implementation of this initiative in November 2001. This is across the nine English Government regions, five of which have operations under way. I understand that the experience corps company will launch in the south-east region, which includes Buckingham, during the spring.

It will be for the company to decide what initiatives it develops in this area in line with its targets and objectives agreed with the Home Office.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the experience corps that have been set up in the constituency of Buckingham; and what total funding each corps has received. [43288]

Angela Eagle: The experience corps is a single initiative, which began its operations in England in November 2001. The experience corps will be launched in the south-east region, which includes Buckingham, during the spring.

The level of funding for the initiative in Buckinghamshire is a matter for the experience corps company to decide in line with objectives and targets agreed with the Home Office.

Metropolitan Police (Ethnic Officers)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Black and Asian police officers are serving in each of the Metropolitan police divisions covering the Greater London area. [43013]

Mr. Denham: The information requested has been provided by the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis and reflects the position on 14 March 2002.

London borough division	*Number of Black officers*[1]	*Number of Asian officers*[1]
Barking and Dagenham	3	3
Barnet	3	5
Bexley	5	4
Brent	13	20
Bromley	6.6	4
Camden	13.3	10
City of Westminster	45	46.4
Croydon	21	9.4
Ealing	8	30
Enfield	10	7
Greenwich	3	8
Hackney	12.8	18
Hammersmith and Fulham	12.5	6.4
Haringey	11	14
Harrow	3	11.8
Havering	2.8	2
Hillingdon	3	8
Hounslow	8	10
Islington	26	10
Kensington and Chelsea	17	19
Kingston upon Thames	4	3
Lambeth	24	18.6
Lewisham	13	7
Merton	3	4
Newham	14	14
Redbridge	6	9
Richmond upon Thames	2	6
Southwark	15	13.8
Sutton	2	2
Tower Hamlets	10.6	13.7
Waltham Forest	10.6	6
Wandsworth	4	10
Total	335.2	353.1
Heathrow airport	1	4
Non-borough units	29	14
Headquarters units	99.4	53.9
Total	464.5	425

[1] Full-time equivalents

Armed Robberies

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many armed robberies have been committed in *(a)* England and Wales and *(b)* Greater London in each of the last three years. [43018]

Mr. Denham: The number of robberies using firearms is given in the table:

Number of robberies using firearms (including air weapons)

Year (ending March)	*England and Wales*	*Greater London*[1]
1998–99	2,973	1,138
1999–2000	3,922	1,695
2000–01	4,081	1,424

[1] Metropolitan Police and City of London police force areas. There was a boundary change on 1 April 2000 in which parts of the Metropolitan Police area were transferred to Essex, Hertfordshire and Surrey, so that these police force areas followed county boundaries thereafter.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers have been detained at Oakington since its opening; and of these how many have *(a)* left Oakington for accommodation provided by NASS, *(b)* left Oakington for other accommodation and *(c)* been detained in other establishments immediately after leaving Oakington. [42948]

Angela Eagle: 11,895 principal asylum applicants were accepted at Oakington between 20 March 2000 and 31 December 2001. Provisional data, which is subject to revision, show that approximately 20 per cent. of these were detained in other establishments immediately after leaving Oakington. Corresponding information about the destination of those released on temporary admission on leaving Oakington is not presently available.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers are awaiting decisions as to whether their application for asylum has been accepted. [43017]

Angela Eagle: There were 39,400 asylum applications awaiting an initial decision on 31 December 2001, less than half the 87,000 on 31 December 2000. This figure relates to the number of cases ie the number of principal applicants.

Information on the number of cases awaiting an initial decision (including work in progress) is published quarterly on the Home Office website at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.htm.

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what financial support in vouchers and cash is provided by NASS to support asylum seekers. [43239]

Angela Eagle: Column A of the table sets out current levels of financial support. This is provided in vouchers and includes one for £10 which can be exchanged for cash. Column B of the table sets out the level of support which will be provided with effect from 8 April 2002. This support will be provided wholly in cash.

£

	Column A	Column B
Qualifying couple	57.37	59.26
Lone parent aged 18 or over	36.54	37.77
Single person aged 25 or over	36.54	37.77
Single person aged at least 18 but under 25	28.95	29.89
Person aged at least 16 but under 18[1]	31.75	32.50
Person aged under 16	30.95	33.50

[1] Except a member of a qualifying couple.

Asylum seekers in receipt of the full support package (accommodation and subsistence) receive fully furnished accommodation including cooking utensils. Council tax and utilities are paid for centrally.

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers are resident in *(a)* the Gainsborough constituency and *(b)* Lincolnshire. [44643]

Angela Eagle: The information is not available in the form requested. We currently only have statistics on the number of asylum seekers supported directly by the National Asylum Support Service (NASS).

The only cluster area to which NASS disperses asylum seekers in Lincolnshire is Lincoln. As at the end of December 2001, 70 asylum seekers (including dependants) were being supported in NASS accommodation in Lincoln. Some asylum seekers supported by NASS find their own accommodation and receive subsistence only support (vouchers) from NASS. From available information, as at the end of December 2001, there were 500 asylum seekers (including dependants) in receipt of subsistence only support (vouchers) in the East Midlands Region (which includes Lincolnshire). Figures are not currently available by constituency for those asylum seekers supported by the NASS.

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers whose applications have been refused have been removed from the United Kingdom during the last year for which figures are available. [44642]

Angela Eagle: Provisionally, there were 9,285 principal asylum applicants (to the nearest five) removed from the United Kingdom in 2001. Further information is given in the table.

Asylum removals in 2001[1,2]

	Principal applicants removed	*Dependants removed*[3]	*Total asylum seekers removed*
Q1	2,070	n/a	n/a
Q2	2,375	215	2,590
Q3	2,385	355	2,745
Q4	2,450	485	2,935

[1] Provisional figures, rounded to the nearest five. Figures may not sum due to rounding.
[2] Includes persons departing 'voluntarily' after enforcement action had been initiated against them and persons leaving under Assisted Voluntary Return Programmes run by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM).
[3] Data on dependants of asylum seekers removed have only been collected since April 2001.

Information on the number of asylum removals is published on a quarterly basis. Information for the first quarter (January to March) of 2002 will be published on 31 May 2002 on the Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate website http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he last received a letter from the chief constable of Merseyside concerning the future housing of asylum seekers in Landmark and Inn on the Park in Everton, Liverpool; and if he will make a statement. [44105]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 18 March 2002]:* A letter from the chief constable of Merseyside police concerning the future housing of asylum seekers in Landmark and Inn on the Park in Everton, Liverpool was received on 12 March 2002. We are reviewing the situation in the light of his comments.

Metropolitan Police (Racism)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many complaints of allegations of racism have been made against officers serving in the Metropolitan police in the last 12 months. [43015]

Mr. Denham: Data are collected centrally on a financial year basis for racial discrimination. In the 12 months from April 2000 to March 2001, the Metropolitan police recorded 352 complaints of racial discrimination.

Wheel Clamping

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he plans to introduce legislation on wheel clamping. [43012]

Mr. Denham: Under the Private Security Industry Act 2001 anyone engaged in wheel clamping by way of business or employment or for monetary gain (as well as other designated groups) will need to obtain a licence from the Security Industry Authority. The authority will begin operations in 2003 and will have wheel clamping as one of its priority areas.

Charity Commission

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the progress of the Charity Commission investigation into organisations that operate within charitable rules promoting Islamic fundamentalism and raising funds for proscribed organisations. [43480]

Angela Eagle: This is a matter for the Charity Commission as the Government Department responsible for charities in England and Wales. The Director of Operations at the Charity Commission wrote to my hon. Friend on 11 March 2002.

Correspondence

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the hon. Member for Walthamstow will receive a reply to his letters regarding Mr. M. Amin (A466239), sent on 12 October 2000 and 14 November 2001. [43774]

Angela Eagle: I wrote to my hon. Friend on 22 March 2002. I am sorry I did not send an earlier reply.

Animal Experiments

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to set up a royal commission inquiry into animal experiments. [43969]

Angela Eagle: The Government have not ruled out a Royal Commission but strongly believe that resources can best be used to make immediate improvements to the operation of the 1986 Act and to promote the fullest application of the 3Rs—replacing the use of animals with alternative methods; reducing the number of animals needed for a particular purpose and refining the procedures to minimise suffering.

In this context, the Animal Procedures Committee is currently considering the responses to a public consultation paper as part of its review of the cost/benefit assessment of applications for authority to use animals in scientific procedures. As part of this work, the committee plans to produce a statement on the validity of animal experiments. I expect to receive its report in the next few months.

The House of Lords has also established a Select Committee on the use of animals in scientific procedures and is currently gathering evidence.

Foster Carers

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he plans to allow non-working foster carers the opportunity to earn credits for national insurance purposes. [34630]

Mr. McCartney: I have been asked to reply.

Foster carers whose allowance contains a reward element are liable to pay national insurance contributions. Those who have no liability may choose to pay voluntary contributions. We will keep these arrangements under review as we do with all rules relating to benefits.

Golden Jubilee

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what events *(a)* he is and *(b)* other Ministers in his Department are planning to attend as part of the Golden Jubilee celebrations; and what events his Department is planning to arrange to celebrate the Golden Jubilee. [33247]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tessa Jowell), on 11 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 58W.

Passport Service

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the United Kingdom Passport Service intends to publish its corporate and business plan 2002 to 2007. [46320]

Angela Eagle: The United Kingdom Passport Service corporate and business plan has been published today and I am pleased to say that copies of the plan have been placed in the Library.

Criminal Records Bureau

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the Criminal Records Bureau intends to publish its corporate and business plan 2002 to 2007. [46321]

Angela Eagle: The Criminal Records Bureau corporate and business plan has been published today and I am pleased to say that copies of the plan have been placed in the Library.

Diabetes (Guidelines)

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to change his guidelines to the police on diabetes. [44489]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 19 March 2002]:* The guidelines on diabetes are currently under review by independent medical experts as part of the Home Office's National Recruitment Standards project. This work aims to ensure that occupational medical standards for police recruitment are evidence-based, job-related and not unfairly discriminatory. The new standards are expected to be applied consistently by the 43 forces of England and Wales.

The medical review will also take into account the implications of the proposed extension of the employment related provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act to the police.

Recommendations on proposed new medical standards should be available for consultation by July/August 2002.

Seafarer's Work Permit

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his policy is on the extension of the work permit regime to include seafarers serving on one-port voyages. [43595]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 20 March 2002]:* In June 2000, the work permit arrangements in place for non-European economic areas seafarers engaged in domestic ferry services and dredging operations were extended to include those engaged on scheduled domestic freight services. This has been enforced with effect from 1 April 2001, following a period of flexibility to allow shipping companies to adjust their staffing patterns to take account of the revised arrangements.

Consideration of whether to extend the work permit arrangements to cover one-port voyages is continuing. A decision will be made in due course in the light of all the available information, including legal advice received and consultations with officials in the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions.

Entitlement Cards

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if Her Majesty's Government are investigating *(a)* privacy-enhancing technologies and *(b)* secret-key certificates in its work on developing entitlement cards. [40864]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 7 March 2002]:* My officials have engaged in wide discussion in their work on entitlement cards. In particular, they have worked closely with the Office of the e-Envoy where relevant work on privacy enhancing technologies and secret-key certificates is being undertaken in the context of the development of electronic Government services.

Family Visit Visas

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give a breakdown by nationality of *(a)* acceptances and *(b)* refusals for family visit visa applications in the last six months for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [44443]

Mr. Bradshaw: I have been asked to reply.

We do not collect statistics on the nationalities of applicants.

Statistical information on the number of family visit applications issued and refused on a monthly basis is only available, from those posts which provide monthly statistical information (110 largest posts in 2001 and 111 in 2002). These figures are in the tables.

The remaining posts submit information on an annual basis; this is not broken down into months. The annual return will be issued later this month, with replies from missions expected at the end of April 2002.

Family visit applications

	Applications issued					
	September 2001	*October 2001*	*November 2001*	*December 2001*	*January 2002*	*February 2002*
1 Abijan	21	16	11	26	10	19
2 Abu Dhabi	36	15	35	21	28	36
3 Abuja	20	15	15	18	0	0
4 Accra	473	246	238	691	851	210
5 Addis Ababa	10	6	15	5	13	—
6 Algiers	0	0	0	0	0	0
7 Aimaly	25	12	31	22	0	7
8 Amman	62	69	46	9	67	56
9 Amsterdam	49	58	34	8	36	34
10 Ankara	9	5	26	8	26	17
11 Bahrain	38	19	18	29	34	25
12 Baku	11	15	24	41	19	19
13 Bangkok	45	34	32	20	38	77
14 Banjul	57	58	41	49	42	44
15 Beirut	108	64	63	90	33	59
16 Belgrade	118	167	254	446	209	229
17 Bogota	80	124	99	95	21	—
18 Bombay	557	528	433	380	489	665
19 Bratislava	92	112	153	116	74	134
20 Brussels	8	12	4	22	9	7
21 Bucharest	105	92	121	73	51	59
22 Budapest	1	7	2	0	6	8
23 Cairo	147	109	124	142	135	96
24 Calcutta	163	109	85	74	109	143
25 Canberra	7	14	16	15	20	12
26 Casablanca	83	77	84	99	126	126
27 Chicago	142	186	234	259	100	177
28 Colombo	82	61	48	65	66	63
29 Copenhagen	44	59	62	82	39	62
30 Dakar	0	3	2	2	1	0
31 Damascus	32	21	21	34	41	31
32 Dar Es Salaam	114	16	59	30	27	126
33 Dhaka	251	222	233	123	212	175
34 Doha	24	22	28	24	21	30
35 Dubai	91	55	56	31	24	27
36 Dublin	18	27	54	33	26	31
37 Dusseldorf	189	303	322	496	207	230
38 Ekaterinburg	10	11	23	17	11	19
39 Freetown[1]	—	—	—	—	36	40
40 Geneva	105	49	49	78	73	—
41 Georgetown	47	35	36	43	73	—
42 Guangzhou	105	68	134	128	94	108
43 Hanoi	20	7	13	6	—	—
44 Harare	7	4	2	4	5	—
45 Havana	4	5	4	5	1	11
46 Hong Kong	34	28	45	40	38	—
47 Islamabad	999	399	604	774	1,037	1,176
48 Istanbul	223	233	205	205	210	247
49 Jakarta	47	52	69	63	39	25
50 Jedda	18	19	12	8	21	33
51 Jerusalem	25	14	42	36	32	20
52 Kampala	249	73	72	101	59	—
53 Karachi	292	169	188	127	—	—
54 Kathmandu	16	57	26	56	13	24

Family visit applications

	Applications issued					
	September 2001	*October 2001*	*November 2001*	*December 2001*	*January 2002*	*February 2002*
55 Khartoum	27	25	7	24	20	14
56 Kiev	107	93	145	121	73	93
57 Kingston	66	75	76	67	61	62
58 Kuala Lumpur	11	7	3	7	7	6
59 Kuwait	7	5	12	11	8	12
60 Lagos	2,727	723	1,267	165	138	691
61 Lahore	139	223	299	214	317	—
62 Lima	26	23	40	32	23	39
63 Los Angeles	126	125	206	97	174	149
64 Luanda	3	8	6	2	0	—
65 Lusaka	64	51	70	83	33	58
66 Madras	180	206	181	199	275	359
67 Madrid	51	30	48	54	45	—
68 Manila	26	42	26	5	27	—
69 Mexico City	0	0	0	0	0	0
70 Minsk	26	25	25	29	16	20
71 Moscow	227	405	321	292	229	258
72 Muscat	85	70	62	113	96	78
73 Nairobi	388	252	279	234	301	183
74 New Delhi	1,027	416	309	353	601	665
75 New York	361	464	632	766	548	—
76 Nicosia	220	178	192	241	240	195
77 Oslo	40	58	74	73	44	—
78 Ottawa	211	247	287	187	137	136
79 Paris	345	358	75	288	135	173
80 Peking	136	182	343	276	341	341
81 Port Louis	113	101	142	144	79	173
82 Port of Spain	3	8	3	4	5	—
83 Prague	0	0	0	0	0	0
84 Pretoria	1	3	7	3	8	9
85 Quito	18	14	6	12	20	22
86 Riga	3	6	16	14	7	—
87 Riyadh	18	6	10	0	0	—
88 Rome	72	102	143	252	114	72
89 Sana'a	4	5	1	5	8	—
90 Santo Domingo	1	1	1	1	67	51
91 Sarajevo	105	68	75	64	79	86
92 Shanghai	54	48	73	84	14	12
93 Singapore	10	17	32	16	49	83
94 Skopje	38	52	96	102	91	110
95 Sofia	87	124	211	162	69	63
96 St. Petersburg	54	0	93	94	0	—
97 Stockholm	91	116	106	89	81	114
98 Taipei	0	0	0	0	0	0
99 Tashkent	22	4	7	11	6	6
100 Tbilisi	0	0	0	1	0	—
101 Tehran	381	344	381	378	0	0
102 Tirana	33	39	70	41	21	28
103 Tokyo	6	9	10	15	3	12
104 Tripoli	163	119	28	34	67	—
105 Tunis	98	63	60	77	76	64
106 Vienna	43	54	58	80	26	26
107 Warsaw	0	0	3	2	1	—
108 Washington	0	0	0	0	0	0
109 Wellington	0	0	0	0	0	—
110 Yaounde	22	24	44	21	13	13
111 Zagreb	54	113	168	195	81	104
Total	13,633	9,912	11,476	11,203	9,826	9,317

	Applications refused					
	September 2001	*October 2001*	*November 2001*	*December 2001*	*January 2002*	*February 2002*
1 Abijan	2	1	0	0	1	1
2 Abu Dhabi	13	6	1	3	8	4
3 Abuja	66	62	56	57	0	0
4 Accra	960	1,039	1,634	926	769	726
5 Addis Ababa	5	5	8	3	17	—
6 Algiers	0	0	0	0	0	0
7 Aimaly	0	1	2	0	0	0

	Applications refused					
	September 2001	*October 2001*	*November 2001*	*December 2001*	*January 2002*	*February 2002*
8 Amman	2	4	1	1	3	3
9 Amsterdam	1	3	2	3	2	0
10 Ankara	0	0	1	1	2	6
11 Bahrain	2	1	2	1	1	0
12 Baku	0	1	4	1	0	4
13 Bangkok	40	40	27	9	21	27
14 Banjul	9	24	12	7	3	10
15 Beirut	2	2	1	2	1	0
16 Belgrade	4	5	3	0	1	4
17 Bogota	11	21	19	4	12	—
18 Bombay	235	161	156	103	152	158
19 Bratislava	3	4	3	2	2	2
20 Brussels	0	0	0	0	0	0
21 Bucharest	5	0	18	7	10	15
22 Budapest	0	0	1	0	2	1
23 Cairo	19	6	10	1	15	22
24 Calcutta	3	7	2	0	1	0
25 Canberra	1	0	0	0	1	0
26 Casablanca	20	5	3	4	6	4
27 Chicago	1	0	1	2	1	0
28 Colombo	67	69	67	51	29	28
29 Copenhagen	12	5	3	0	4	3
30 Dakar	1	1	3	3	0	4
31 Damascus	3	4	6	2	1	7
32 Dar Es Salaam	10	10	0	0	0	27
33 Dhaka	278	327	383	248	227	123
34 Doha	4	5	6	6	1	2
35 Dubai	31	51	38	19	28	18
36 Dublin	0	0	10	1	3	8
37 Dusseldorf	1	10	4	6	9	15
38 Ekaterinburg	1	1	1	2	1	0
39 Freetown[1]	—	—	—	—	37	32
40 Geneva	4	8	5	5	4	—
41 Georgetown	10	5	14	18	4	—
42 Guangzhou	25	15	13	12	23	21
43 Hanoi	2	5	3	3	—	—
44 Harare	1	1	0	0	4	—
45 Havana	1	0	0	1	1	0
46 Hong Kong	2	4	5	4	5	—
47 Islamabad	902	40	253	95	382	832
48 Istanbul	44	38	50	52	99	111
49 Jakarta	2	4	2	1	10	8
50 Jedda	1	24	5	2	1	7
51 Jerusalem	2	0	4	0	0	0
52 Kampala	28	9	28	20	28	—
53 Karachi	39	0	0	1	—	—
54 Kathmandu	7	8	24	17	22	26
55 Khartoum	14	15	6	9	13	9
56 Kiev	19	12	12	7	4	10
57 Kingston	16	8	18	21	16	12
58 Kuala Lumpur	1	1	2	1	1	3
59 Kuwait	15	5	5	8	6	6
60 Lagos	273	291	324	155	182	311
61 Lahore	89	98	109	49	90	—
62 Lima	1	0	1	6	3	1
63 Los Angeles	2	5	2	2	2	1
64 Luanda	2	3	0	1	1	—
65 Lusaka	10	28	25	39	27	3
66 Madras	25	30	14	26	22	17
67 Madrid	0	1	0	0	0	—
68 Manila	42	70	81	49	52	—
69 Mexico City	0	0	0	0	0	0
70 Minsk	0	0	2	0	2	0
71 Moscow	11	11	4	6	8	2
72 Muscat	5	6	1	3	0	5
73 Nairobi	35	41	57	53	38	21
74 New Delhi	522	460	382	394	372	396
75 New York	1	3	3	4	11	—
76 Nicosia	2	14	6	4	2	0
77 Oslo	0	0	1	0	3	—
78 Ottawa	1	3	5	0	5	4
79 Paris	2	2	0	0	0	2

	Applications refused					
	September 2001	*October 2001*	*November 2001*	*December 2001*	*January 2002*	*February 2002*
80 Peking	19	14	17	16	23	29
81 Port Louis	24	27	10	11	9	8
82 Port of Spain	1	0	1	0	0	—
83 Prague	0	0	0	0	0	0
84 Pretoria	2	9	5	10	7	0
85 Quito	1	2	4	1	5	1
86 Riga	0	0	0	1	0	—
87 Riyadh	9	4	9	0	0	—
88 Rome	4	1	1	0	1	1
89 Sana'a	4	1	13	6	14	—
90 Santo Domingo	0	0	1	0	0	3
91 Sarajevo	3	3	3	0	6	6
92 Shanghai	7	2	6	2	0	0
93 Singapore	0	0	0	0	28	19
94 Skopje	5	4	8	2	28	11
95 Sofia	15	22	17	10	6	4
96 St. Petersburg	0	0	7	8	0	—
97 Stockholm	0	6	0	2	3	0
98 Taipei	0	0	0	0	0	0
99 Tashkent	0	0	0	1	0	0
100 Tbilisi	0	0	0	3	0	—
101 Tehran	56	42	29	43	0	0
102 Tirana	1	8	3	2	0	1
103 Tokyo	1	0	2	5	1	2
104 Tripoli	38	13	16	15	30	—
105 Tunis	50	31	22	13	24	27
106 Vienna	1	0	0	2	26	26
107 Warsaw	0	1	1	3	3	—
108 Washington	0	0	0	0	0	0
109 Wellington	0	0	0	0	0	—
110 Yaounde	4	2	1	1	4	4
111 Zagreb	10	3	6	6	5	5
Total	4,225	3,344	4,136	2,706	3,037	3,209

[1] From January 2002

Note:

"—" indicate information not yet received from posts

Children's Rights

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the United Kingdom will ratify the European Convention on the exercise of children's rights. [43939]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I have been asked to reply.

Of the 43 member states of the Council of Europe only Cyprus, Greece, Latvia, Poland and Slovenia have ratified the Convention on the Exercise of Children's Rights. A new Council of Europe Convention on Contact with Children is expected to be adopted shortly. Both of these conventions include provisions for children who may wish to be heard or represented as a party to the proceedings so the Government intend to look at both of them together.

Public Transport (Assaults)

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many assaults there have been on *(a)* crew and *(b)* passengers while travelling on public services in Staffordshire in the last 12 months. [43958]

Ms Keeble: I have been asked to reply.

In returns to the Department, bus operators in Staffordshire reported 12 assaults on bus crew in the year 2000; data are not yet available for 2001. Information concerning assaults on bus passengers in Staffordshire is not available. The British Transport police have advised that in the last 12 months five assaults on staff and seven on passengers were reported on the railways in Staffordshire.

Dog Ownership

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the Government plans to introduce licensing for dog ownership. [43966]

Mr. Meacher: I have been asked to reply.

The Government do not plan to introduce licensing for dog ownership—the previous dog licensing system ceased in 1988 because it cost more to administer than the revenue it produced. DEFRA promotes responsible dog ownership through byelaws, education and publicity.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Global Crossing

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the dates of meetings that *(a)* special advisers and *(b)* Ministers in his Department have had since 1 January 1999 with representatives of Global Crossing; and if he will make a statement. [34058]

Mr. MacShane: No Ministers of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, or their special advisers, have had meetings with representatives of Global Crossing since 1 January 1999.

Air Conditioning

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which consultant was used to advise on the installation of air conditioning during the recent refurbishment of GCHQ. [41163]

Mr. Straw: The most recent refurbishment work at a GCHQ premises, involving the provision of air-conditioning, engaged the services of W. S. Atkins as consultant.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether an installer capable of installing not-in-kind air conditioning was invited to quote for the recent refurbishment contract for GCHQ; and if he will make a statement. [41165]

Mr. Straw: In line with Government policy, contracts for GCHQ are let on the basis of a main contractor providing goods and services via sub-contractors, (including in this case the provision of air conditioning). It is for those specialists to determine solutions which may, or may not, be on a like for like basis.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what measures were taken to ensure that the consultant advising on the installation of air conditioning during the recent refurbishment of GCHQ was aware of the Government's policy on the use of hydrofluorocarbon refrigerants in air conditioning; and if he will make a statement on the measures taken by the consultant to source practical and safe alternatives to hydrofluorocarbon-based air conditioning. [41164]

Mr. Straw: GCHQ ensured that the consultant complied fully with Government policy on refrigerants, which supports the phase-out timetable for ozone-depleting agents—including hydrochlorofluorocarbon (HCFC) and chlorofluorocarbon (CFC)—as agreed in the Montreal Protocol of 1987, and the subsequent revisions laid down by European Commission Regulation 594–91. The refrigerant chosen for the air conditioning plant used in the refurbishment was R407C (which is HFC-based and is therefore not ozone-depleting) and all other materials were CFC-free. This is acceptable under the relevant legislation.

Staff Numbers

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many staff have been employed by his Department in each of the last 10 years. [42467]

Mr. Bradshaw: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office on 19 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 296W.

Weapons of Mass Destruction

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which countries have weapons of mass destruction. [43089]

Mr. Bradshaw: Under the terms of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, the United Kingdom, the United States, France, China and Russia are legally entitled to possess nuclear weapons.

Additionally, India and Pakistan have tested nuclear devices. We continue to encourage Israel to resolve international concerns about its nuclear status by acceding to the nuclear non-proliferation treaty as a non-nuclear weapons state. We also know that Iraq possesses significant biological and chemical weapons capabilities and, were UN sanctions to be lifted, we believe it could develop a nuclear weapon within five years.

There are four States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention (The US, Russia, India and another State Party) that have declared possession of chemical weapons. They are currently in the process of destroying them in accordance with their obligations under the convention.

We are also aware of, and very concerned by, persistent reports that Iran, The Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Libya and Syria are pursuing programmes to develop WMD and the means for their delivery.

Israel

Richard Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of Israel concerning the implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1322 with respect to adhering to the Fourth Geneva Convention. [43485]

Mr. Bradshaw: The UK along with our EU partners reaffirmed the applicability of the Fourth Geneva Convention to the Occupied Territories, including East Jerusalem at the reconvened conference of High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention in Geneva on 5 December 2001, and, in both the Conference Declaration and in the EU statement, condemned the indiscriminate and disproportionate use of force to contain violence, in line with UN Security Council Resolution 1322.

Richard Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what investigations he has made into Israeli forces' detention, since 12 March, of the British citizen Patricia Rantisi and their occupation of her Ramallah apartment; and what representations he is making to the Government of Israel on the subject. [44672]

Mr. Bradshaw: Our embassy in Tel Aviv have raised concerns with the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) about the plight of all British nationals in the occupied territories. Consular officials in Jerusalem kept in regular contact with British nationals trapped in Ramallah between 12 and 15 March, including speaking by telephone to Mrs. Rantisi.

On 14 March, the Permanent Under Secretary of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office delivered a demarche in the name of my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary to the Israeli ambassador to London calling for IDF co-operation over the plight of British nationals in Ramallah. The embassy in Tel Aviv has also raised Mrs. Rantisi's plight with the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Contracts

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the 30 largest contracts awarded by his Department from *(a)* May 1997 to April 1998, *(b)* May 1998 to April 1999, *(c)* May 1999 to April 2000, *(d)* May 2000 to April 2001 and *(e)* May 2001 to the latest date for which figures are available, stating in each case the values of the contracts and the companies with which the contracts were placed. [43674]

Mr. MacShane: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for North Tayside (Mr. Peter Wishart) on 20 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 385–86W.

Civil Servants (Education)

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proportion *(a)* in the last year for which figures are available, *(b)* five years ago and *(c)* 10 years ago of senior civil servants in his Department attended (i) independent and (ii) state schools; and if he will make a statement. [43856]

Mr. Bradshaw: The information requested cannot be provided except at disproportionate cost. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office's manpower system does hold data on education details but information on the schools and type of school that staff attended is incomplete. In its recruitment policy, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office aims to reflect the diversity of British society.

British Detainees (Guantanamo Bay)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has received clarification from the detaining power as to the legal status of British detainees at Camp X-Ray; and if British detainees at Camp X-Ray may be removed to other jurisdictions without his knowledge and approval. [44476]

Mr. Bradshaw: We continue to ask the US authorities for clarification of the position of British detainees in Guantanamo Bay, including their status and the legal procedure to which they might be subject.

In response to our approaches, the US Government has given us the assurance that they will treat all of the detainees humanely and consistently within the principles of the Geneva Convention.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether *(a)* the UK Government and *(b)* its agencies has been offered access to evidence gathered from British detainees at Camp X-Ray by the detaining power. [44457]

Mr. Bradshaw: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave him on 12 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 867W.

Drug Trafficking

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer to the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) of 11 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 691W, on drug trafficking, what anti-drugs assistance has been given to countries in south-west and central Asia; and what assistance has been given for border security and surveillance in those countries. [44711]

Mr. MacShane: We have allocated approximately £4.5 million for counter-narcotics projects in central and south-east Asia in financial year 2002–03.

This region has already benefited significantly from FCO funding. The main recipients for the financial years 1998–2002 have been Iran (approximately £2.9 million, mostly via UNDCP) and the five Central Asian Republics (approximately £500,000).

FCO overseas anti-drugs assistance is targeted at improving law enforcement capacities in the main producing and trafficking countries which pose a direct drugs treat to the UK through the provision of equipment and training.

Creche Facilities

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what creche facilities are provided by his Department; and at what cost. [44866]

Mr. Bradshaw: The FCO opened its first workplace nursery on 3 September 2001. It can take up to 36 children. Capital costs were in the region of £450,000 (£375,000 for construction costs, £50,000 for professional fees and £25,000 for furniture and equipment). The Cabinet Office provided £150,000 towards these costs from the Modernising Government Fund. Parents pay between £100-£120 per week, depending on their grade and the age of the child. It is envisaged that an initial subsidy towards running costs of up to £85,000 per annum, reducing gradually over a 2–3 year period, will be needed while the nursery builds up to full capacity. The objective of setting up the nursery was to demonstrate a long-term commitment to helping staff combine work and family.

The FCO is also an employer partner in the Buffer Bear network of nurseries, with access to 10 priority places. The cost of a place varies depending on, among other things, the location of the nursery and staff are offered a subsidy of £15-£35 per week depending on their grade. These nurseries are based at key commuter points and offer choice for parents who do not wish to bring their children into London.

The FCO currently has two under-two places at the First Steps nursery in Marsham street. These are being phased out, before the FCO withdraws from the contract in December 2002. The cost of a place for an under-two is £223.14 per week. As with our in-house nursery, parents pay between £100-£120 per week, depending on their grade. The FCO subsidy for the coming year will be in the region of £14,000.

Staff are also eligible to use the Westminster Holiday Playscheme, which caters for 5 to 12-year-olds during school holidays, at three sites in central London. The cost is £26 per day, which is split equally between the FCO and the parent. The subsidy for FY 2001–02 will be in the region of £4,000. Places are offered on a first come, first served basis, which means the number of users varies each year.

The FCO is currently conducting a review of child care support that is offered to staff.

Nigeria

Phil Sawford: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made to the Nigerian Government in support of Safiyatu Hussaini's appeal against the sentence of death by stoning for the crime of adultery. [43972]

Mr. MacShane: We have repeatedly made clear our concerns about the case of Safiyatu Hussaini. Our high commission in Abuja is monitoring the situation closely and is in contact with local organisations involved in the case. Ms Hussaini has the support of a strong defence team, supported by the Nigerian Human Rights Commission and local non-governmental organisations.

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of Nigeria regarding the woman due to be stoned to death; and if he will make a statement. [45004]

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth affairs what representations he has made to the Government of Nigeria about the decision by Sharia law to stone to death Safiyati Husseini. [44896]

Mr. MacShane: The Nigerian Government are well aware of the Government's concerns over the sentence of death by stoning passed on Safiyatu Husseini.

Ms Husseini's case is currently before Sokoto State Sharia Court of Appeal, which has said it will give its decision on the appeal on 25 March. If the sentence is confirmed, there is scope for further appeals. Ms Husseini is supported by a strong legal team and the Nigerian Human Rights Commission.

The British high commission in Abuja is monitoring the situation closely, and has made the Government's concerns over the case known at a number of levels to the Nigerian authorities.

Zimbabwe

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what estimate he has made of the numbers of British passport holders who may need to be rescued in the event of a major humanitarian crisis in Zimbabwe; [44934]

(2) what contingency plans the Government have made to rescue British passport holders by air in the event of a major humanitarian crisis in Zimbabwe. [44933]

Mr. Bradshaw: There are approximately 26,000 British nationals registered with the British high commission in Harare. We have a civil contingency plan for Zimbabwe, as we do for many other countries. Any evacuation would be a last resort and by whatever means available at the time.

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he has taken to demonstrate the Government's position on recognising the result of the Zimbabwean elections, with particular reference to *(a)* diplomatic relations and *(b)* other protocols with Zimbabwe. [45789]

Mr. Straw: I refer the right hon. Member to my statements to the House of 14 and 21 March. We do not recognise the result of the presidential election in Zimbabwe as being a true reflection of the will of the Zimbabwean people. As a signal of our conviction that the election was neither free nor fair, the British high commissioner in Harare did not attend the inauguration ceremony for Mr. Mugabe on 17 March.

India (Peter Bleach)

Mr. Forth: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations at ministerial level have been made to the Government of India regarding Peter Bleach; what the response of the Indian Government were; and if he will make a statement. [45411]

Mr. Bradshaw: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary wrote to the Indian Home Minister, L. K. Advani, about Mr. Bleach's case on 13 December 2001. The Prime Minister also raised it with Mr. Advani during his visit to India in January 2002.

I discussed Mr. Bleach's case with the Chief Minister of West Bengal, Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, on 22 February 2002. Most recently, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary reiterated our concern about Mr. Bleach's continued detention and poor health with Mr. Advani on 27 February 2002.

Since December 2000 we have requested that Peter Bleach be released on grounds of fair and equal treatment with the five Russians convicted with him for the same offences, and who were released in July 2000. The Government of India's response has been that the nature of Mr. Bleach's offences was different: we do not accept this. We have asked the Government of India to reconsider Mr. Bleach's case and to take into account the deterioration in his health since he has been diagnosed with tuberculosis and bronco-pneumonia.

Gibraltar

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment was made of precedents for the EU's conditional offer to the citizens of Gibraltar agreed to at Barcelona. [44977]

Peter Hain *[holding answer 21 March. 2002]:* At Barcelona EU Heads of State and Government welcomed the relaunch of the Brussels Process, underlined their support for the efforts of the British and Spanish Governments to conclude a comprehensive agreement before the summer; and invited the European Commission to explore ways in which the EU could underpin any agreement reached. It is for the Commission to consider how best to carry this remit forward.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the implications for Gibraltar of the Barcelona Summit. [45577]

Peter Hain: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Belfast, North (Mr. Nigel Dodds) on 20 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 389W.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he plans to visit Gibraltar. [46224]

Peter Hain: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply from my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary to the hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir Patrick Cormack) on 14 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 29.

Macedonia

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he plans to present the Stabilisation and Association Agreement between the European communities and FYR Macedonia to Parliament. [45241]

Peter Hain: A Command Paper and an explanatory memorandum for the Macedonian Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the European Union was deposited in Parliament on 1 March.

United States

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what meetings were arranged for the Department to meet the US Assistant Secretary for Defence during his recent visit to London this week; and if he will make a statement on the outcome of the meetings. [45695]

Mr. Straw: On 18 March the Assistant Secretary of Defence attended two separate meetings with senior officials from the FCO. These were part of a series of discussions in Whitehall.

Iraq

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what consideration has been given to the offer of the Iraqi Government to allow British weapon inspectors into Iraq; and if he will make a statement. [43912]

Mr. Straw: The UK Government have received no direct approach from the Government of Iraq, although we are aware that an Iraqi spokesman announced such an offer through the state-controlled Iraqi media. The demand of the international community is for UN weapons inspectors to be allowed into Iraq. They have built up a vast amount of knowledge about Iraq's weapons and know where to look. United Nations Security Council resolutions also require Iraq to allow the weapons inspectors full, unconditional access at any time. If Iraq truly has nothing to hide it will let them in on this basis. I note from the Iraqi spokesman's announcement that the British team would be allowed to visit only sites named in advance. We are looking for Iraqi disarmament, not yet more propaganda stunts.

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to obtain *(a)* UN and *(b)* NATO authorisation to allow a United Kingdom military attack on Iraq. [45159]

Mr. Bradshaw: No decision has been taken to launch military action against Iraq, and so the question of whether authorisation is needed does not arise.

WALES

Press Releases

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many press releases were issued by his Department *(a)* between 1 May and 31 December 1997 and *(b)* in each year from 1998 to 2001 inclusive. [40041]

Mr. Paul Murphy: A monthly breakdown of Welsh Office press releases in 1997 is no longer available. In that year as a whole, the Welsh Office issued 650 press releases. The Welsh Office issued 774 press releases in 1998 and 776 in 1999. Since its creation in July 1999, the Wales Office has issued 30 press releases in 1999, 100 press releases in 2000 and 86 press releases in 2001.

Coalfields Regeneration Trust

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has had with the First Secretary of the National Assembly for Wales on the work of the Coalfields Regeneration Trust with particular reference to *(a)* the Cynon Valley and *(b)* Wales. [44790]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I have regular discussions with the First Secretary on a range of issues affecting Wales.

The National Assembly funds the Coalfields Regeneration Trust and it has established itself as a leading funder and partner in coalfield regeneration in Wales. All of the £3.46 million available for Wales during the first three years has been committed to nearly 60 projects.

I understand that in the Cynon Valley the Trust has funded many projects, including assistance with the refurbishment of the Cwmaman Public Hall and building alterations to Hirwaun YMCA.

Ministerial Visit (Czech Republic)

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what modes of transport he used to travel to the Czech Republic in the week beginning 11 March; what the total cost was of his travel expenditure; how many officials accompanied him; what the total cost of the visit was; and how long he took to travel there and to return. [45280]

Mr. Touhig: None: my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has made no official visit to the Czech Republic.

However, I undertook a visit to the Czech Republic from 11 to 13 March. The main objective of my visit was to meet and to support a trade mission organised by Wales Trade International. The trade mission comprised seven Welsh companies, drawn from throughout Wales, each of which was establishing first contacts in the Czech Republic. In supporting the trade mission, I highlighted the benefits—for individuals and for firms—of a wider Europe, both for the applicant countries and for the UK as a whole, and for Wales in particular.

The further objectives of my visit included confirming the United Kingdom's support for the enlargement of the EU and the sharing of experience of regenerating a former coal-mining and steel-making region.

I travelled to the Czech Republic by train at a cost of £816.60. I was accompanied by my private secretary and by one senior policy official. The total cost of the visit

was £3,174.99. The outward journey took 18 and a half hours and the return journey took 19 and a half hours. My outward journey was made on a Sunday; both journeys entailed travelling overnight.

PRIVY COUNCIL

Flexible Working

Mr. Bercow: To ask the President of the Council how many and what proportion of the staff of his Department are *(a)* job sharing, *(b)* term working and *(c)* engaged in another form of flexible working. [42420]

Mr. Robin Cook: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Twickenham on 14 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 631W, about job sharing in my Department. Currently three members of my staff are engaged in flexible working although none are term working.

Staff in my Department regularly work from home subject to operational requirements and based on individual circumstances.

Modernisation

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the President of the Council if, in his proposals for modernisation of the House, he will consider *(a)* the House providing information about the work of the Scottish Parliament and devolved assemblies within the UK and *(b)* requesting the same bodies to provide information about the work of the House on a reciprocal basis in their own information centres. [46273]

Mr. Robin Cook: These are valuable suggestions which will be kept in mind as work on improving the facilities for visitors progresses.

Parental Leave Directive

Mr. Bercow: To ask the President of the Council what estimate he has made of the *(a)* financial costs and *(b)* benefits to his Department of the Parental Leave Directive. [42479]

Mr. Robin Cook: Thus far, no member of staff in my Department has sought parental leave. No estimate of the financial costs has been made as these would differ according to individual circumstances.

The potential benefits to the Privy Council Office of the Parental Leave Directive are considered to be: experienced staff can be retained by offering extra time away from work to care for their children; improved staff morale and performance through a better work and life balance; and improved planning of staff absences.

MINISTER FOR WOMEN

Pensions

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Minister for Women what recent discussions she has had with Ministers in the Department for Work and Pensions on pension rights for women. [43807]

Ms Hewitt: Last week I wrote to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions highlighting the work that his Department has carried out in ensuring that pension reforms had improved women's rights.

Currently over 1.1 million female pensioners are in receipt of the minimum income guarantee and the new pension credit will benefit lower income pensioners, of whom two-thirds are women.

I also asked my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions to ensure that his officials continue to liaise with officials from the Women and Equality Unit so that they can remain informed of the progress on pensions reforms as they affect women and that the development and implementation of pensions policy is analysed by gender so that potential benefits for women can be identified.

PRIME MINISTER

Select Committees

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Prime Minister on how many occasions he has been invited to appear before a Select Committee since 1997. [37692]

The Prime Minister: Since 1997, I have received four formal invitations to appear before a Select Committee.

Equipment Leasing

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the equipment leasing arrangements entered into by his Office in each of the last four years; and what the cost is to public funds in each case. [39085]

The Prime Minister: Equipment should be leased when it offers better value for money than direct purchase bearing in mind the products whole life costs and quality to meet (but not exceed) the requirement. These costs include maintenance, running and disposal costs, not simply initial costs.

Leasing costs for office equipment incurred in each of the last four years are as follows:

	£
2 May 1997 to 31 March 1998	107,892
1998–99	81,885
1999–2000	136,204
2000–01	142,138

Lord Levy

Richard Ottaway: To ask the Prime Minister which ministers of foreign Governments Lord Levy has met at his request in the last six months. [41864]

The Prime Minister: In his capacity as the Prime Minister's envoy, Lord Levy meets a range of contacts, including Ministers of foreign Governments. In the last six months, Lord Levy has discussed the Middle East peace process with Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, the Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat, Palestinian Authority Minister for Planning and International Co-operation Nabil Sha'ath, King Abdullah of Jordan, Former

Jordanian Foreign Minister Abdul Illah Khatib, Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmed Maher, French Foreign Minister Hubert Vedrine, German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer, Moroccan foreign Minister Mohammed Benaissa, Omani Foreign Minister Yusuf Bin Alawi, and Tunisian Foreign Minister Habib Bin Yahia.

He also met President Hugo Chavez of Venezuela, and the Venezuelan Vice President and Foreign Minister to discuss bilateral relations.

Lord Levy has also met a number of more junior Ministers in his role as the Prime Minister's envoy.

Parental Leave Directive

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Prime Minister what estimate he has made of the *(a)* financial costs and *(b)* benefits to his Office of the Parental Leave Directive. [42483]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my hon. Friend, the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office today.

Age Discrimination

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Prime Minister what his Office's policy is towards age discrimination. [42583]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my hon. Friend, the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office today.

Safiyatu Hussaini

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Prime Minister if he raised the case of Safiyatu Hussaini during his meetings with representatives of the Nigerian Government in February. [44895]

The Prime Minister: The case was not raised during my meetings, which focused on other issues.

The Nigerian Government is well aware of the Government's concerns over the sentence of death by stoning passed on Safiyatu Hussaini. We have made our concerns over the case known at a number of levels within the Nigerian federal system.

Ms Hussaini's case is currently before Sokoto State Sharia Court of Appeal, which has said it will give its decision on the appeal on 25 March. If the sentence is confirmed, there is scope for further appeals thereafter. Ms Hussaini is supported by a strong legal team and the Nigerian Human Rights Commission.

The British High Commission in Abuja is continuing to monitor the situation closely.

Phase Three Implementation

Norman Baker: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the implications for Government policy of the implementation of Phase Three. [45890]

The Prime Minister: The Government's policy agenda focuses on sustaining a strong economy and making improvements in productivity and enterprise, continuing welfare reform and increasing social justice, driving through public service reform particularly in education, health, crime and transport, and taking a leading place at the centre of Europe and the wider international community.

Unpaid Advisers

Mr. Beith: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the names of the unpaid advisers appointed by him since June 1997, stating in each case *(a)* the date of their appointment, *(b)* the duration of their appointment and *(c)* the project or projects on which they have been engaged. [43373]

The Prime Minister: At 25 March, I had appointed the following unpaid advisers to work with the new Forward Strategy Unit (FSU):

Arnab Banerji, Chief Investment Officer of F&C Management Ltd.;

Nick Lovegrove, Partner at McKinsey's;

Penny Hughes, formerly President of Coca Cola Great Britain and Ireland, currently non-executive director of Vodafone plc and Trinity Mirror plc;

Adair Turner, Vice Chairman of Merrill Lynch.

Lord Birt, my unpaid strategy adviser, has an over-arching role on a number of projects supported by the FSU.

Previous unpaid advisers who have been appointed by me and the issues on which they advised are Lord Stevenson (education), Lord Simon (the civil service), and Lord Birt (crime).

Rehabilitation International's Charter

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Prime Minister what response he has made to representations on the Government's support for Rehabilitation International's Charter for the Third Millennium, presented to him on 5 July 2000 and the adoption by the United Nations General Assembly of the Charter's call for a UN Convention on the Rights of Disabled People; and if he will *(a)* publish the response in the *Official Report* and *(b)* place copies in the Library. [45511]

The Prime Minister: I have received representations on this matter.

I welcomed Rehabilitation International's Charter for the Third Millennium in July 2000. In doing so, I said that I believed that it would form the basis of a global consensus on priorities for at least the next decade. This absolutely remains the Government's view.

At the UN General Assembly in November a resolution calling for an international convention on disability, as envisaged in the charter, was adopted. The resolution has now established an ad hoc committee to consider proposals for an international convention on the rights and dignities of disabled people. It is likely that the committee will meet this summer. We will want to work closely with other on the committee to ensure that the convention is clearly focused and its aims and objectives are consistent with member states' national interests and responsibilities.

In addition, there have been two further important international developments.

The Irish Resolution at the Commission on Human Rights (CHR) in 2000 has led to a study on the adequacy of existing international standards to protect the rights of people with disabilities. Its findings are due soon and are expected to inform the Irish draft at this year's CHR.

We also await the report of the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Social Development for Disability, Mr. Bengt Lindquist, who is monitoring the implementation of the UN Standard Rules as well as looking at the question of an international convention. The Government support the activities of the Special Rapporteur and have contributed £20,000 to further his important work.

In the meantime, the Government continue to focus here on action to take forward our commitment to comprehensive and enforceable civil rights for disabled people in the UK. This policy presently ensures that the UK is ahead of many other countries in legislating for and promoting civil rights for disabled people.

Strategic Rail Authority

Mrs. May: To ask the Prime Minister what discussions his Policy Unit has had with the SRA on the development of the SRA's Capacity Utilisation Strategy. [45709]

The Prime Minister: Officials have meetings with a range of people in the course of their work. It is not the normal practice of the Government to release details of such meetings or discussions.

Illegal Meat Imports

Mr. Alan Reid: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on departmental responsibility for *(a)* preventing illegal meat imports entering the United Kingdom and *(b)* detecting meat imports which have entered the United Kingdom illegally. [46105]

The Prime Minister: DEFRA has lead responsibility for animal health controls on imports of meat working with the Food Standards Agency, HM Customs, the devolved Administrations, and local and port health authorities.

Gibraltar

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister when he plans to visit Gibraltar. [46185]

The Prime Minister: I have no immediate plans to do so.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister when he last spoke to the Chief Minister of Gibraltar. [46184]

The Prime Minister: I have not spoken to the Chief Minister of Gibraltar. My right hon. Friends the Foreign Secretary and the Minister for Europe met the Chief Minister of Gibraltar most recently on 25 January and are in regular contact with him in writing and through the Governor of Gibraltar.

Correspondence

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Prime Minister what his target time will be in 2002–03 for *(a)* Ministers to reply to letters from hon. Members and *(b)* officials in his office to reply to letters received directly from members of the public. [44949]

The Prime Minister: The effective handling of correspondence is an issue to which I, and ministerial colleagues, attach great importance. My office takes action on all letter received within 15 working days.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

McKenzie Friends

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department under what circumstances a McKenzie Friend *(a)* can and *(b)* cannot be used in court; and in which type of courts they are used. [44804]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The judgment in the 1999 Court of Appeal case of R. *v.* Bow County Court, ex parte Pelling confirms that litigants in person should be allowed the help of a McKenzie Friend in public proceedings, held in open court or in chambers, unless the judge is satisfied that fairness and the interests of justice do not require it.

In an open court hearing there usually must be some justification established if a person is not to have the benefit of a McKenzie Friend, or some evidence that the McKenzie Friend has acted or is acting inappropriately at the hearing which makes it reasonable to deprive the litigant of the assistance which would otherwise be permitted.

Where the proceedings are held in private then the nature of those proceedings (which make it appropriate for the hearing to be in private) may make it undesirable in the interests of justice for a McKenzie Friend to assist.

Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service

Simon Hughes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what proportion of the children's guardians who work for CAFCASS have been allowed to access the CAFCASS IT system; and if she will make a statement. [46011]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The CAFCASS IT system is available to all office-based employed guardians but not yet to newly employed home-based guardians who accepted an offer of employment last summer.

Simon Hughes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the estimated date is for CAFCASS to be 'e' ready in line with targets set for public bodies; and if she will make a statement. [46013]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The CAFCASS Corporate Plan states that CAFCASS is contributing to the 'e' Government agenda through increased capacity, where appropriate, for services to be delivered by electronic means by 2005. CAFCASS is developing an IT infrastructure which facilitates efficient and effective exchange of information between agencies in the family justice system.

Simon Hughes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what frequency of board meetings the CAFCASS Support Infrastructure Project Initiation document specifies; and on how many occasions the board met between July 2001 and January 2002. [46009]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Support Infrastructure Project Initiation document did not specifically state a frequency of meeting, nor is a specific frequency mandated in the PRINCE2 manual. The Support Infrastructure Project did not meet after July 2001 as the project was put on hold.

Simon Hughes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if the CAFCASS IT system has database facilities installed; and if she will make a statement. [46012]

Ms Rosie Winterton: CAFCASS inherited systems with database facilities. The CAFCASS IT system continues to support and extend these databases. The recent Magistrates Courts Service Inspectorate (MCSI) report said that IT investment across CAFCASS was, in general, a success story once initial teething problems had been addressed.

Disputes Resolution

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what *(a)* action she has taken and *(b)* results have been achieved, pursuant to her pledge that Government legal disputes will be settled by mediation or arbitration whenever possible. [44959]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave him on 15 October 2001 in response to his question on how my Department will report to Parliament on progress with the Government's commitment to use alternative dispute resolutions where possible in resolving its own disputes. On that occasion I explained that the Lord Chancellor intends to make an announcement at the beginning of the next financial year, and has asked all Government Departments to collect the relevant figures.

Court Proceedings Pilot

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when the pilot for extended courts in Manchester and London will commence; when the courts will start and close business; and for how long the pilots will run. [42793]

Mr. Wills: The two pilot schemes are due to commence in spring 2002. The proposed plans for Manchester and London are different. They are:

(i) The pilot at Manchester city magistrates court is planned to support the key criminal justice objectives of access to justice, reducing delay and improving services to victims and witnesses. The pilot courts will have an earlier start from 9am for three adult remand courts from Monday to Friday. Additional sittings for trials will take place in two court rooms from 4pm until 8pm on two evenings per week (Tuesday and Thursday).

(ii) In London the plan is for Bow Street magistrates court to support the objective of arrest and straight to court by dealing immediately with evening arrests and to evaluate if this will deter criminals and provide reassurance to the public. One court will sit from 6pm until midnight on Friday and Saturday nights.

Both pilots will run for approximately six months. The actual start dates and full details of the schemes will be given in a press notice which will be released when all of the aspects for the working protocols are agreed and finalised with the agencies involved.

Persistent Offenders

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what guidelines he has issued to courts about detaining persistent offenders under 16 years who are *(a)* charged with and *(b)* guilty of non-violent offences; and if he will make a statement. [42246]

Mr. Wills: The decision whether to grant bail or not is a judicial decision taken within the statutory framework provided by the Bail Act 1976. Judges and magistrates carry out their duties independently of the Government. It would be wrong for Ministers to seek to direct judges or magistrates in the way they exercise their discretion. Accordingly, no guidelines have been issued on the use of bail or the related powers in section 23 of the Children and Young Persons Act 1969. For the same reasons, my Department does not issue guidelines on sentencing. Magistrates and judges are helped by decisions of the higher courts and, particularly, by the guideline judgments of the Court of Appeal. In R. *v.* Howells and others (1998) the then Lord Chief Justice, Lord Bingham, in a reserved judgment, considered, at length, the factors which courts should weigh when considering whether an offence is so serious that only a custodial sentence is justified.

Litigation

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many cases *(a)* her Department and *(b)* its agencies have defended in (i) industrial tribunals and (ii) the courts in each year since 1997; how many were concluded in their favour; and what the total cost to her Department of litigation was in each year. [41108]

Ms Rosie Winterton: In each year since 1997 the Lord Chancellor's Department (including the Court Service) has defended the following number of (new) cases:

(a) 1997–98:
12 employment tribunal cases
77 court cases.

(b) 1998–99:
13 employment tribunal cases
94 court cases.

(c) 1999–2000:
26 employment tribunal cases
81 court cases.

(d) 2000–01:
26 employment tribunal cases
80 court cases.

(e) 2001 to date:
21 employment tribunal cases
108 court cases.

Of the employment tribunal cases, only one case was concluded against the Department/Court Service which was in the year 2000 (the case having been issued in 1998). All the other cases (which are not on-going) were either successfully defended at trial (or on appeal), or withdrawn beforehand. Of those employment tribunal cases withdrawn, agreed compensation was paid in the following number of cases:

(a) 1997–98: one
(b) 1998–99: three
(c) 1999–2000: three
(d) 2000–01: one
(e) 2001 to date: two.

Of the other court cases, the vast majority of these were either struck out, disposed of summarily by the court, or settled on favourable terms. On the information readily available in the Department, in the last year there has been only one case in which the court has given judgment against the Department/Court Service.

In each year since 1997 the Public Guardianship Office (formerly the Public Trust Office) has defended the following number of (new) cases:

(a) 1997–98:
0 employment tribunal cases
0 court cases.

(b) 1998–99:
one employment tribunal case
five court cases.

(c) 1999–2000:
0 employment tribunal cases
one court case.

(d) 2000–01:
three employment tribunal cases
0 court cases.

(e) 2001 to date:
one employment tribunal case
0 court cases.

Of the employment tribunal cases, none of these were concluded against the Public Trust/Guardianship Office and of the cases which were withdrawn, in only one case was agreed compensation paid (in 2000–01).

Of the other cases, in only one case was agreed compensation paid (in 2001).

Treasury Solicitor's costs (which includes Counsel's fees) for each year for cases[1] involving the Lord Chancellor's Department, the Court Service and the PGO (formerly PTO) were:

(a) 1997–98: £384,202
(b) 1998–99: £512,568
(c) 1999–2000: £589,242
(d) 2000–01: £627,862
(e) 2001 to date: £766,961.

[1] These figures may include a small amount in relation to "non-litigious" work. It has not been possible in the time available to exclude any such amounts.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Circulars

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the circular documents that have been sent by her Department to local education authorities since 7 June 2001; and how many pages each document contained. [44079]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 18 March 2002]:* We have sent 274 documents to local education authorities between 7 June 2001 and 18 March 2002. The full list of titles and page numbers has been placed in the Library.

Child Care

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) how many child care places in day nurseries, with childminders and in pre-school and

playgroups were available for every 100 children aged under eight years in each region in England in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 2002; [43506]

(2) if she will list, for each region of England and for each London borough, how many places at *(a)* day nurseries, *(b)* childminders, *(c)* play groups and play schools, *(d)* out of school clubs and *(e)* holiday play schemes there were in (i) 1997 and (ii) 2001; [43505]

(3) how many places in *(a)* after-school clubs and *(b)* holiday play-schemes were available per 100 children of primary school age in (i) 1997 and (ii) 2001. [43507]

Margaret Hodge: Information is not available in the form requested. The available information is shown in the tables.

Latest figures on day care facilities in England were published by my Department in the Statistical Bulletin "Children's Day Care facilities at 31 March 2001 (08/01)" in October 2001, a copy of which is available from the Library. An electronic copy of this publication is also available on my Department's website www.dfes.gov.uk/statistics.

Number of places in children's day care provision[1], England, 1997 and 2001 (position at 31 March each year)

	1997		2001	
	Places	*Places/100 children*	*Places*	*Places/100 children*
Provision for children aged under 8				
Day nurseries	193,800	[2]6	285,100	[2]10
Playgroups and pre-schools	383,700	[2]12	330,200	[2]11
Childminders	365,200	[3]7	304,600	[3]6
Provision for children aged 5–7				
Out-of-school clubs	78,700	[4]4	152,800	[4]8
Holiday schemes[5,6]	209,000	[4]11	598,000	[4]32

[1] Rounded to the nearest 100.
[2] Places/100 children aged 0 to 4.
[3] Places/100 children aged under 8.
[4] Places/100 children aged 5 to 7.
[5] Holiday schemes have been counted once for each holiday period in which they operate.
[6] Additional guidance was given to data providers in 1999.

Number of places in children's day care provision[1], England, Government office regions and London boroughs 1997 (position at 31 March)

	Day nurseries	*Playgroups and pre-schools*	*Childminders*	*Out-of-school clubs*	*Holiday schemes*
England	193,800	383,700	365,200	78,700	209,000
North East	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
North West	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Yorkshire and the Humber	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
East Midlands	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
West Midlands	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
East of England	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Inner London	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Outer London	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
South East	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
South West	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Camden	1,396	563	843	n/a	n/a
City of London	78	2,209	4	70	72
Hackney	1,950	538	911	1,110	2,329
Hammersmith and Fulham	1,192	n/a	254	n/a	n/a
Haringey	775	593	1,355	208	1,250
Islington	1,868	716	1,084	1,084	1,543
Kensington and Chelsea	926	337	305	730	3,060
Lambeth	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Lewisham	1,436	478	1,109	951	960
Newham	798	283	1,367	196	1,231
Southwark	1,650	578	1,048	2,077	2,305
Tower Hamlets	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Wandsworth	1,894	1,429	2,537	1,027	3,496
Westminster	1,089	834	379	727	2,964

Number of places in children's day care provision[1], England, Government office regions and London boroughs 1997 (position at 31 March)

	Day nurseries	Playgroups and pre-schools	Childminders	Out-of-school clubs	Holiday schemes
Barking and Dagenham	355	707	615	168	1,214
Barnet	566	931	1,110	337	2,946
Bexley	448	1,222	1,764	184	534
Brent	1,786	546	1,721	310	n/a
Bromley	n/a	2,498	2,353	320	1,082
Croydon	1,088	1,176	3,006	714	709
Ealing	1,309	454	3,220	532	414
Enfield	850	986	1,955	294	708
Greenwich	895	666	1,413	182	248
Harrow	155	1,237	1,321	198	1,118
Havering	572	1,736	1,630	275	363
Hillingdon	151	934	2,765	112	1,072
Hounslow	876	735	593	633	2,155
Kingston upon Thames	715	1,159	1,213	277	2,302
Merton	585	627	927	311	3,534
Redbridge	106	1,392	1,490	175	2,288
Richmond upon Thames	1,106	1,516	1,380	407	4,922
Sutton	845	1,047	1,257	407	4,922
Waltham Forest	280	587	1,919	122	n/a

n/a = Not available

[1] Figures for England and Government office regions rounded to the nearest 100.

Number of places in children's day care provision[1], England, Government office regions and London boroughs 2001 (position at 31 March)

	Day nurseries	Playgroups and pre-schools	Childminders	Out-of-school clubs	Holiday schemes
England	285,100	330,200	304,600	152,800	598,000
North East	9,200	10,100	15,300	8,400	24,700
North West	50,900	41,500	36,100	24,800	67,200
Yorkshire and the Humber	25,300	25,500	29,500	14,300	58,500
East Midlands	21,400	25,800	19,200	13,000	63,700
West Midlands	37,200	30,700	32,200	15,700	35,800
East of England	22,400	45,300	32,200	11,800	43,400
Inner London	22,800	8,400	10,600	23,200	63,200
Outer London	22,100	25,700	27,700	11,800	77,100
South East	47,900	71,800	64,400	17,400	109,100
South West	25,900	45,300	36,000	13,100	55,400
Camden	1,350	432	807	1,068	7,180
City of London	81	49	6	220	792
Hackney	2,310	653	961	1,800	560
Hammersmith and Fulham	1,152	713	510	220	2,105
Haringey	1,218	618	1,008	1,382	9,686
Islington	2,102	460	823	3,815	3,580
Kensington and Chelsea	1,592	726	206	940	1,085
Lambeth	1,980	629	939	1,462	6,972
Lewisham	2,061	906	1,179	1,694	1,736
Newham	1,885	579	1,027	1,167	15,126
Southwark	1,906	904	1,081	3,113	4,940
Tower Hamlets	1,133	400	376	1,147	1,342
Wandsworth	2,876	1,072	1,378	1,227	6,282
Westminster	1,105	264	338	2,861	1,794
Barking and Dagenham	448	1,110	684	338	5,292
Barnet	1,791	1,142	1,885	690	4,856
Bexley	550	1,414	1,699	223	1,921
Brent	2,304	479	1,343	748	2,395
Bromley	1,102	3,534	2,532	568	4,336
Croydon	1,438	1,999	2,139	1,191	8,719
Ealing	2,457	1,105	2,716	974	2,702
Enfield	937	1,928	1,571	1,550	7,532
Greenwich	741	866	1,189	255	581
Harrow	293	1,620	1,059	446	2,752
Havering	607	1,681	1,068	226	2,358
Hillingdon	1,833	1,139	2,424	280	1,904
Hounslow	911	854	737	910	5,154
Kingston upon Thames	685	1,024	1,208	953	3,900
Merton	949	664	1,058	330	2,793

Number of places in children's day care provision[1], England, Government office regions and London boroughs 2001 (position at 31 March)

	Day nurseries	Playgroups and pre-schools	Childminders	Out-of-school clubs	Holiday schemes
Redbridge	1,092	1,600	1,315	490	3,171
Richmond upon Thames	1,320	1,619	1,146	625	3,910
Sutton	928	996	1,216	412	1,975
Waltham Forest	1,697	932	696	576	10,830

[1] Figures for England and Government office regions rounded to the nearest 100.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) how much money was spent by Cambridgeshire in 2000–01 in creating child care places; [44017]

(2) how much money has been allocated to Cambridgeshire to achieve its child care targets in *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02. [44016]

Margaret Hodge: For 2000–01, Cambridgeshire Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership (EYDCP) was allocated a total of £642,570, including £100,500 from the European Social Fund (ESF) for child care. For 2001–02, their allocation is £2,149,873, including £375,835 from the ESF.

In 2000–01 Cambridgeshire spent £604,113 towards the creation of child care places.

In addition, money from the New Opportunities Fund is available to support the creation of out of school hours care and neighbourhood nurseries.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what the targets are for Cambridgeshire for the creation of new child care places in 2001–02; [44014]

(2) what the latest figures are for the creation of child care places in Cambridgeshire in 2001–02. [44015]

Margaret Hodge: Cambridgeshire EYDCP has targets to create 1,577 child care places in 2001–02 by April 2002. By the end of December 2001 Cambridgeshire EYDCP had reported the creation of 1,401 child care places.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when she will review the OfSTED application pack for day care registration. [44901]

Margaret Hodge: The content of application packs is a matter for OFSTED. I understand that OFSTED is reviewing the content currently and that revised packs will be available later in the year.

Nursing Diploma

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether the student funding review is examining funding arrangements for nurses on diploma courses. [43333]

Margaret Hodge: No. Funding for nurses on diploma courses does not form part of the student finance review being undertaken by my Department, as it is the responsibility of the Department of Health.

School Conditions

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) how many schools were *(a)* rebuilt and *(b)* substantially remodelled in 2001–02; [46115]

(2) if she will list by LEA building works in schools exceeding £1 million undertaken in each year since 1997, stating *(a)* when the decision was made to go ahead with the project, *(b)* the political control of the LEA, *(c)* the cost of the works and *(d)* the constituency within which the school is located; [45870]

(3) if she will list by LEA the newly constructed schools opened in each year since 1997, stating *(a)* when the decision was made to construct the school, *(b)* the political control of the local education authority, *(c)* the cost of the buildings and *(d)* the constituency in which the school is located. [45869]

John Healey: We do not hold information in the form requested. Much capital support is allocated to local education authorities and schools on a formulaic basis. Records of how it is utilised for specific projects are held locally.

Demountable Classrooms

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many demountable classrooms there are in Shrewsbury and Atcham; and where they are. [44296]

John Healey: As part of the data collected through the appraisal of Asset Management Plans, the Department has some information on the overall area of temporary buildings at schools, but it is not possible from these data to identify with any precision the number of demountable classrooms within individual authorities.

The data we have on temporary buildings will be appraised with a view to publishing analysis to support benchmarking later this year.

Education Maintenance Allowances

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of pupils in receipt of education maintenance allowances attend *(a)* selective and *(b)* non-selective schools in each authority where they are paid. [45868]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: We do not require local education authorities, who administer the pilot EMA schemes, to collect this information. EMA is targeted at eligible young people irrespective of what type of school or college they attend.

PFI/PPPs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the difference was between the price offered in reaching preferred bidder stage and the final contract price for PPP contracts let by her Department in each of the last four years; and if she will make a statement. [45616]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The final contract price for Capita to deliver the Connexions Card project was £109.7 million over seven years. The details of the various bidding stages during contractual negotiations are commercial in confidence.

Physical Education

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what her latest estimate is of the number of schools providing two hours of sport and PE during the school day each week. [45109]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The national curriculum for PE includes an aspiration that all schools should offer two hours physical activity a week. The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority's PE and School Sport Project has found that with imaginative and flexible timetabling schools can and do provide two hours of high quality PE and school sport per week. All of the schools involved in the project are doing this. Our White Paper "Schools: achieving success" gives a commitment that all children will be entitled to two hours of high quality PE and school sport a week, within and outside the curriculum.

14 to 19 Education

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how she plans to involve young people in the consultation on the Government's plans for the education of those aged 14 to 19; and if she will make a statement. [44773]

Mr. Timms: We recognise the need to take full account of the views of young people on the 14–19 reforms and, for the first time ever, we have produced a version of the Green Paper specifically for them.

Copies of this have been distributed to members of the UK Youth Parliament and, through the British Youth Council, to Youth Councils around the country. Sample copies will also be distributed to schools, FE sector colleges and LEAs with encouragement for teachers to engage young people in the consultation process in guided PSHE and citizenship sessions or through student councils.

Events will also be organised for a wide cross-section of young people through local Connexions Partnerships. We are also inviting the UK Youth Parliament and the British Youth Council to consider the proposals and respond and Ministers are discussing the proposals with groups of young people during ministerial visits.

We have also placed the Green Paper online on the DfES young people's gateway at www.dfes.gov.uk/youngpeople and advertised on websites popular with young people.

School Playing Fields

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what measures her Department has taken to prevent the selling of school playing fields. [44444]

John Healey: Before October 1998, there was nothing to prevent a local authority selling a school playing field if it wanted to. As a result of widespread public concern, section 77 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 was introduced in October 1998 to stop the indiscriminate sale of school playing fields. Local authorities and governing bodies of all maintained schools are now required to obtain the Secretary of State's consent before they can sell any part of a playing field.

Applications to sell school playing fields are assessed against the following criteria:

a. schools' needs: that playing field provision and curriculum requirements at the school selling the playing field, and at other schools in the local area, will be met;

b. community needs: that community use of a school's playing fields is taken into account, with alternative facilities made available if necessary;

c. finance: that the sale proceeds are re-invested to provide new or improved sports facilities at schools, or are used to help to raise standards by providing better educational facilities.

The criteria are set out in the Department's Guidance 0580/2001: "The Protection of School Playing Fields and Land for City Academies". Only those applications that meet the criteria are approved. Furthermore, since July 2001, all applications have been scrutinised by the independent School Playing Fields Advisory Panel to make sure that they conform to the published criteria. The Panel comprises representatives from the National Playing Fields Association, the Central Council of Physical Recreation, the education organisation Learning through Landscapes, the National Association of Head Teachers and the Local Government Association.

Teachers

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many full-time equivalent teachers there were in maintained *(a)* nursery, *(b)* primary and *(c)* secondary schools in January 2001; and how many there were in 1984. [46008]

Mr. Timms: The numbers of regular full-time equivalent teachers in the maintained sector in England were as follows:

	January 1984	*January 2001*
Nursery	1,600	1,600
Primary	171,200	193,400
Secondary	224,200	196,700

Notes:

1. 1984 secondary numbers exclude estimated sixth form college numbers.
2. Part-time teachers have been converted to an estimate of their full-time equivalence and added to full-time numbers.
3. Excludes occasional teachers.
4. Teachers whose service is divided between primary and secondary schools have been apportioned pro-rata to the nursery/primary or secondary phase.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teachers left the profession in the latest period for which figures are available. [45408]

Mr. Timms: In the year to 31 March 2000, the latest for which data are available, 34,900 qualified teachers left full-time or part-time regular service in the maintained schools sector in England for reasons including retirement. Over the same period, there were 36,300 new entrants or re-entrants to the maintained schools sector in England. These data are provisional.

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of the teaching work force in schools in England supply teachers comprise. [45270]

Mr. Timms: The information is not available in the form requested. Occasional teachers employed on contracts of less than one month and who worked for the whole of the survey date, comprised 4.6 per cent. of the total full-time equivalent number of teachers working in maintained schools in England on 18 January 2001.

School Governors

Mr. David: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to encourage people to become school governors. [45253]

Mr. Timms: The Department continues to support and provide guidance to local education authorities (LEAs) in England and we are devising a programme to support school-led governor recruitment. We fund the School Governors' One-Stop Shop to recruit governors with business and management skills in areas covered by the Excellence in Cities programme. As part of our commitment to encourage recruitment of school governors from minority ethnic backgrounds, the Department supports the activities of the Collective of Bangladeshi School Governors that promotes governorship to minority ethnic communities in Newham, Tower Hamlets and Hackney.

Science and Engineering Courses

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) if she plans to provide incentives for colleges and universities to provide science and engineering courses; [45564]

(2) if she plans to provide incentives for students studying science and engineering at Higher National and degree level. [45563]

Margaret Hodge: The Higher Education Funding Council for England takes into account the higher cost of teaching science and engineering subjects in making grant allocations to higher education institutions, but the Government have no plans to introduce incentives for institutions to provide science and engineering courses, nor for students to take them.

University Funding

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the submission to SR 2002 on university funding by Universities UK. [45204]

Margaret Hodge: The Government have carefully considered the representations on the financial needs of higher education from Universities UK, and from a number of other bodies. The outcome of the 2002 spending review will be announced in the summer.

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills which public service agreement targets that are scheduled to be met in 2002 will not be achieved by the due date. [44838]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Information about progress on PSA targets will be published in the Department's 2002 departmental report, which is due to be published in May.

Airline and Aerospace Industries

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry in respect of retraining needs in the airline and aerospace industries; what budgets she has made available to assist with such retraining; and if she will make a statement. [27547]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 23 January 2002]:* I have been asked to reply.

The airline and aerospace industries have been affected by a number of closures and job losses in recent months. The Government have been proactive in working, in regional and local partnerships, to support those people affected by providing the most appropriate service to help them back into work and to retrain them where necessary.

Retraining opportunities are offered to people who have been made redundant through Work Based Learning for Adults. In addition, Rapid Response Funding has recently been approved to retrain individuals made redundant from BAe Systems in the north-west and Gill Aviation in the north-east. The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) are also offering support—for example, at Gatwick and Heathrow LSC funding has been provided for one to one advice sessions for clients facing particular employment problems, and to support their training needs.

Student Loans

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer of 11 March 2002, *Official Report*, columns 764–70W, to the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins), if she will break down the figures for Blackpool *(a)* by part-time and full-time students and *(b)* by age of student. [44698]

Margaret Hodge: The previous figures shown for Blackpool in the answer of 11 March were all full-time, apart from two students on part-time initial teacher training courses; the level of fee support received by these two students is unknown.

Data on age breakdown as requested are not available.

Medical Schools

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many students in medical schools in the UK there were who had been educated at *(a)* state schools and *(b)* independent schools in each of the last five years. [42841]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 14 March 2002]:* The latest available information is shown in the table.

Accepted applicants to pre-clinical medical courses in the UK by previous educational establishment—UK domiciled students

	Year of entry				
Previous school type	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Maintained[1]	1,787	1,937	2,023	2,078	2,308
Independent	1,777	1,720	1,747	1,796	1,759
FE/HE institutions	588	585	594	691	771
Other	82	9	14	22	19
Not known	343	432	493	642	818
Total	4,577	4,683	4,871	5,229	5,675

[1] Including former grant maintained schools.

Source:

Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS).

Language Statistics

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the proportion of people in England who speak a second language; and what recent research she has commissioned on comparisons with other EU states. [43806]

Margaret Hodge: As part of its support for the European Year of Languages, the European Commission carried out a survey of the languages spoken in the 15 member states of the European Union in April 2001. The survey, "Eurobarometer 54", indicated that 34 per cent. of the UK sample is able to speak another EU language.

Our long-term language strategy, which we plan to publish in the autumn, will outline our proposals to widen the opportunities for language learning in this country. In particular, it is our ambition that all primary school children will be entitled to study languages by 2012.

Illiteracy

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the level of illiteracy is *(a)* in coalfield areas and *(b)* of citizens born in the United Kingdom. [41799]

John Healey: The table shows estimated literacy levels in the main coalfield districts (those districts with more than three 'coalfield wards').

District name	*Literacy levels*[1]	*District name*	*Literacy levels*[1]
Dover	23.9	Selby	22.3
Cannock Chase	25.6	Barnsley	28.3
Lichfield	21.0	Doncaster	27.2
Newcastle-under-Lyme	25.1	Rotherham	27.5
Staffordshire Moorlands	23.0	Sheffield	25.8
Stoke-on-Trent	27.6	Calderdale	26.3
Tamworth	26.7	Salford	27.6
North Warwickshire	23.2	Wakefield	26.8
Nuneaton and Bedworth	26.0	Wigan	25.9
Amber Valley	25.0	St. Helens	26.4
Bolsover	27.6	Middlesborough	28.9
Chesterfield	26.2	Chester-le-Street	25.3
Erewash	24.3	Derwentside	27.4
North East Derbyshire	23.7	Durham	27.4
South Derbyshire	22.1	Easington	30.4
Hinckley and Bosworth	22.3	Alnwick	26.2
North West Leicestershire	24.1	Blyth Valley	26.6
Ashfield	27.0	Castle Morpeth	21.3
Bassetlaw	24.4	Newcastle upon Tyne	25.8
Broxtowe	22.3	Wansbeck	29.1
Gedling	22.2	South Tyneside	29.0
Mansfield	26.6	Sunderland	28.8
Newark and Sherwood	24.0	—	—

[1] Percentage of population with 'low', 'lower' or 'very low' literacy.

Note:

National average equals 24 per cent.

Data at ward level is available as a searchable database on the Basic Skills Agency website at "www.basic-skills.co.uk/datasite/", which also contains data by Parliamentary Constituency and by local Learning and Skills Council area.

The most detailed survey of basic skills in Britain is "Adult Literacy in Britain", published in 1997. This reported that 23 per cent. of the population had low levels of literacy. 15 per cent. of those with low levels of literacy did not speak English as a first language and may not have been born in the UK. This equates to around 1 million of the 7 million adults in England with poor literacy skills.

Higher Education

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many higher education institutions are situated in coalfield constituencies. [41823]

Margaret Hodge: The higher education institutions located in constituencies containing coalfield areas are listed in the table.

HE institution	*Constituency*
University of Kent	Canterbury
Christ Church College	Canterbury
University of Durham	City of Durham
University of Teesside	Middlesbrough
University of Newcastle	Newcastle upon Tyne, Central
University of Northumbria	Newcastle upon Tyne, Central
University of Keele	Newcastle-under-Lyme
University of Salford	Salford
University of York	Selby
Sheffield Hallam University	Sheffield, Central
University of Sunderland	Sunderland, South
University of Leeds (Bretton Hall)	Wakefield

Energy Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on energy costs incurred by her Department in each of the last 10 years. [42438]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for Rural Affairs on 19 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 268W.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Literacy

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the literacy levels are of long-term unemployed people in *(a)* coalfield areas and *(b)* England. [41821]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Statistics relating to the literacy levels of the long-term unemployed in England are not available. However, we estimate that around one third of unemployed people have literacy and/or numeracy skills below Level 1 (the level expected of an 11-year-old) in England)[1].

No separate information is available for literacy levels among long-term unemployed people in coalfield areas, although we do have information on overall literacy levels in these areas.

We are committed to improving the literacy and numeracy of unemployed people so they have the skills they need to find and stay in work. In September 2001 we began piloting alternative ways of encouraging people claiming jobseeker's allowance to take up offers of help with their literacy and numeracy skills. One of these pilots is in my hon. Friend's constituency.

[1] *Source*—"Skills for Life: the National Strategy for Improving Adult Literacy and Numeracy Skills" (March 2000).

Empty Properties

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the total area in square feet of all empty properties owned by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* his agencies and *(c)* other public bodies for which he has had responsibility was in each year since May 1997. [37309]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Department for Work and Pensions was formed in June 2001 from the former Department for Social Security and parts of the Department for Education and Employment.

Statistics relating to empty properties owned by the new Department are not yet available for the current financial year (2001–02).

Health and Safety (Computers)

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many employees in his Department who regularly use computers have taken up the provision of a free eye test; and how this service is advertised to *(a)* current and *(b)* new staff. [36691]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Currently different arrangements for testing eye health apply to staff employed in the former Department of Social Security and those employed in the Employment Service.

In May 2001 the Department of Social Security contracted with a company of ophthalmic opticians to provide staff with free eye tests at intervals of not less than two years. Between 1 May 2001 and 31 January 2002 (which is the latest month for which statistics are available) a total of 13,888 staff had their eyes tested under this contract. We estimate that by the end of the first year of the contract, on 30 April 2002, around 18,500 staff would have benefited from the service.

The availability of free eye tests in the former Department of Social Security is publicised on the Department's "Intranet" computer system and was brought to the attention of staff through a circular which was distributed widely. New staff are provided with information about the service as part of the standard induction programme. In addition, local managers are required to nominate an eye care liaison officer whose responsibility is to publicise the availability of the service, using posters and leaflets, prior to an optician visiting an office of the Department.

The Employment Service (which was up to July 2001 part of the former Department for Education and Employment) does not have a contract with an external eye care specialist. Instead staff are able to arrange their own eye tests with an optician of their choice and to have the cost reimbursed. Between 1 April 2001 and 31 January 2002 a total of 2,030 staff had their eyes tested at the Agency's expense.

The Employment Service provides new staff with a "Workstation Guide" leaflet and a video entitled "In Your Own Interests" is shown to all staff. Both of these highlight the provision of eye tests. In addition, eye tests are covered in the Health and Safety Guide which is available on the Employment Service's computerised communication system. Work station assessment forms are also completed by staff at six monthly intervals or following a work station change. These too highlight the provision of eye tests.

We intend to gradually extend the provisions of the former Department of Social Security's contract to all staff in the Department for Work and Pensions from April 2002. This will mean that in future all staff should have the opportunity to have their eyes tested free of charge in their places of work.

Parental Leave Directive

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate he has made of the *(a)* financial costs and *(b)* benefits to his Department of the parental leave directive. [42473]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Parental leave is unpaid and therefore incurs no direct financial cost. We do not keep records of the opportunity or indirect cost of staff taking parental leave. Information obtained from our payroll systems shows that during the period 1 March 2001 to 28 February 2001, staff in DWP took a total of 2,075 days parental leave.

We cannot quantify the specific benefits to the Department provided by the parental leave directive because it is only one part of a wide range of family-friendly policies provided by the Department. Benefits to the Department include increased labour supply, reduced turnover and a higher commitment from staff while enabling them to achieve a better balance between their home and working lives.

Automated Credit Transfer

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many benefits claimants have moved to a system of automated credit transfer in each year since the service has been available. [43343]

Malcolm Wicks: Information on the number of customers moving to automated credit transfer (ACT) each year since ACT became a method of payment is not available in the precise format requested. However, we do collect information on the number of benefit recipients being paid by ACT and this is given in the table.

As the table shows, the number of customers paid by ACT increased by 800,000 in 2001. This shows that the status quo is not an option, because people are already voting with their feet.

	Number of benefit recipients receiving their benefit by ACT
1993	5,166,000
1994	5,852,000
1995	7,084,000
1996[1]	7,508,000
1997	8,005,000
1998[2]	8,691,000
1999	9,180,000
2000[3]	10,213,000
2001	11,015,000

[1] Includes industrial injuries disablement benefit from June 1996
[2] Includes invalid care allowance from June 1998
[3] Includes guardian's allowance from June 2000

Information is available from 1993 on the number of customers being paid by ACT with the exception of customers in receipt of jobseeker's allowance (for which data is not available). The table reflects the number of benefit recipients being paid by ACT. The figures include customers receiving payment by ACT for the first time as well as those moving from paper based methods of payment to ACT.

Universal Bank

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what funding the Government have secured from the main lending banks in order to finance the Universal Bank project. [43345]

Malcolm Wicks: The main UK high street banks and the Nationwide Building Society have together agreed to contribute a total of £180 million over five years towards the costs of the new Post Office Card Account. They have also agreed to make their basic bank accounts accessible through post offices.

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many discussions he has had with the Post Office on the Universal bank; [43338]

(2) if he will make a statement on the future of the Universal bank project. [43342]

Malcolm Wicks: Officials from the Department, together with Inland Revenue and Northern Ireland social security agency officials, meet with the Post Office on a regular basis. Contracts have now been signed between these Departments and the Post Office for the provision of the new post office card account.

Council Tax (Mentally Impaired People)

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will extend the arrangement for a non-dependent deduction, relating to those who are severely mentally impaired, to council tax. [41782]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* Regulations already provide that deductions are not made from a person's council tax benefit where a non-dependant member of the household is severely mentally impaired as defined in schedule 1 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.

Foster Carers

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what recent representations he has received on the extension of home responsibilities protection to whole-time foster carers. [37304]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 26 February 2002]:* We regularly receive representations on all aspects of state retirement pension entitlement from a variety of organisations and interested individuals.

Dr. Jack Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if home responsibilities protection will be given to foster carers. [37186]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 27 February 2002]:* Foster carers whose allowance contains a reward element may be liable for national insurance contributions on a self-employed basis. Where there is no liability, they may choose to pay voluntary contributions to assist in qualifying for state retirement pension. Foster carers who receive child benefit for their own children under aged 16 will be eligible for home responsibilities protection. We will keep these arrangements under review as we do with all rules relating to benefits.

Dr. Jack Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what pension arrangement foster carers are entitled to; and if he will make a statement on support for those who give up work to care for foster children. [37187]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 27 February 2002]:* Foster carers whose allowance contains a reward element may be liable to pay national insurance contributions as a self-employed person. Those who have no liability may choose to pay voluntary contributions to assist them to qualify for basic state retirement pension. Where a foster carer receives child benefit for a child of their own aged under 16, they will be eligible for home responsibilities protection. We will keep these arrangements under review as we do with all rules relating to benefits. Married women of pensionable age will be entitled to a retirement pension of 60 per cent. of their husband's entitlement when he reaches state pension age and makes a claim.

Housing and Council Tax Benefit

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to reform non-dependent deductions for housing benefit and council tax benefits. [42257]

Malcolm Wicks: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 14 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 787W.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the specific measures were of the

direction issued to Hackney Council for the improvement of its administration of housing benefit and council tax benefit. [44304]

Malcolm Wicks: The housing benefit direction issued on 12 October 2001 to the London borough of Hackney, under section 15 of the Local Government Act 1999, required the authority to achieve the following:

(a) clear its backlog of benefits work by 31 December 2001;

(b) in completing this action, satisfy itself on an on-going basis that it was acting lawfully and properly by carrying out appropriate checks;

(c) clear the backlog of work without adversely affecting the speed and accuracy of non-backlog housing benefit and council tax benefit work.

A copy of the direction is available in the Library.

Home Responsibilities Protection

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people are entitled to home responsibilities protection; and at what annual cost. [37305]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 26 February 2002]:* Such information as is available is in the table. We cannot calculate an annual cost as this is dependent upon the individual's circumstances at pension age.

Numbers of people of working age entitled to home responsibilities protection

Thousand

Tax year	*Men*	*Women*	*Total*
1990–91	116	5,142	5,257
1991–92	127	5,253	5,380
1992–93	139	5,368	5,507
1993–94	155	5,446	5,600
1994–95	166	5,478	5,644
1995–96	181	5,484	5,665
1996–97	196	5,467	5,662

Notes:
1. Figures are subject to sampling error.
2. Figures are rounded to the nearest thousand and are shown in thousands.
3. These figures are the number of individuals entitled to HRP. They include those who have not used it to reduce the number of years needed for a full basic state retirement pension.
4. 1996–97 figures are the latest available.

Source:
Figures are taken from the Lifetime Labour Market Database (LLMDB), which is a 1 per cent. sample from the National Insurance Recording System (NIRS).

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many people were *(a)* unemployed and *(b)* claiming incapacity benefit in April in each of the last five years; [44259]

(2) what proportion of incapacity benefit claimants have returned to full-time employment in each of the last five years. [44260]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 20 March 2002]:* We are undertaking a fundamental overhaul of the welfare system, transforming it from a passive organisation paying out benefits to an active system that fights poverty, creates opportunity and helps people become self-sufficient and independent.

Our new Jobcentre Plus service ensures that people making new or repeat claims to incapacity benefit have the opportunity of work-focused advice and support from a personal adviser so they can be helped to move into work when they are ready to do so.

The available information is in the table.

	Number of people unemployed	*Number of people claiming incapacity benefit*
May 1997	1,556,000	2,370,500
May 1998	1,293,000	2,316,900
May 1999	1,221,100	2,277,500
May 2000	1,063,700	2,263,200
May 2001	935,700	2,327,000

Notes:
1. All figures are rounded to the nearest hundred. Incapacity benefit data are collected quarterly in May, August, November and February of each year.
2. Incapacity benefit figures include national insurance credits only cases.
3. From 13 April 1995 people of pension age were no longer able to claim incapacity benefit. Incapacity benefit recipients already over pension age could continue to receive incapacity benefit for up to five years after state pension age.
4. Unemployment figures have been seasonally adjusted.
5. Figures are for Great Britain.

Sources:
1. Office for National Statistics: count of claimants of unemployment-related benefits from Benefits Agency computer systems.
2. Incapacity benefit figures are taken from 5 per cent. samples of the incapacity benefit computer system and exclude a small number of cases held clerically.

Information on the number of people who have returned to full-time employment following a claim to incapacity benefit is not available.

Social Fund

Paul Goggins: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what gross budget will be set for the discretionary Social Fund in 2002–03. [46332]

Malcolm Wicks: The discretionary Social Fund budget for 2002–03 will be £627 million. This represents an increase of £6.4 million over the total gross budget allocated in April 2001.

As part of this allocation, the Community Care Grant budget will be increased by £5 million to £108 million. The loans budget will be £518 million, an increase of £1.4 million over that allocated in April 2001.

£1 million will be retained centrally as a contingency reserve. For example, to provide additional help to Districts facing unexpected and unplanned expenditure.

Further details of individual District budget allocations, and the basis on which these were made, have been placed in the Library.

Minimum Income Guarantee

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people in *(a)* Stoke-on-Trent, North, *(b)* Staffordshire and *(c)* England he expects to have a guaranteed income of £98 per week from next April; and if he will make a statement. [25526]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is as follows.

The forecast number of claimants of the minimum income guarantee from April 2002 in England is 1,485,000.

Nationally there are over 1.7 million pensioners claiming the MIG. By April 2002 a single pensioner will be at least £15 a week better off in real terms than in 1997 from the MIG rises. A pensioner couple will be well over £23 a week better off.

New Deal

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what targets he sets for *(a)* enrolment, *(b)* programme completion and *(c)* permanent employment for the New Deal for Disabled People; and if he will make a statement on the extent to which such targets have been achieved. [44261]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 20 March 2002]:* The New Deal for Disabled People is testing new and innovative ways of helping people on incapacity benefits into work. Although Job Brokers have provided indications of planned take-up, these are commercial in confidence. No targets have been set for enrolment, programme completion or permanent employment.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the cost per permanent job achieved by the New Deal for Disabled People has been since its full initiation. [44262]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 20 March 2002]:* Under the New Deal for Disabled People, sustained employment is defined as employment lasting six months or more. As the programme only became available nationally from July 2001, it is not yet possible to provide a meaningful figure for job placements resulting in sustained employment nor therefore a figure for the cost per sustained job achieved.

Older People

Mr. MacDougall: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what initiatives his Department has in place to encourage *(a)* organisations, *(b)* companies and *(c)* the civil service to employ people who are aged 50 years and over. [42400]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Since 1997, this Government have consistently shown its commitment to employment opportunities for all regardless of age. For those over 50 there is a comprehensive range of back to work help including New Deal 50 plus. Government support has ensured that the employment rate for the over-50s has increased each year for the last four years. Through New Deal 50 plus alone, over 61,000 people so far have been helped back to work.

We are vigorously promoting the benefits of recruiting, training and retaining older workers as part of our Age Positive campaign. We have already spoken to employers, employer organisations, employees and voluntary sector organisations about ways in which the message can be spread further. The Age Positive campaign is going from strength to strength, working to challenge ageist employment practices between now and the implementation of age legislation in 2006. The newest feature of the campaign is the Age Positive website (www.agepositive.gov.uk). It features guidance and good practice case studies for employers including our recent publication 'Good Practice in the Recruitment and Retention of Older Workers' which is also available in the Library.

For small and medium sized employers, we have developed a model programme on the business benefits of age diversity and recruiting the over-50s. To date 20 workshops have been delivered across the country and we are looking to increase this in the coming months, extending to Scotland and Wales.

The Department's Diversity and Equality statement makes an explicit commitment to non-discrimination on age grounds. We do not discriminate against anyone on the basis of their age when recruiting or promoting staff. We have also been working closely with the Cabinet Office to promote this approach across the civil service and have done so since the introduction of the Code of Practice on Age Diversity in Employment, which we published in June 1999. The departmental retirement age for all staff below senior civil service was increased from 60 to 65 with effect from 1 April 2000. Staff have the choice to retire at any time between these ages.

Pensions

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) if he will estimate the number of *(a)* people receiving and *(b)* pension providers issuing combined pension forecasts; [43359]

(2) if he will estimate the number of *(a)* employers and *(b)* pension providers who are providing information for the combined pension forecast. [43358]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 14 March 2002]:* To date, 33,662 customers have received a combined pension statement issued in partnership with four employers and three pension providers.

Since its launch at the annual Pensions Show on 17 October 2001, the new service has received expressions of interest from 91 private or occupational pension providers who wish to take advantage of this new, voluntary service.

These providers are progressing through the various stages involved in introducing the service to their customers, including the formal registration process, obtaining the required customer consent to exchange personal information with the Department and developing their IT systems to share data electronically.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate what proportion of *(a)* occupational pensions defined by benefit, *(b)* occupational pensions defined by contribution and *(c)* personal pensions provided for survivor benefits or joint life annuities; and what proportion of such pensions provide for indexation of pensions. [37040]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table.

Numbers of active members of defined benefit schemes according to benefits payable on death after retirement

Thousands

Benefit payable	*Private sector*		*Public sector*		*Total*
	As of right under scheme rules	*At trustees' discretion*	*As of right under scheme rules*	*At trustees' discretion*	
Pension to surviving spouse	4,810	220	4,100	—	9,130
Pension to surviving children	3,090	600	4,100	—	7,790
Pension to a divorced ex-spouse	200	1,680	600	160	2,640
Pension to any nominated person	320	2,560	600	340	3,820
Total active members of defined benefit schemes	5,140	—	4,100	—	9,240

Notes:

1. Schemes may be included under more than one category in the above table.
2. The GAD survey did not include information on the number of defined contribution and personal pension in payment that provide for a survivor's pension as most of these schemes provide a lump sum on retirement with which the member buys a pension. It is then up to the member to choose whether or not the pension will provide for a survivor's pension. In a defined contribution scheme used to contract out of the state earnings related pension scheme (SERPS), that part of the pension deriving from the national insurance contribution rebate (the protected rights) must be used to purchase a pension providing for a survivor's pension where the member is married at the time the pension is purchased.
3. The same rules apply to personal pensions. It is entirely a matter for the member to decide whether or not the pension provides for survivor's benefits except where the personal pension has been used to contract out of (SERPS). In these circumstances, that part of the pension fund comprising the protected rights, must be used to purchase a pension providing for a survivor's pension where the member is married at the time that the pension is purchased.
4. All occupational pension schemes (both defined benefit and defined contribution) are subject to indexation. That part of the pension in payment that derives from pension rights built up from 6 April 1997 must be increased by the percentage increase in the retail price index, or 5 per cent, whichever is the lesser.
5. With personal pensions only that part of the pension deriving from the protected rights is subject to indexation. It is up to the scheme member to decide whether or not the pension deriving from the excess of these rights is to be indexed.

Source:

Table 10.9 of the GAD Survey of Occupational Pension Schemes 1995

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in each of the past 30 calendar years what was the *(a)* percentage ratio of current average earnings to the state basic retirement pension, *(b)* same percentage ratio to average state pension paid to individuals (excluding dependent spouses) and *(c)* same percentage ratio to mean income from state and occupational pension schemes. [40112]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 5 March 2002]:* The information requested is in the tables.

Average earnings as a percentage of full basic pension

	Percentage
September 1971	435
October 1972	425
October 1973	413
July 1974	364
April 1975	359
November 1975	406
November 1976	420
November 1977	401
November 1978	406
November 1979	385
November 1980	406
November 1981	422
November 1982	416
November 1983	433
November 1984	445
November 1985	446
July 1986	477
April 1987	504
April 1988	531
April 1989	550
April 1990	561
April 1991	548
April 1992	563
April 1993	565
April 1994	565
April 1995	571

Average earnings as a percentage of full basic pension

	Percentage
April 1996	575
April 1997	589
April 1998	594
April 1999	599
April 2000	608
April 2001	—

Notes:

1. Average earnings figure not yet available for April 2001.
2. Figures for GB

Average earnings as a percentage of average category A/AB pension paid

	Percentage
April 1995	608
April 1996	612
April 1997	626
April 1998	633
April 1999	638
April 2000	648
April 2001	-

Notes:

1. Average earnings figure not yet available for April 2001.
2. Information on average amount of Category A pension paid is not available prior to April 1995.
3. Taken from administrative data.
4. Figures are for GB.

Average earnings as a percentage of state and occupational pension schemes for pensioner units

	Percentage
April 1994	262.7
April 1995	264.8
April 1996	258.6
April 1997	258.9
April 1998	258.1

Average earnings as a percentage of state and occupational pension schemes for pensioner units

	Percentage
April 1999	256.5
April 2000	—
April 2001	—

Notes:

1. The figures are based statistics published in the Pensioner Income Series 1999–00.
2. The definition of a pensioner unit is a single person over state pension age or a couple where the man is over state pension age.
3. Data for years prior to 1994–5 would only be possible using the Family Expenditure Survey but this analysis is not readily available.
4. Since parts (a) and (b) of this question are based on DWP administrative data on benefit receipt, part (c) is not directly comparable.
5. Figures are for GB.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many employees in each of the last ten years were *(a)* participants in contracted-out funded pension schemes, *(b)* participants in contracted-in payments to the national insurance system and *(c)* outside either category. [40171]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 5 March 2002]:* The information requested is not available. Such information as is available is in the table.

Thousand

	Total number contracted-out	*Total number belonging to SERPS*[1]	*Total number of workers not contracted-out or belonging to SERPS*
1991–92	14,931	6,471	2,356
1992–93	14,849	6,327	2,064
1993–94	14,659	6,555	2,816
1994–95	14,566	7,115	1,357
1995–96	14,817	7,496	922

[1] These include employees who are members of contracted-in occupational pension schemes. In his publication titled "Occupational Pension Schemes-1995", the Government Actuary estimated that in 1995, there were 1.3 million members of such schemes.

Source:

"Second Tier Pension Provision 1995–96" and "Labour Force Survey"—Department for Work and Pensions' Analytical Services Division

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will change the practice of starting a pension from the Monday following a person's 60 or 65 birthday. [37423]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Entitlement to Retirement Pension begins with the pay-day on or following the pensioner's 60 or 65 birthday. Changes in entitlement, for example a decrease because of a prolonged stay in hospital, also takes effect from the pay-day following the change in circumstances. The same rule applies with the termination of the award. The principle of paying Retirement Pension in whole weeks stems from the fact that the benefit is traditionally paid in advance.

There are no plans to change the present arrangements for paying Retirement Pension.

Mobility Allowance

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions for what reason medical checks in respect of mobility allowance are carried out on a person who has a medically confirmed condition that will not improve; and what plans there are to change this system. [45893]

Maria Eagle: Entitlement to the mobility component of disability living allowance is based on the effects of a disabling condition and not the condition itself. Even where a condition remains unchanged, the effect on a person's ability to walk, or the help they need from other people when out and about, can change over time for a number of reasons, including medical treatment, therapy, or how the person adapts to their disability.

When considering entitlement to either care or mobility components of disability living allowance, the decision maker may request a report based on an examination by a specially trained Medical Services doctor. This is not primarily about diagnosis, but is intended to obtain an expert view of the disabling effects of the condition. The decision maker will consider this, along with any other evidence about their needs supplied by the disabled person, their medical attendants, carers or others with relevant information, to decide whether the relevant statutory provisions relating to entitlement are satisfied.

There is a substantial programme of work to modernise the administration of disability living allowance. This includes work to ensure that medical evidence is utilised as efficiently as possible.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on eligibility for mobility allowance. [45891]

Maria Eagle: Mobility allowance was replaced by the mobility component of disability living allowance in 1992. The mobility component, which comprises a lower rate and a higher rate, is primarily to help people who are severely disabled early in life.

To qualify for the lower rate claimants must be aged five or over, and must be so severely disabled physically or mentally that they cannot take advantage of the faculty of walking out of doors without guidance or supervision from another person most of the time. To qualify for the higher rate claimants must be aged three or over, and must be so severely physically disabled that they are unable to walk or virtually unable to walk.

Approximately 1.5 million severely disabled people currently receive the higher rate and some 0.5 million receive the lower rate of the mobility component.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how often medical checks are carried out to ensure a person is still eligible for the mobility allowance. [45892]

Maria Eagle: The former mobility allowance is now the higher rate mobility component of disability living allowance (DLA). Assessment of a DLA claimant's medical condition occurs at the time of the initial claim, and at any subsequent review of entitlement. A review normally occurs when a decision is being made on a renewal of benefit in the case of limited-period awards;

or where the recipient themselves requests a review; or under the rolling programme of periodic review of long awards.

Jobcentre-Plus Offices

David Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many incidents of verbal abuse or damage to office equipment occurred in *(a)* 1999–2000 and *(b)* 2000–01 in branches of the Employment Service; [45506]

(2) how many incidents of verbal abuse or damage to office equipment occurred in *(a)* 1999–2000 and *(b)* 2000–01 in branches of the Benefits Agency. [45505]

Malcolm Wicks: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock) on 13 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 1118W.

Pension Service

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what advice on pensioner benefits will be available in Jobcentre Plus offices following the introduction of the Pension Service; [45694]

(2) if he will estimate the *(a)* number and *(b)* percentage of inquiries received by pension centres which will be outsourced; [45688]

(3) what plans he has to outsource *(a)* telephone, *(b)* e-mail and *(c)* postal inquiries made to pension centres; [45689]

(4) if he will estimate the average number of Pension Service staff in each local authority area who will offer *(a)* face-to-face non-home visits, *(b)* administrative support and *(c)* home visits; and if pensioners will have an entitlement to a home visit from Pension Service staff; [45692]

(5) if he will list the benefits and credits on which Pension Service staff will be trained to advise in *(a)* pension centres and *(b)* face-to-face contact sessions; [45693]

(6) what progress he has made in establishing partnership agreements with voluntary organisations that will deliver face-to-face advice on pensioner benefits; [45690]

(7) if he will estimate the average number of Pension Service staff who will offer face-to-face advice in each local authority area; [45691]

(8) pursuant to his answer of 4 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 15W, if pensioners will retain the right to face-to-face advice on pensions matters following the introduction of the proposed Pensions Service; and how such a right will be exercisable. [45197]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 21 March 2002]:* The Pension Service will offer an improved service for both today's and future pensioners. There are no plans to outsource customer inquiries.

The new organisation, and in particular the local service will take time to build. In the mean time all of our current arrangements for face-to-face contact will continue to apply.

In terms of the staff who will provide face-to-face advice, we are still determining precise numbers and the ratio of contact centre staff to local service staff. Final decisions have yet to be taken on where local service staff will be located. However numbers will reflect the needs of local communities and will not be assigned by local authority area.

Staff will be trained to identify potential entitlement to other benefits and will refer customers on as appropriate.

Retirement Ages

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if the distinction between working and retirement ages constitutes the watershed between the respective responsibilities of the new Jobcentre Plus and Pensions Agency services; and what arrangements are being made to ensure that officers of either agency can handle client queries which do not fully match the division of administrative responsibilities. [44265]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 20 March 2002]:* The Pension Service and Jobcentre Plus will operate within a single Department.

The Pension Service will offer an improved service for pensioners. It will be customer focused and will give pensioners a modern, personalised, efficient service designed to meet their needs. It will also provide information for future pensioners to help them make decisions about their future pension arrangements.

Jobcentre Plus will provide work-focused benefit and other services to people of working age, and services such as New Deal 50 plus to people above retirement age who are looking for work.

Arrangements will be in place between the agencies to cover specific cross-cutting issues, such as access to the social fund by people above retirement age, and access to the minimum income guarantee by men aged between 60 and 64. To ensure that levels of service are maintained, officials will be provided with contact details across both agencies, and in the Department's other businesses, to ensure that customers are dealing with the right part of the Department for the service they require regardless of the route by which they first approached it.

Accounting Standards

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the implementation, time scale and content of accounting standard FRS 17 and its effects on standard and final salary pension schemes. [45264]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Accounting standards are a matter for the Accounting Standards Board which is independent of Government. There are many factors affecting occupational pension provision including longer life expectancy and falling stockmarkets. It is not possible to isolate the effects of FRS 17 from these other factors.

Legal Aid

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has for the re-introduction of legal aid in respect of civil claims for personal injuries and disease cases. [44992]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I have been asked to reply.

The Access to Justice Act 1999 excludes most personal injury claims from the scope of Community Legal Service funding. However funding is still available for personal injury claims against public authorities which allege serious wrongdoing, such as child abuse claims and actions against the police. A personal injury claim may also be funded if it has a significant wider public interest. Support funding remains available for exceptionally expensive cases. Public funding is also available for clinical negligence cases, as we recognise that costly investigative work is necessary for these cases to be brought.

We believe that conditional fee agreements provide a suitable alternative to public funding for those personal injury cases excluded from the scope of the Community Legal Service scheme, and we have no plans to re-introduce public funding for those cases.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Local Government

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list additional statutory obligations placed upon local authorities by the Government in each of the past five years. [40215]

Dr. Whitehead: The information for all Departments is not held centrally. The main new duties placed on local authorities by my Department in the last five years include:

Local Government Act 1999

Duty of best value to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which they exercise their functions, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

Greater London Authority Act 1999

Duty on London borough councils and the common council of the City of London to have regard to the Mayor's transport strategy, municipal waste management strategy and London air quality strategy; and to consult the Mayor on their unitary development plan to ensure it is in general conformity with the Mayor's spatial development strategy.

Local Government Act 2000

Duty to consult, draw up proposals and implement new executive arrangements.

Duty to hold a referendum on a directly elected mayor if their proposals involve a form of executive which includes a directly elected mayor, where a valid petition is submitted or the Secretary of State directs the authority.

Duty to appoint an overview and scrutiny committee.

Duty to prepare a community strategy.

Duty to adopt a code of conduct within six months of the new model code coming into force.

Duty to establish a standards committee.

Duty to set up an independent remuneration panel to advise on their allowance scheme.

Transport Act 2000

Duty to prepare and keep under review a local transport plan, which includes a bus strategy, for their area.

Duty to offer disabled residents and elderly people of state pension age a free pass entitling them to half fares on local bus services.

Representation of the People Act 2001 and Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000

Various duties, or changes to duties, in relation to local, parliamentary, and European parliamentary elections, including the registration of electors and the conduct of elections in their areas.

Homelessness Act 2002

Stronger duties to accommodate and assist homeless people.

Duty on housing authorities to adopt a homelessness strategy every five years based on a homelessness review, and a duty on social services to co-operate in this on request.

Duty on housing departments to co-operate with social services when dealing with homeless families with children.

Spring Supply Estimates

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on item *(a)* lxxxvi and *(b)* lxxxv on page 9 of the Spring Supply Estimates. [40234]

Dr. Whitehead: Item *(a)* lxxxvi on page 9 of the Spring Supply Estimates provided for payments to and receipts from Railtrack plc (in administration) in accordance with the Loan Agreement and indemnities given under section 63 of the Railways Act 1993. Item *(b)* lxxxv on the same page of the Spring Supply Estimates relates to the heavy goods vehicle (HGV) transitional rebate scheme, which covered the period 1 December 2000 to 30 November 2001.

Press and Public Relations Staff

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many people were employed in a press or public relations function in his Department and its predecessor on 1 January in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999, *(d)* 2000, *(e)* 2001 and *(f)* 2002. [39946]

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many staff in his Department's press office have received *(a)* termination and *(b)* redundancy payments in each of the last four years. [41082]

Dr. Whitehead: I refer the hon. Members to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) on 19 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 220W.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what involvement Ian Jones had in drafting the Department's press release of 15 February entitled Stephen Byers' statement on the resignations of Martin Sixsmith and Jo Moore. [41996]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* Under Part II of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information it is not the practice to disclose details of internal discussions and advice.

Leak Inquiries

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many leak inquiries have been held in his Department and its predecessor in each of the last five years; and how many led to action against a member of staff. [41993]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* Four inquiries were undertaken in my Department and its predecessor in 1997–98, two in 1998–99, one in 1999–2000, three in 2000–01. None of these inquiries led to action against a member of staff. Two inquiries have been carried out this financial year. No action has been taken against any member of staff as a result of the first inquiry. Consideration is being given to whether action against any member of staff is appropriate as a result of the second inquiry.

Railways

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the total public and private investment, not including public resource expenditure, allocated for the railways to be spent over the period 2001 to 2011, at today's prices as at *(a)* 1 April 2001, *(b)* 2 April 2001, *(c)* 13 January 2002, *(d)* 14 January 2002, *(e)* 29 January 2002 and *(f)* the latest available date. [45706]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the updated version of table A3 from the Ten-Year Plan for Transport, copies of which were placed in the Libraries of the House on 25 February.

Total capital investment in rail over the ten years to 31 March 2011 is estimated to be £52.9 billion (£18.6 billion public plus £34.3 billion private). This figure has increased from £49 billion in the original Ten-Year Plan to reflect the public sector funding increases since then. These figures are in cash prices, standard HM Treasury deflators should be used to translate into current prices.

Rail funding over the period also includes £14.9 billion of public resource funding, of which £3 billion is estimated to be used as direct revenue support for the private investment. This £3 billion should be deducted when calculating the total level of public and private funding for rail to avoid double counting.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 18 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 21W, how many meetings he has had with the Rail Regulator since 11 December 2001. [46119]

Mr. Byers: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Mr. Jamieson), to the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) on Tuesday 11 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 789W.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the route specific capacity utilisation strategies being developed by the SRA. [45462]

Mr. Byers: The SRA is currently developing one route specific capacity utilisation strategy in relation to the West Coast Main Line.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent representations he has received from *(a)* the Strategic Rail Authority, *(b)* the Association of Train Operating Companies, *(c)* train operating companies, *(d)* the Rail Passenger Committee and *(e)* other passenger representatives regarding (i) rail fares and fare regulation and (ii) network railcards. [45415]

Mr. Jamieson: The Association of Train Operating Companies informed Ministers and local MPs of their proposals for the network railcard. No other recent representations have been received on these subjects from industry organisations or passenger representatives.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to the answer of 6 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 373W, on railway policy, what the changes in demand were to which his Department responded; and who within his Department was responsible for *(a)* assessing these changes and *(b)* reallocation of resources. [45495]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to my answers of 6 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 373W and 18 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 22W.

Rail Fares

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent changes *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the Strategic Rail Authority have made to (i) rail fare regulation and (ii) the regulation of network railcards; and what changes are planned. [45414]

Mr. Jamieson: No recent changes have been made to rail fare regulation. Network railcards are not regulated. The issue of rail fares and fare regulation will be dealt with through the Strategic Rail Authority's review of fares policy.

Railtrack

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to the answer of 6 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 370W, on Railtrack, if he will list the variety of other organisations referred to. [45498]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Transport on 8 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1188W.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many meetings he has had with Ernst and Young as administrators of Railtrack since 1 January. [45451]

Mr. Byers: It is not the normal practice of the Government to release details of meetings or discussions with private individuals or companies.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when Railtrack in administration will repay the money lent to it since going into administration. [44232]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 18 March 2002]:* I refer the right hon. Member to the answer given today by my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State to my hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough and Whitby (Lawrie Quinn) [ref. 45966].

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions on what date the Railtrack administrator is expected to repay the moneys advanced under the commercial loan agreement. [45298]

Lawrie Quinn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the current position of Railtrack plc in administration. [45966]

Mr. Byers: Following the European Commission's decision of 13 February 2002 to clear the package of financial assistance to Railtrack plc (in administration), the administrator has secured up to £4.4 billion of commercial banking facilities, backed by a Government guarantee. This is a clear demonstration of the willingness of the private sector to invest in the UK railway sector. It has enabled the administrator to repay, with interest, the £1.9 billion he has drawn down from the £2.1 billion short-term commercial loan that Government provided on 7 October 2001.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what discussions he has had with the Treasury on the tax treatment of share holdings in Railtrack. [45448]

Mr. Byers: My Department and the Treasury have had numerous discussions at a variety of levels in relation to Railtrack.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much money has been *(a)* granted to, *(b)* lent to and *(c)* guaranteed for Railtrack since going into administration. [44233]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 18 March 2002]:* I refer the right hon. Member to my answer of 12 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 917W.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much the administration of Railtrack has cost the Government to date; and how much the Government have spent on *(a)* railway consultancy, *(b)* accountancy and *(c)* legal advice in the last five months. [44240]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 18 March 2002]:* The total fees for the Administrator and his advisers were about £17.5million to the end of February 2002, which will be repaid when Railtrack comes out of administration. With regard to how much the Government have spent on railway consultancy, accountancy and legal advice, I refer the right hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Minister for Transport to the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) on 12 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 916W.

Tinsley Viaduct

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what analysis has been carried out of alternative routes for traffic using the Tinsley viaduct; [44670]

(2) how many *(a)* cars, motorbikes and vans, *(b)* lorries and *(c)* camper-vans and caravans used the Tinsley Viaduct each day in the last 12 months; [44669]

(3) if he will list the work carried out on the Tinsley Viaduct on the M1 in the last 30 years, in each case giving *(a)* the aim and nature of the works, *(b)* details of the Government body responsible, *(c)* the length of time the works took and *(d)* the costs of the works; [44667]

(4) what his estimate is of the change in the level of traffic on the Tinsley Viaduct on the M1 following the planned return to three lanes of traffic; [44671]

(5) what works are planned on the Tinsley Viaduct on the M1. [44668]

Mr. Byers: I have asked the Chief Executive of the Highways Agency, Tim Matthews, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Tim Matthews to Mrs. Theresa May, dated 25 March 2002:

The Secretary of State for Transport, Stephen Byers, has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions about Tinsley Viaduct on the M1. The Highways Agency has the responsibility for this structure.

In addition to routine maintenance of the structure, major works were carried out between 1976 and 1980 to strengthen the structure following the report of the Merrison Committee into box girder bridges. The Viaduct has also been rewaterproofed and repainted during the 30 year period. Records are no longer available to enable me to provide details of the duration and costs of these works.

The Highways Agency has recently awarded (a contract) to Edmund Nuttall to assess the extent of strengthening works needed to allow the viaduct to carry 3-lanes of traffic in each direction. This investigation started on 25 February and will take up to four months to complete. Decisions on what works are necessary, will be taken in the light of this investigation.

Traffic data for the viaduct is not available in the form you requested. However we do have total vehicle numbers for the year 2000, the last twelve month period for which figures are available:

These are:

Cars, motorbikes and vans including camper vans and caravans—31,486,086

Lorries—9,897,218

These figures equate to Average Annual Daily Traffic flows of 86,263 (cars, motorbikes and vans) and 27,115 (lorries).

Reinstating three traffic lanes in each direction is not expected to have any material effect on the volume of traffic using this section of the M1. The main benefit of restoring capacity will be the reduction of congestion at peak times. This will improve journey-time reliability and reduce accident risks associated with traffic queues on motorways.

Several plans exist for diverting traffic onto alternative routes. They are applied in consultation with the police and depend upon the nature of the incident requiring a diversion. For example, local diversions from the top level of the Viaduct to the lower level, the A631, are used during periods of high winds and when accidents occur on the Viaduct. Wider diversions to direct traffic off the motorway at junctions in advance of the Viaduct are also available.

When the Viaduct needs to be closed for roadworks, alternative traffic routes are agreed with the Local Highway Authorities. It is rarely necessary to close the Viaduct completely. Planned closures take place when traffic flows are reduced, usually at night.

If you require any further information, our Group Leader Phil Stanton, will be happy to assist you. He can be contacted at the Agency's offices at Sunley Tower, Piccadilly Plaza, Manchester M14BE or by telephone on 0161 930 5688.

Heathrow

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what discussions he has had with interested parties following the publication of the Inspector's report on Heathrow terminals on the development of rail links from Heathrow to the West. [45425]

Mr. Byers: I have made clear that I expect BAA to comply with their commitments to encourage the introduction and use of additional public transport services to Heathrow. The conditions of the Terminal 5 planning permission provide safeguarding measures for future rail links to and from the west of Heathrow. The SRA is continuing discussions with BAA on all options for improved rail links, including those west of Heathrow.

Rail Lines (Kent)

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the SRA will announce the tender document for commuter trains on the new CTLR railway lines; and if he will make a statement. [46146]

Mr. Jamieson: The SRA are currently working to a provisional timetable which envisages that the letting process would start in the summer with the publication of an OJEC notice inviting expressions of interest in delivering the domestic services, including the required rolling stock. This would be followed by the issue of an invitation to negotiate [ITN] in the autumn.

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) when the SRA will publish the required electricity supply needs and costs for the London to Sittingbourne trains for the new 12 carriage 375 rolling stock with particular reference to requirements during the rush hour; [46147]

(2) what discussions Railtrack has had with Connex SE management since 1997 on increasing the power supply for the new class 375 rolling stock for the London to Sittingbourne line; and if he will make a statement. [46148]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) is working with the industry, including Connex and Railtrack to ensure all matters connected with the replacement of slam door rolling stock are carried out effectively. Their remit covers the London—Sittingbourne route and the enhancement to the power supply system will take into account the need to operate 12 car trains on this route.

West Coast Main Line

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the SRA's review of capacity utilisation on the West Coast Main Line will be published for consultation. [45460]

Mr. Byers: The Strategic Rail Authority began a review of the project's outputs last year. The outputs will be subject to approval by the Rail Regulator.

East London Line Extension

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment his Department has made of incorporating the Braithwaite viaduct in the East London Line extension; and when he expects to make an announcement on this matter. [44750]

Mr. Jamieson: The Braithwaite viaduct is outside the limits of deviation established for the northern extension of the East London Line under its Transport and Works Order. London Underground Ltd. have no plans, or powers, to construct a railway on that alignment.

Consequently, there is no possibility of the Braithwaite viaduct being incorporated in the East London Line project. LUL have not sought the removal of the Braithwaite viaduct, which is now listed as a Schedule II building, as it does not form part of the East London Line works at the Bishopsgate Goodsyard. London Underground will need to obtain Listed Building consent to demolish the structures adjacent to the Braithwaite.

Rail Freight

David Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what studies have been undertaken by his Department on the impact of rail freight terminals on local communities. [45130]

Mr. Jamieson: Rail freight facilities are subject to approval under normal planning procedures, which take into account, among other things, the impact on the local environment.

David Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the rail freight terminals located in the UK. [45129]

Mr. Jamieson: A rail freight terminal may be any interface between rail freight services, other modes and storage facilities. They vary enormously in size and scope from a simple siding to a multi-user distribution park. Railtrack's 2001 Network Management Statement gives the number of freight facilities connected to its network, including closed sites and maintenance depots. Railtrack's website, www.freightcommercial.co.uk, contains a list of these facilities. I understand the information is also available from a commercial website, www.railfreightonline.com.

David Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will estimate the level of freight transported by *(a)* road and *(b)* rail each year in the UK. [45128]

Mr. Jamieson: Estimates are not made on an UK basis for both road and rail freight. The latest available comparative figures are for Great Britain in 2000:

(a) road: 1,689 million tonnes lifted and 158 billion tonne-kilometres moved.

(b) rail: 93 million tonnes lifted and 18 billion tonne-kilometres moved.

Central Railway Freight Line

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has received from the SRA regarding the *(a)* financial and *(b)* technical case for the proposed Central Railway freight line. [45005]

Mr. Jamieson: Last year the Strategic Rail Authority provided Ministers with a high level financial and technical review of Central Railway's proposals. With the help of consultants and with the co-operation of Central Railway, the SRA are to carry out a further detailed assessment in order to further test key areas of the proposals. This is an essential piece of work if the Government are to be able to take an informed decision about Central Railway's request for a hybrid Bill. The SRA anticipates that the work will be completed by September.

Channel Tunnel Rail Freight

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what recent discussions he has had with *(a)* the EU Transport Commissioner and *(b)* the French Transport Minister on the closure of the channel tunnel rail freight facilities; [43978]

(2) what assessment he has made of the impact on his rail freight target of the closure of the Channel Tunnel rail freight facilities; and if he will make a statement. [44011]

Mr. Spellar: The channel tunnel rail freight facilities have not closed.

West Somerset Railway Link

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will give financial help to the West Somerset Railway Link to the main line at Taunton. [43401]

Mr. Jamieson: There are at present no plans to do so, although it is understood that proposals are being considered by Somerset county council in the context of its Local Transport Plan.

Strategic Rail Authority

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what discussions he has had with the Strategic Rail Authority regarding the funding of multi-modal schemes; [45419]

(2) if he will make a statement on the proposed future funding of multi-modal schemes through the Strategic Rail Authority. [45420]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority is working with my Department on the processes by which the study outcomes will be taken forward.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the SRA's capacity utilisation strategy will be published for consultation. [45461]

Mr. Byers: The Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) is planning to publish a draft Capacity Utilisation Strategy consultation document later this year.

British Transport Police

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the *(a)* operational and *(b)* target strength of the British Transport police in each BTP area was (i) in April 1997 and (ii) at the latest available date. [43950]

Mr. Byers: The British Transport police have provided me with the following information regarding operational and target strength in 1997 and 2002. In 1997 the force recorded target numbers according to rank rather than location.

British Transport staff numbers

	April 1997		*March 2002*	
	Operational	*Target*	*Operational*	*Target*
Force HQ	114.00	—	109.00	112.00
London North	323.50	—	308.00	315.00
London South	296.00	—	308.05	315.00
Midlands	164.75	—	168.00	177.00
North East	203.00	—	189.10	195.10
North West	285.75	—	258.30	267.00
Scotland	195.00	—	203.40	202.40
South West	135.00	—	128.08	135.28
London Underground	415.35	—	430.00	420.00
	2,132.35	2,177	2,101.93	2,138.78

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what new arrangements the British Transport police are implementing to ensure that no individual case is acted on on the basis of an out-of-date arrest warrant; and if he will make a statement. [45182]

Mr. Jamieson: The British Transport police (BTP) have advised that after completing their initial 15 weeks at a regional training centre recruits return to the BTP's Force Training Centre where they receive specialist training that includes the execution of arrest warrants. Further guidelines on warrants are also available internally to all BTP staff. A specialist eight-day course is also run for the BTP's Police National Computer (PNC) operators. This provides detailed knowledge on the PNC and includes procedures relating to arrest warrants.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many Transport police were employed in each of the last five years. [45309]

Mr. Jamieson: The British Transport police have provided me with the following information:

	Number of officers (full time equivalents)
1997	2,132
1998	2,095
1999	2,106
2000	2,073
2001	2,101

Passenger Transport

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether he intends to establish value for money criteria for allowances paid to PTA members. [44377]

Ms Keeble: Remuneration for PTA members under the Local Government Act 1972 and Local Government and Housing Act 1989 are entirely a matter for local determination.

Transport Delays

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent *(a)* assessment he has made and *(b)* research he has commissioned into the cost, in terms of customer and business time and financial impact, of transport delays. [45428]

Mr. Jamieson: The 10-year Plan for Transport made estimates of the amount of time lost on English roads as a result of delays due to congestion in 2000. The Plan made forecasts for 2010 of the increase in congestion and of the extent to which the policies in the Plan would reduce this rise in congestion.

A number of external estimates have also been made of the value road users might place on the elimination of congestion. These use different methods and therefore produce different results, but they all agree that this value runs to billions of pounds per annum.

Neither these external estimates, nor those undertaken by my Department, can be translated directly into assessments of the cost of congestion to business or more widely. This is because they relate only to the amount of time road users lose to congestion and the value of this time to them. They take no account of the costs of implementing the policies or schemes needed to reduce the amount of time lost. The true costs of congestion are therefore the economic and other benefits forgone if we do not tackle it.

We shall be doing further work in this area, the lessons from which we will take into account as part of our Review of the 10 year-Plan which we intend to publish in July.

Transport Costs

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment has been made of *(a)* past and *(b)* likely future scenarios of changes in the cost of different modes of transport in the UK to (i) individuals and (ii) households. [45421]

Mr. Jamieson: The most recent published data on past trends in transport costs can be found in "Transport Statistics Great Britain 2001" (tables 1.15 and 1.25) and "Transport Trends 2001" (pages 23 and 41).

Chapter 9 of "Transport 2010", the Government's 10-year plan for transport, contains some general analysis of future transport costs, including illustrative scenarios and their potential impacts. More detail on these scenarios and on the assumptions underlying the 10-year plan is contained in the companion "Background Analysis" document.

Airport Security

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he expects to reply to the letter of 19 November 2001 from the hon. Member for Leominster, concerning airport and baggage security. [45332]

Mr. Spellar: I replied to the hon. Member's letter on 18 December 2001.

Social Housing

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many *(a)* local authority dwellings and *(b)* dwellings owned by registered social landlords (i) were not of a decent standard on 1 April 2001, (ii) will have been brought up to a decent standard by 1 April 2002, and (iii) will not meet the decent standard on 1 April 2002. [43435]

Ms Keeble: We estimate that 1.7 million social homes did not meet the decent home standard at April 2001—about 1.2 million homes local authority homes and 500,000 homes owned by housing associations. These estimates will be updated later this year when the 2001 English House Condition Survey results are available.

Local authorities have plans to reduce their non-decent stock by 12 per cent. between April 2001 and March 2002. This is through a combination of investment in the housing they own and through transfer to housing associations. We do not yet have equivalent figures for dwellings owned by housing associations. The Housing Corporation is working with associations to ensure the 2004 target is met.

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what his estimate is of the cost of *(a)* reducing the number of social dwellings that are not up to a decent standard by one third in the period 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2004 and *(b)* reducing the number of social dwellings that are not up to a decent standard by 50 per cent. in the period 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2006. [43436]

Ms Keeble: At present we only have estimates for the costs associated with local authority stock. The estimated costs of tackling the capital works outlined above are about £9.5 billion by 2004.

The cost of reducing the number of non-decent homes by one third by 2004 depends on three factors:

(a) the cost of dealing with those dwellings identified as non-decent at April 2001

(b) the cost of making homes decent that fall below this standard between 2001 and 2004

(c) the cost of preventing homes becoming non-decent during the period.

The reduction of non-decent homes in the local authority sector will be achieved through a combination of investment in the local authority stock (through retention, transfer to Arms Length Management Organisations and via resources secured through Private Finance Initiative) and transfer of stock to housing associations.

Currently, no target has been set for the improvement required by 2006. A reduction of 50 per cent. in the number of non-decent LA homes would require investment of about £15 billion, through a combination of investment by local authorities and transfer.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make it his policy to require local authority housing investment programme returns to record the number of homes which *(a)* are and *(b)* are not of a decent standard on the same criteria as set out in the comprehensive spending review. [46109]

Ms Keeble: Local authorities are already required to provide information on their stock in their Housing Revenue Account business plans, which is part of the Housing Investment Programme.

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) how many local authority properties released for letting as a result of the cash incentive scheme in each Government office region in England in each of the past four years were *(a)* bedsits, *(b)* one-bedroomed , *(c)* two-bedroomed, *(d)* three-bedroomed, *(e)* four-bedroomed and *(f)* five-bedroomed or more; [44470]

(2) how many local authority tenants in each Government office in England have applied for a cash incentive scheme grant in each year since 1997–98; and how many of those *(a)* were offered a grant and *(b)* used a grant to purchase a property on the open market; [44469]

(3) what was the total value of cash incentive scheme grants made to local authority tenants in each Government office region in England in *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000 and 2000–01. [44468]

Ms Keeble: Information on the numbers and amounts of Cash Incentive Scheme grants made is given in the table. Data are not collected centrally on grant offers made or the types of properties released.

Cash incentive scheme grants made 1997–98 to 2000–01

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Total number of grants made				
North East	72	17	—	—
Yorkshire and Humber	98	90	18	6
East Midlands	280	278	177	12
East of England	311	287	120	89
London	2,138	1,374	630	403
South East	614	420	195	95
South West	332	256	94	61
West Midlands	372	174	52	35
North West	480	224	15	5
England	4,697	3,120	1,301	706
Total amounts paid (£ million)				
North East	0.4	0.1	–	–
Yorkshire and Humber	0.5	0.5	0.1	–
East Midlands	1.6	1.6	0.3	–
East of England	4.7	3.0	0.9	0.6
London	35.7	23.4	8.4	8.4
South East	7.6	5.2	2.6	1.4
South West	2.7	2.1	0.6	0.4
West Midlands	3.1	1.5	0.1	0.1
North West	3.0	1.7	0.1	—
England	59.3	39.1	13.2	11.0

Sources:
1997–98 and 1998–99—CIS monitoring returns
1999–2000 and 2000–01—Housing Investment Programme returns

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many non-decent social dwellings there are in *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales, *(c)* Scotland and *(d)* Northern Ireland. [46220]

Ms Keeble: We estimate that 1.7 million households lived in non-decent social sector dwellings in 2001. This estimate will be updated later this year when the 2001 English House Condition Survey results are available.

The decent home standard applies to housing in England—different standards are used in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Mr. Grogan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) of 12 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 871W, on rents, if he will provide similar estimates for the real terms percentage changes in each year he predicts for formula rents for council tenants in each local council in England until 2011. [43851]

Ms Keeble: As I said in my earlier answer to the hon. Member, *Official Report*, column 1004W, the underlying increase in 'formula' rents will be the same for all local authorities.

It is possible to make estimates of how average 'actual' rents might change in real terms between 2001–02 and 2011–12 if the national average local authority formula rent were to increase by an average of about 1.5 per cent. per year, and each local authority were to move its actual average rent to its average formula rent over that period (ignoring the impact of rent caps and the limit on annual rent changes for individual tenants). This was the basis of the figures given to the hon. Member for Hendon on 12 December. I am placing in the Libraries a table giving equivalent figures for all authorities on the same basis.

I must, however, emphasise once more that these figures are only estimates based on a number of assumptions. Ultimately the level of 'actual' local authority rents over the next ten years will depend, among other things, on the outcomes of future spending reviews and the decisions taken by individual local authorities.

Right to Buy

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the impact of increasing the maximum cash incentive scheme grant available in London to a level *(a)* equal to the maximum right to buy discount available in London and *(b)* 25 per cent. higher than the maximum right to buy discount in London. [44465]

Ms Keeble: No recent assessment has been made of the impact of increasing the limits on maximum Cash Incentive Scheme grants.

Rate Relief Scheme

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how increased charges to those businesses that will not qualify for assistance under the proposed rate relief scheme in the Government's Strong Local Leadership-Quality Public Services White Paper, will be implemented; and if he will make a statement. [46193]

Dr. Whitehead: The White Paper proposed a rate relief scheme for small businesses, funded through a small supplement of no more than 2.5 per cent. on the bills of ratepayers not receiving the relief. The scheme will require primary legislation to allow for the relief and to allow for the small upward adjustment in the national rate poundage that will apply to those not receiving relief. The timing of this legislation depends on the availability of parliamentary time.

Homelessness

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many families were living in bed and breakfast accommodation, broken down by *(a)* constituency and *(b)* local authority. [44715]

Ms Keeble *[holding answer 21 March 2002]:* Available information reported by local authorities in England on the number of households accommodated in bed and breakfast hotels under statutory homelessness provisions on 31 December 2001, has been placed in the Libraries of the House. Information is collected at local authority level only.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State recently announced a new commitment to ensure that by March 2004 no family with children will be placed in bed and breakfast other than in an emergency. This was accompanied by changes in housing benefit subsidies to make leasing self-contained temporary accommodation more cost effective, and an additional £35 million from DTLR to help local authorities find alternatives to bed and breakfast.

Rough Sleepers

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the number of rough sleepers in *(a)* Leeds and *(b)* West Yorkshire at the latest available date. [45371]

Ms Keeble: Tables showing the local authority HIP estimates and results of street counts for 1998, 1999, 2000 and the latest figures for 2001 were placed in House Libraries on 11 December 2001, *Official Report*, columns 797–98W. Local authorities not listed in the tables for those years submitted either an estimate of 0–10 or no estimate in their HIP returns.

Queen's Jubilee

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much the Department has spent on the Queen's Jubilee in each of the past three years; how the money was allocated; and if he will make a statement. [44602]

Dr. Whitehead: Over the past year the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions has been fully involved in the preparations for the Golden Jubilee. As these costs have been absorbed in the general running of the Department, it is not possible to state what these costs have been.

Staff (Locally Elected Representatives)

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many members of staff at his Department are locally elected democratic representatives; and if he has a strategy for his Department to encourage members of staff to become locally elected democratic representatives. [44560]

Dr. Whitehead: The DTLR does not keep a centralised record of those members of staff who are locally elected democratic representatives.

My Department supports members of staff who wish to take part in all local democratic processes, although some staff are precluded from certain activities due to the nature of their positions.

Abandoned Cars

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he expects to make a statement on the outcome of the consultation on abandoned cars. [45189]

Mr. Jamieson: My right hon. Friend expects to make an announcement shortly.

Neighbourhood Management Programme

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if the Government plans to announce a further round of funding under the Neighbourhood Management Programme; and if he will make a statement. [44791]

Ms Keeble: The Government do intend to announce a further round of funding under the Neighbourhood Management programme. We are keen to learn early lessons from the first round of Pathfinders to help shape our approach in a second round. My Department is developing options for taking this forward, and I hope to be able to announce details of a further round by late spring/early summer.

Marine and Port Safety

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on changes to the safety bodies responsible for *(a)* marine and *(b)* port safety issues since June 2001. [45650]

Mr. Jamieson: There have been no such changes.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what discussions he has had with *(a)* Humber pilots and *(b)* Associated British Ports since 12 December 2001 regarding pilotage on the River Humber. [45647]

Mr. Jamieson: Officials have maintained regular contact with ABP in order to confirm the assurances which they have given us that the safe operation of the Humber ports will not be affected by a dispute with their former pilots. Officials last met representatives of the former pilots at the end of January when the former Chairman and Secretary of Humber Pilots Ltd. called shortly before giving up these positions. The Department has since had two exchanges of correspondence with the acting Chairman.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions by what mechanism his Department *(a)* implements and *(b)* monitors marine organisations and companies against the Port Marine Safety Code. [45649]

Mr. Jamieson: The Port Marine Safety Code applies to statutory harbour authorities, some of which are companies—others are trusts and local authorities. The code required participating authorities to complete

implementation by the end of 2001, and the Department has commenced a review of this work which will run to the end of 2002.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of changes to the nature of pilotage since 12 December 2001. [45648]

Mr. Jamieson: A new pilotage service was introduced on the Humber on 12 December when the former pilots went on strike. My Department has closely monitored the new arrangements and I hope to be in a position to place in the Library a copy of a report of that work.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what representations he has received since 12 December 2001 from *(a)* Humber pilots and *(b)* Associated British Ports regarding (i) pilotage on the River Humber and (ii) other issues. [45646]

Mr. Jamieson: Associated British Ports have provided regular reports to confirm the assurances which they have given us that the safe operation of the Humber ports will not be affected by a dispute with their former pilots. Former Humber pilots and others—mainly pilots in other ports—have made various representations.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what role his Department has played in negotiations between the Humber pilots and the Associated British Ports regarding the Humber pilots dispute. [45645]

Mr. Jamieson: None.

Research

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether reports published by his Department from research conducted for his Department may be *(a)* materially altered and *(b)* edited from the original documentation supplied to the Department before publication. [45658]

Mr. Jamieson: Amendments may be made to the format and content of draft reports in so far as these relate to the presentation of the results of the research and interpretation of relevant policy. Once final draft reports are agreed, they are published, or otherwise made available, without alteration.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to the answer of 12 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 915W, on research documents, if he will place in the Library a copy of the Department's research management policies and practices and the handling of research and/or contractor information as referred to in Annex A of the DTLR(C) Reseach Overview. [45672]

Mr. Jamieson: The information requested has been placed in the Libraries of the House. It should be noted that this is internal guidance and subject to regular update and revision.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to the answer of 12 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 915W, on research documents, who is preparing the specification for further work to present the information in a form suitable for access through the DTLR website; what timetable has been agreed for this specification to be completed; what form this specification is likely to take; and what timetable for completion of work to enable access to be available is expected. [45674]

Mr. Jamieson: My officials are developing the specification to provide a basis for further work within the Department (to ensure consistency of information and compatability with other information available on the website) and for commissioning further software development (to facilitate access to the data). No firm timetable has yet been agreed.

Air Traffic Control

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what progress has been made towards the development of a new air traffic control centre at Prestwick; and if he will make a statement. [45705]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale (Mr. Duncan) on 23 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 862–63W.

Urban Regeneration

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the potential for private finance initiatives within urban regeneration. [41387]

Ms Keeble: The Secretary of State has asked English Partnerships to carry out a feasibility study into the use of private finance initiatives within urban regeneration

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the local government finance assistance schemes available through Leeds City Council to tackle urban poverty. [45373]

Ms Keeble: My Department's main programmes such as the Housing Investment Programmes (HIP) and Revenue Support Grant all contribute to the alleviation of urban poverty. In addition, my Department runs the following programme which specifically addresses this:

Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF), which is paid as part of Rate Support Grant, amounts to:

2001–02: £4.1 million

2002–03: £6.2 million

2003–04: £8.3 million.

NRF is specifically targeted at deprived communities.

The HIP allocation for 2002–03 is £12.8 million. The Major Repairs Allowance allocation is £35.05 million.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the inner city budget schemes initiated to tackle urban poverty since June 1997. [45372]

Ms Keeble: Since June 1997, my Department and its predecessor Department have initiated the following programmes which aim to tackle poverty and address social exclusion, particularly in the most deprived local authority areas, including those in inner cities:

Year	Name of scheme
1998	Single Regeneration Budget round 4
1999	Single Regeneration Budget round 5
1999	New Deal for Communities
2000	Single Regeneration Budget round 6
2000	Government's share of the European Regional Development Fund
2001	Single Regeneration Budget transitional arrangements for the RDA single programme
2001	Community Chest
2001	Community Empowerment Fund
2001	Neighbourhood Management Programme
2001	Neighbourhood Renewal Fund
2001	Neighbourhood Skills and Knowledge Programme
2001	Neighbourhood Wardens Programme
2001	Starter Homes Initiative
2001	Street Wardens Programme

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the impact of EU state aid rules on the use of private sector partnerships to deliver urban regeneration in the UK. [41385]

Ms Keeble: The closure of the PIP programme has restricted the use of regeneration PPPs. We are currently working on ways of removing these restrictions. However, provided public and private involvement in the regeneration PPP acts on the same terms it should not be affected by the state aid rules. The existing gap funding schemes allow PPPs to provide state aid within defined limits. The Single Regeneration Budget, one of the Government's major regeneration programmes, is delivered through local regeneration partnerships and the private sector continues to be an important member of a large number of these.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what his most recent estimate is of the quantity of previously developed urban land available for development in the London Region; and what estimate has been made of the number of new dwellings that may be accommodated on that land. [45651]

Ms Keeble: Estimates from the National Land Use Database show that, within London in 1998, there were some 2,820 hectares of previously developed land that were unused or may have been available for redevelopment. Estimates from the boroughs suggested that some 1,720 hectares of this were suitable for housing and could accommodate some 82,000 dwellings. The figures provide a snapshot of the land available in 1998. The estimated dwelling capacity reflects the development plan policies applying at the time and were made prior to the publication of revised national planning policy guidance on Housing (PPG3). The figures do not make allowance for new brownfield sites emerging in future, or other sources of additional capacity, not involving greenfield land, such as sub-division of existing housing, flats over shops and empty homes.

In September 2000, the GLA published a report entitled "London's Housing Capacity". The capacity study, undertaken in 1999, estimated that there was potential for 381,000 net additional dwellings in London in the period 1997–2016. If vacancies and non self-contained accommodation are included the capacity is 458,000 household spaces. The study found that of the large identified housing sites (which comprised nearly 30 per cent. of the total capacity and where detailed information about former use was available), 97 per cent. were brownfield sites.

The National Land Use Database is currently being updated to 2001.

Play Areas (Children With Disabilities)

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will meet representatives from interested organisations to discuss the Government's proposed best practice guidance on accessible play areas for children with disabilities; and if she will make a statement. [41297]

Dr. Whitehead: The Government are committed to producing new guidance on play areas for disabled children. I welcome the valuable contribution that outside expertise would bring and I would be pleased to meet relevant organisations.

Fire Service

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the awards made by the Arson Control Forum, stating *(a)* the recipient, *(b)* the amount and *(c)* the purpose in each case. [42922]

Dr. Whitehead: I would refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend, the then Minister for the Home Department (Mike O'Brien) on 8 May 2001, *Official Report*, column 78W about the Arson Control Forum's new projects bidding exercise for 2001–02.

I shall be writing to the hon. Member about the outcome of the Arson Control Forum new projects bidding exercise for 2002–03 in due course.

Roads

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many road schemes the South West Regional Assembly has recommended to the Department for approval. [45279]

Mr. Jamieson: To date, the South West Regional Assembly (SWRA) has recommended three road schemes for inclusion in the Targeted Programme of Improvements (TPI). These are:

A38 Dobwalls Bypass

A417 Cowley to Air Balloon Improvement

A30 Merrymeet roundabout, near Okehampton.

In March 2001, the Dobwalls Bypass was added to the TPI while the two other schemes are currently the subject of further studies being undertaken by the Highways Agency.

Gas Explosion, Newton Heath

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the Health and Safety Executive's investigation into the gas explosion in Newton Heath, Manchester on 17 November 2001. [43653]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 21 March 2002]:* A report by Transco plc on the gas explosion at Newton Heath was received by the Health and Safety Executive

on 4 March 2002. HSE is discussing with Transco what action the company should take to implement the recommendations. I understand that a copy of the Transco investigation report has been sent to the hon. Member by HSE and that both they and Transco have offered to meet him to discuss the report.

Stadiums

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will set out the criteria used in deciding whether to call in the planning application for *(a)* redevelopment of Odsal Stadium and *(b)* a new stadium for Arsenal Football Club. [45477]

Mr. Byers: My general approach, like that of previous Secretaries of State, is not to interfere with the jurisdiction of local planning authorities unless it is necessary to do so. Parliament has entrusted them with responsibility for day-to-day planning control in their areas. Local planning authorities are normally best placed to make decisions relating to their areas and it is right that, in general, they should be free to carry out their duties responsibly, with the minimum of interference.

There will be occasions, however, when I may consider it necessary to call in a planning application to determine myself instead of leaving it to the local planning authority. My policy is to be very selective about calling in planning applications. I will, in general, only take this step if planning issues of more than local importance are involved and if those issues need to be decided by me rather than at a local level. Such cases may include, for example, those which, in my opinion:

may conflict with national policies on important matters;

could have significant effects beyond their immediate locality;

give rise to substantial regional or national controversy;

raise significant architectural and urban design issues; or

may involve the interests of national security or of foreign Governments.

Each case is, however, considered on its own facts.

Copies of the letters to call in *(a)* and not to call in *(b)* are on the Department's website.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what discussions he has had with the Department of Culture, Media and Sport on the redevelopment of Odsal Stadium, Bradford. [45491]

Mr. Byers: I have had no discussions with the Department of Culture, Media and Sport on the redevelopment of Odsal Stadium.

Secondments

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many BP employees are on secondment to his Department; for what purposes; on what terms; and how many BP employees have been on secondment to his Department since January 2000. [45888]

Dr. Whitehead: There have been no BP employees on secondment to this Department since January 2000.

Multi-modal Studies

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he intends to make an announcement about the South-East Manchester Multi Modal Study. [45768]

Ms Keeble: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend (Mr. Spellar) to my hon. Friend the Member for Rochdale (Mrs. Lorna Fitzsimons) on 21 March 2002, *Official Report*, columns 492W-493W.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what consultation there has been between the consultants undertaking the London to south and south-west multi-modal study and the Thames Valley multi-modal study on recommendations regarding the M4 from London to Reading. [45452]

Mr. Byers: There have been frequent meetings between the two sets of consultants undertaking these two multi modal studies, and between the Government Offices for the south-east and south-west who are chairing the steering groups for the studies.

Congestion

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the level of inter-urban congestion is on roads in England. [46194]

Mr. Jamieson: To provide a baseline against which to monitor progress towards the congestion target in the 10-year Plan for Transport, we will publish estimates of congestion in 2000 later in the year.

Signposting

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to improve signposting on roads and motorways; and if he will make a statement. [45957]

Mr. Jamieson: The responsibility for placing and maintaining signs lies with the relevant traffic authority. We have published good practice guidance on the design and use of signs, which is available from the Stationery Office, in the Traffic Signs Manual and Local Transport Notes, and the Highways Agency has recently updated its standard on sign maintenance. We are currently consulting on updated guidance for the provision of white and brown direction signs to tourist attractions and facilities in England, and we will be publishing updated guidance on warning signs and road markings when revised Traffic Signs Regulations are introduced later this year.

Local Authority Contracts

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make it his policy to remove the right for local authorities to charge successful tenders a percentage of the total tender price. [45974]

Dr. Whitehead: I am not aware that local authorities do charge successful tenderers a percentage of the total tender price. If the hon. Member would like to provide me with more information, I will consider further.

East of England Development Agency

Mrs. Shephard: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the annual salary costs are of *(a)* the chairman and *(b)* the chief executive of the East of England Development Agency in 2001–02. [45510]

Dr. Whitehead: In 2001–02 the salary costs for the chairman of the East of England Development Agency are £46,634, and the salary costs for the chief executive are £100,590 plus a bonus yet to be determined.

Planning Inspectorate

Ms Dari Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what performance target he plans to set the Planning Inspectorate Executive Agency for 2002–03. [46482]

Ms Keeble: The Planning Inspectorate has a key role to play in delivering quality services to all users of the planning system.

This year, for the first time, we are setting targets for the handling of enforcement appeals. The Planning Green Paper underlines that better enforcement is a key factor in raising public confidence in the planning system. Improved handling of enforcement appeals will support delivery of that objective.

We are also setting a new target for the handling of called-in planning applications and recovered appeals by the inspectorate. This is part of our Green Paper drive to deliver essential improvements in the decision-making times in these cases.

We will be working with the inspectorate to consider ways in which performance on planning appeals might be improved further in later years without compromising quality.

The targets for 2002–03 are as follows:

Timeliness

(a) Planning appeals

80 per cent. of all planning appeals decided by written representation to be decided within 16 weeks;

80 per cent. of all planning appeals decided by hearing to be decided within 22 weeks;

80 per cent. of all planning appeals decided by inquiry to be decided within 30 weeks;

(b) Enforcement appeals

80 per cent. of all enforcement appeals decided by written representation to be decided within 32 weeks;

80 per cent. of all enforcement appeals decided by hearing to be decided within 33 weeks;

80 per cent. of all enforcement appeals decided by inquiry to be decided within 43 weeks;

(c) Called-in and recovered appeals

to process 80 per cent. of all called-in and recovered appeal cases within 12 weeks from close of the inquiry to delivery of the inspector's report to the Secretary of State.

(d) Development plan inquiries

to provide an inspector for a development plan inquiry in at least 90 per cent. of cases on the date requested by the local authority, provided that the objection period has ended and at least six month's notice has been given;

to deliver 90 per cent. of inspector's reports on development plan inquiries to local authorities according to time scales agreed under service agreements.

Quality

To satisfy the Advisory Panel on Standards for the Planning Inspectorate, and thus the Secretary of State and the first Minister of the National Assembly for Wales, annually and following rigorous monitoring, that the quality of all the inspectorate's work is being maintained at a high standard, with 99 per cent. of its case work free from justified complaint.

Information and guidance

To survey customer satisfaction with the inspectorate's performance and to act upon the results.

Wembley Stadium (Transport Links)

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the redevelopment of Wembley Park underground station to facilitate transit to and from a national stadium at Wembley. [45202]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the reply my right hon. friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner) on 12 March 2002, and which I understand appeared in the *Official Report*, on 19 March 2002, column 237W.

Driver and Vechicle Licensing Agency

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many complaints were received by *(a)* the DVLA, *(b)* his Department and *(c)* other bodies with reference to the process by which licence applications are processed by the DVLA, broken down by the nature of each complaint, in each year since 1997. [45426]

Mr. Jamieson: Available information about the number of formal complaints received about the DVLA driving licence application process is shown as follows.

Table 1 shows the number of formal customer complaints received by DVLA broken down by the nature of the complaint.

Table 2 shows the number of official correspondence cases received by DVLA, which may include complaints, but detailed analysis figures are not available. Of these, private secretary office cases are received via the Department. Further analysis of Table 2 data is not available without a special exercise at disproportionate cost. DVLA receive 5.4 million driving licence applications every year.

The Department and DVLA have no information on complaints received by other bodies.

Table 1: DVLA formal customer complaints

Complaint category	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Driving licence applications				
Non receipt of a driving licence	48	59	130	92
Other driving licence complaints	153	227	551	139
Drivers medical complaint	25	75	149	174
Documents lost at DVLA	6	7	46	154
Processing time/procedures[1]	5	6	18	322
DVLA forms	5	4	36	28
Total	242	378	930	909

[1] 1997–98 to 1999–2000 data are for both driver and vehicle complaints.

Table 2: Official correspondence (which may be complaints)

Case type	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Private secretary office	232	253	510	905
MP direct	356	441	996	1,101

Note:
The figures are shown in financial years.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent changes there have been in the *(a)* management, *(b)* computerisation and *(c)* other aspects of the DVLA related to the process by which licence applications are processed; and if he will make a statement. [45413]

Mr. Jamieson: The second EC directive on driver licensing resulted in significant changes to the management, computerisation and other aspects of DVLA's processes relating to the issue of driving licences. Prior to July 1998 drivers received paper licences. From this point photocard licences were introduced on a phased basis. All licences issued by DVLA are now in this form.

The changes have meant that photographs and signatures are captured electronically for reproduction on the new style licence. As it now contains a photograph identity checking procedures have been tightened up considerably, compared with those in place for the issue of paper licences. Ministers decided that from April 1999 identity documentation should be accepted to support identity.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment his Department has made of the effectiveness of the process by which licence applications are processed by the DVLA; what steps his Department *(a)* has taken and *(b)* plans to take to make this process more effective; and if he will make a statement. [45412]

Mr. Jamieson: The process associated with the issue of driving licences has been the subject of continuous review and improvement since photocards were introduced in July 1998. Holders of UK passports and those in receipt of state retirement pensions can now have their applications checked at some 750 post offices with the documents returned immediately, thereby reducing the need to send their documents direct to Swansea.

The introduction of electronic interchange of information about identity between DVLA and UK Passport Services is being actively explored. New versions of forms and leaflets are introduced regularly taking customers views into account, which has reduced the rate of return of applications significantly.

MOT

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what changes have taken place to the MOT test since 1997; what plans there are to make further changes to the test; and if he will make a statement. [45430]

Mr. Jamieson: There have been no significant changes to the scope of the MOT test since 1997 and there are none planned. However, detailed testing standards and methods are constantly updated to keep pace with changing vehicle technology and legislation.

The introduction of the MOT computerised database from January 2003 will improve the availability of standards information for testers and enable much more information on the results of tests to be gathered. It will also alter administrative procedures for recording a test and the issue of test certificates.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many cars *(a)* initially failed, *(b)* passed on completion of necessary work and *(c)* passed without additional work the MOT test in each year since 1990. [45432]

Mr. Jamieson: The Vehicle Inspectorate collects returns from all 18,869 MOT testing stations on a monthly basis which contain details of the vehicles tested, failures and passes. A 2 per cent. sample of the returns is used as the basis for calculating an annual fail rate and details are shown in the table. The inspectorate does not hold details of the numbers of vehicles passed on completion of necessary work or passed without additional work. More information about failure rates and defect categories can be found in the Vehicle Inspectorate Effectiveness report 2000–01, a copy of which has been placed in the House of Commons Library.

Year[1]	*Number of vehicles*[2] *tested*	*Fail rate (percentage)*
1994–95	22,562,000	37.2
1995–96	22,468,000	37.3
1996–97	21,669,000	36.1
1997–98	21,482,000	36.1
1998–99	22,174,000	35.7
1999–2000	22,035,000	33.6
2000–01	22,775,000	31.7

[1] Figures not available in a comparable format prior to 1994–95
[2] Cars, vans and passenger vehicles with up to 12 seats

The introduction of the computerised MOT database from January 2003 will provide the inspectorate with the facility to improve the reporting of pass and fail rates.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the Vehicle Inspector (i) have taken and (ii) plan to take to monitor the work of MOT testing stations and the effectiveness of the MOT test. [45431]

Mr. Jamieson: Checks of the standard of MOT test procedures and authorised premises are carried out by the Vehicle Inspectorate (VI) by means of regular visits during which premises are inspected and tests observed; observed tests of vehicles submitted by "incognito" vehicle examiners; checks carried out in response to appeals against the test result from members of the public; and special investigations in cases where the inspectorate believes that there might be significant breaches of the regulations. The Vehicle Inspectorate has the power to take enforcement action when evidence of sub-standard testing is found. Sanctions can range from the issue of warning letters to withdrawal of authorisation.

VI trialled a new check of testing effectiveness in 2000–01 which has been introduced fully this year. Examiners carry out random re-inspections of recently tested vehicles and the results give VI a measure of how well garages are applying test standards.

The introduction of the computerised MOT database from January 2003 will enable the inspectorate to analyse detailed statistics on the performance of test stations, testers and the outcome of individual tests. This will enable VI to increase its effectiveness through improved targeting of enforcement checks, training and advice.

Road Safety

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) how many local authority *(a)* road safety officers and *(b)* school crossing patrol coordinators there are in the UK; [45663]

(2) how many *(a)* schools and *(b)* companies ran road safety activities with their local authority road safety officers in 2001. [45665]

Mr. Jamieson: This information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will place in the Library the guidance issued by his Department on the location and visibility of speed cameras. [45707]

Mr. Byers: New visibility rules for those areas participating in the safety camera netting off scheme were announced on 3 December and have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Digital Tachographs

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what is the intended date for the introduction of digital tachographs; how many representations he has received about the need to protect data from fraudulent manipulation; how many times drivers will be able to lose their smartcard and remain within the law; and what information he has made available to the freight industry. [44936]

Mr. Spellar: The fitting of digital tachographs to new vehicles will become compulsory two years after the publication by the European Commission of the technical specification for digital tachographs. I understand that publication should take place in May this year. On this basis, digital tachographs will need to be fitted to new vehicles from May 2004.

To date, no representations have been received about the vulnerability of data to fraudulent manipulation. The regulation lays down strict security requirements and provides that type approval may not be granted until the whole system has demonstrated its capacity to resist attempts to tamper with or alter the data.

A driver may hold one valid driver card only. If the driver card is damaged, malfunctions or is lost or stolen, the issuing authority—in the UK the Driver and Vehicle Agency (DVLA)—will issue a replacement card. The issue of a replacement card will be shown on DVLA's database and the original card recorded as withdrawn. Multiple losses of cards by drivers will be reported by DVLA to the Vehicle Inspectorate who may investigate.

We have kept the industry informed about developments through the Road Haulage Forum and other on-going contacts. Now that the Commission is shortly to publish the technical specification, starting the countdown to implementation of the regulation, we will be consulting the industry on various detailed aspects of the implementation process.

TV Cables (Electrocution)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many cases of electrocution there were from 1995 arising from the seepage of water through aerial and satellite cables into television and set top boxes; and if he will make a statement. [43236]

Ms Hewitt: I have been asked to reply.

My Department knows of no such cases.

Aggregates

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what resources he makes available for treatment of Mundic aggregate. [43421]

Mr. Wilson: I have been asked to reply.

Over the past eight years Government have provided funding for the work of the Building Research Establishment programme that looks at problems in concrete materials. This work has included an investigation into mundic treatment processes and testing procedures.

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what progress has been made in developing methods of testing and assessment to enable the maximum number of homes built using mundic aggregate to be accepted by mortgage lenders. [43438]

Mr. Wilson: I have been asked to reply.

The Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors, Mundic Working Group published "Stage Three Expansion Testing" on 29 January 2002. The test has been accepted

by the Council of Mortgage Lenders and will allow some further houses to be removed from the mortgage black list.

Civil Defence

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what requirements there are for local authorities to produce a civil defence plan. [45353]

Mr. Leslie: I have been asked to reply.

The Civil Defence (General Local Authority Functions) Regulations 1993 require county councils, unitary authorities, metropolitan districts and London Boroughs to prepare and review plans for civil defence purposes, to exercise and train for those plans and to consult other local authorities and fire authorities affected by those plans. They require district councils to train their staff, to provide information to county councils and to assist county councils in making and revising plans.

Since the introduction of these regulations local authorities have been encouraged to prepare flexible plans for responding to a wide variety of peacetime hazards.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions who within local authorities is the officer held accountable for civil defence matters. [45354]

Mr. Leslie: I have been asked to reply.

The Chief Executive, or equivalent, of a local authority is accountable for matters relating to civil defence.

SCOTLAND

Retirement Ages

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will list the retirement ages that apply to the employees of her Department and its agencies, including how many and which categories of employees are affected by each; and if she will make a statement on her Department's policy on flexible retirement. [32830]

Mrs. Liddell: The normal retirement practice age in the Scotland Office for staff outside the senior civil service is age 60. Retirement age policy is currently under review with colleagues in the Scottish Executive, from where most Scotland Office staff have been loaned. Pending the outcome of the review, staff may be retained beyond age 60 on a yearly basis, provided there is a post available and performance, conduct and attendance are satisfactory.

The Cabinet Office is responsible for setting the retirement age for all members of the senior civil service. This is age 60. However, Heads of Departments and Agency Chief Executives have flexibility to retain members of the senior civil service beyond age 60 if they judge it in the public interest and they are satisfied about the fitness and efficiency of the individual to carry out his or her duties.

Fair Trade

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether fair trade products are sold in her Department. [39833]

Mrs. Liddell: My Department has no facilities which would enable us to sell fair trade products.

Ministerial Meetings

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when she plans to (1) meet the Scottish Ambulance Service; and on how many times she has met them since becoming Secretary of State for Scotland; [40591]

(2) meet Link Scotland; and on how many times she has met them since becoming Secretary of State for Scotland; [40588]

(3) meet the Scottish NFU; and on how many times she has met them since becoming Secretary of State for Scotland; [40589]

(4) meet Friends of the Earth Scotland; and on how many times she has met them since becoming Secretary of State for Scotland; [40593]

(5) meet the Scottish Society for the Protection of Animals; and on how many times she has met them since becoming Secretary of State for Scotland; [40590]

(6) meet the WWF Scotland; and on how many times she has met them since becoming Secretary of State for Scotland; [40592]

(7) meet Scottish Care; and on how many times she has met them since becoming Secretary of State for Scotland; [40597]

(8) meet the Scottish Council for Development of Industry; and on how many times she has met them since becoming Secretary of State for Scotland; [40598]

(9) meet the Centre for Scottish Public Policy; and on how many times she has met them since becoming Secretary of State for Scotland; [40599]

(10) meet the Education Institute of Scotland; and on how many times she has met them since becoming Secretary of State for Scotland; [40594]

(11) meet Universities Scotland; and on how many times she has met them since becoming Secretary of State for Scotland; [40596]

(12) meet the Scottish Council of Voluntary Organisations; and on how many times she has met them since becoming Secretary of State for Scotland; [40601]

(13) meet the Scottish Daily Newspaper Society; and on how many times she has met them since becoming Secretary of State for Scotland; [40600]

(14) meet the Scottish Parent Teacher Council; and on how many times she has met them since becoming Secretary of State for Scotland. [40595]

Mrs. Liddell: I meet representatives of a wide range of public and private sector bodies in a variety of circumstances, both formal and informal, and I shall continue to do so.

Nuclear Power Stations

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Advocate-General, pursuant to her oral answer of 19 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 157, *(a)* what discussions she has had with the Minister of State, Scotland Office in the last two months on the issue of planning consent for new nuclear

power stations in Scotland and *(b)* what account she took of section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989; and if she will make a statement. [45766]

The Advocate-General: I have regular discussions with ministerial colleagues concerning a variety of issues. As I have explained to the House on several occasions it is a long-standing convention, adhered to by successive Governments, that neither the fact nor content of opinions or advice given by the Law Officers is disclosed outside Government (even in Parliament).

PFI/PPPs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what the difference was between the price offered in reaching preferred bidder stage and the final contract price for PPP contracts let by her Department in each of the last four years; and if she will make a statement; [45612]

(2) what the difference was between the price offered in reaching preferred bidder stage and the final contract price for the five largest PFI contracts let by her Department in each of the last four years; and if she will make a statement. [45597]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999. No PPP or PFI contracts have been let by my Department since that date.

Reserved Matters

Mr. Alan Reid: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will list the functions which she exercises in relation to Scotland in reserved matters. [46104]

Mrs. Liddell: I exercise certain statutory and other functions in relation to reserved matters, including under the Scotland Act 1998 in relation to the devolution settlement itself; in relation to elections in Scotland under the Representation of the People Act 1983, as amended; in relation to the Boundary Commission for Scotland under the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986, as amended; in relation to the Crown Estate Commissioners under the Crown Estate Act 1961, and under the Private Legislation Procedure (Scotland) Act 1936.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the statutory instruments issued by her Department in the last 12 months, indicating *(a)* the purpose of each and *(b)* the cost of each to (i) public funds, (ii) businesses and (iii) individuals. [36221]

Ms Hewitt: In the period, my Department made and issued 142 statutory instruments. During this time 33 Regulatory Impact Assessments were issued in connection with SIs.

The further information requested by the hon. Member could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Sustainable Development

Mr. Colman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what arrangements she will put in place to ensure that in filling vacancies on the Gas and Electricity Markets Authority, account is taken of the Government's commitments to sustainable development and reduction of UK greenhouse gas emissions. [39382]

Mr. Wilson: When making appointments to the Gas and Electricity Markets Authority we seek to create a body with a range of skills and attributes which are relevant to the various duties and objectives of the authority.

Energy Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on energy costs incurred by her Department in each of the last 10 years. [42436]

Mr. Wilson: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Rural Affairs on 19 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 268W.

Entertainment Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list for 1997–98 and each subsequent financial year the amount spent by *(a)* her Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* its non-departmental public bodies in respect of hotel and other similar privately-provided accommodation (i) in the UK and (ii) abroad for (A) Ministers, (B) staff and (C) other persons; if she will list the proportion of this cost incurred in respect of (x) food and (y) alcohol in each case; and if she will list the average cost per hotel room or similar unit of accommodation provided in each case. [34389]

Ms Hewitt: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office, on 14 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 560W.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list for 1997–98 and for each subsequent financial year, including the current year to date, the amount spent by *(a)* her Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* its non-departmental public bodies on (i) food and (ii) alcohol, indicating how much was spent on guests, and how much in respect of (A) Ministers and (B) staff, broken down to show how much was provided directly by her Department and how much reclaimed. [34464]

Ms Hewitt: The information requested for the Department, its agencies and non-departmental public bodies could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Official Visits

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if she will list the official visits to *(a)* Paris and *(b)* Brussels made by each Minister in her Department in 2001 and the mode of travel used; and what guidance is provided to Ministers in her Department on the choice of mode of travel for such visits; [38145]

(2) if she will list the official visits within the UK outside London made by each Minister in her Department in 2001, giving for each *(a)* the origin and destination and *(b)* the mode of travel used; and what guidance is provided to Ministers in her Department on choice of mode of travel for official visits. [38181]

Ms Hewitt: Since 1999 this Government have published an annual list of all visits overseas undertaken by Cabinet Ministers costing £500 or more during each financial year. The Government have also published on an annual basis the cost of all Ministers' visits overseas. Details of travel undertaken since 1 March 2001 will be published as soon as possible after the end of the current financial year. Copies of the lists are available in the Libraries of the House.

All travel is undertaken fully in accordance with the rules set out in the Ministerial Code and Travel by Ministers, copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House.

The additional detailed information requested in respect of UK travel is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Celebrations

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what arrangements her Department has made to celebrate *(a)* St. Patrick's Day, *(b)* St. George's Day, *(c)* St. Andrew's Day and *(d)* Her Majesty the Queen's Golden Jubilee; and how her Department celebrated St. David's Day. [42293]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 11 March 2002:]* I refer the hon. Member to the reply which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport gave to the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) in response to his round robin question of 30 January, 11 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 58–59W.

The DTI, along with other Government Departments, flies the Union flag from its buildings on certain days of the year known as 'named days' when the Union flag must be flown from Government buildings. The days include St. David's Day and St. George's Day, but not St. Patrick's Day.

Consideration is being given to the Union flag flying protocol for the Jubilee. However, the Union flag will fly on Coronation Day (2 June) as this is a 'named day'.

An additional bank holiday will take place on Monday 3 June 2002 to mark the Queen's Golden Jubilee and, to create a two-day holiday period, the spring bank holiday, which would normally take place on 27 May, has been moved to Tuesday 4 June.

East of England Development Agency

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the projected underspend by EEDA for the year to 31 March, indicating the reason for the underspend in each case. [35464]

Alan Johnson: EEDA's total projected underspend for the 2001–02 financial year is £5,864,000.

Mrs. Shephard: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the total annual budget is of the East of England Development Agency in 2001–02; and what sum within that total is allocated to publicity and marketing. [45509]

Alan Johnson: EEDA's total annual budget for 2001–02 is £62.596 million. This figure includes £3.7 million potential end of year flexibility from 2000–01 which as at 20 March is still awaiting parliamentary approval. EEDA has allocated £200,000 for publicity and marketing in 2001–02.

Refurbishment

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures the Government are taking to uphold specification standards for the refurbishments of Departments. [36830]

Ms Hewitt: Individual Departments are responsible for the refurbishments of their own Departments.

Insolvency Service

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the budget for the Insolvency Service was for each year from 1997. [42070]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Plans for the Insolvency Service are published in the Government's Expenditure Plans for the DTI, a copy of which can be found in the Libraries of the House. Insolvency Service expenditure is reported in the service's annual accounts which are laid before Parliament and placed in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what controls are in place to ensure that the Insolvency Service hotline meets the needs of its customers. [42077]

Miss Melanie Johnson: In August and September 1998 the National Audit Office undertook a follow up review of directors disqualification, including the hotline, and contacted a sample of complainants, 78 per cent. of whom stated that they would use the service again. The NAO's recommendations as regards the hotline were fully implemented, and included a simplified complaints questionnaire which is also available on the service's website and by link from Companies House.

The service also operates a formal complaints procedure, and since January 1998, six complaints have been received in connection with the hotline of which only two proved to have been justified.

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps her Department is taking to make insolvency laws more *(a)* efficient, *(b)* user friendly and *(c)* effective in obtaining prosecutions. [42061]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Insolvency Act 2000 introduced an optional moratorium into voluntary arrangement proceedings to make procedures more responsive to the needs of those facing financial difficulties.

The White Paper "Opportunity for All in a World of Change: Insolvency—A Second Chance" outlined the Government's proposals for reforms to the law of personal insolvency.

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the average cost in *(a)* sterling and *(b)* man hours has been to prosecute a rogue director, by the undertaking of an investigation and prosecution by the Insolvency Service, over the last year. [42074]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Insolvency Service is not a prosecuting authority. In cases where the Insolvency Service considers that there is prima facie evidence of a prosecutable offence the official receiver refers the results of his/her investigation to the Legal Services Directorate of the Department of Trade and Industry for further investigation and prosecution where appropriate.

Cost for prosecutions are not available.

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the effect of the Insolvency (Amendment) Regulations 2000 on the Insolvency Service, including *(a)* cost savings, *(b)* efficiency savings and *(c)* changes in service levels between the Service and its customers. [42067]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Insolvency (Amendment) regulations 2000, which came into force on 31 March 2000 make provision for payments into and out of the Insolvency Services Account to be transmitted by electronic means. This has had the following effect on the Insolvency Service and its customers:

(a) Cost savings: the Insolvency Service estimates that a BACS payment costs 50p less than a payment by cheque. In the period from 1 April 2000 to 28 February 2002, 7,770 payments out of the Insolvency Services Account were made by BACS producing total estimated savings for the Insolvency Service of £3,885. Insolvency practitioners who have a BACS payments facility should be able to achieve the same order of cost savings when remitting funds to the Insolvency Services Account by this method. Currently the Insolvency Service does not levy a fee for making a BACS payment, whereas a fee of 65p per cheque is charged against the estate upon which it is drawn. In respect of the 7,770 BACS payments in the period from 1 April 2000 to 28 February 2002, the cost saving to estates was £5,050.50.

(b) Efficiency savings: the resource efficiencies of electronic payments have, with other process efficiency gains, enabled the Insolvency Service to process a 15 per cent. higher volume of payments in the period from 1 April 2000 to 28 February 2002 without increasing the number of staff engaged in this area of work.

(c) Changes in service levels between the Insolvency Service and its customer: a BACS payment request is processed on the day of receipt (day one) by the Insolvency Service and credited to the payee's bank account on day three. By comparison, a cheque requisition received on day one is despatched to the payee on day four; the transit time and bank clearing process mean that the cheque will generally be credited to the payee's account on day seven—four days later than by BACS.

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many convictions as a result of investigations by the Insolvency Service there were in each year since 1997. [42072]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The number of prosecutions as a result of investigation by the Insolvency Service each year since 1997 is as follows:

	Number
1 January 1997 to 31 December 1997	406
1 January 1998 to 31 December 1998	394
1 January 1999 to 31 December 1999	334
1 January 2000 to 31 December 2000	339
1 January 2001 to 31 December 2001	373

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what procedure is in place within the Insolvency Service to track the progress of individual cases being investigated; and what plans she has to review this procedure. [42075]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Official receivers have worked to a centrally defined investigation process since 1999. The progress of the investigation is recorded on case files and on a computerised case management system. Performance is monitored at an office level, at regional level and at national level. The investigation process was reviewed and reissued in 2001 and will be subject to further review in 2003.

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what targets her Department has set the Insolvency Service in each of the years since 1997; and how successful the agency was in achieving these targets. [42064]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The targets and outturn for the Insolvency Service are published in the Insolvency Service annual report, a copy of which can be found in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the effectiveness of the Insolvency Service's quinquennial review. [42080]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Insolvency Service (INSS) has responded positively to the recommendations of the quinquennial review.

All recommendation are being actioned by INSS under the supervision of its steering board. Action includes steps to build on its existing performance, to provide a basis to respond to fluctuations in work loads and to modernise existing delivery frameworks. All action is aimed at enhancing service delivery.

The Insolvency Service steering board will continue to oversee progress on implementation.

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what targets she has set the Insolvency Service for 2002–03. [42063]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The targets for 2002–03 have not yet been approved.

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what *(a)* representations she has received and *(b)* research she has commissioned into the effectiveness of the Insolvency Act 2000; and if she will make a statement. [42059]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I have not received any representations about, or commissioned research into, the effectiveness of the Insolvency Act 2000.

The Insolvency Service monitors those of the Act's measures that came into force by 2 April 2001.

Insolvencies

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many insolvencies by *(a)* creditors voluntary liquidation, *(b)* receivership, *(c)* compulsory liquidation, *(d)* administration and *(e)* company voluntary

arrangement there were in (i) 1997, (ii) 1998, (iii) 1999, (iv) 2000 and (v) 2001 in (A) St. Helens, South, (B) St. Helens, MBC area, (C) Merseyside, (D) Manchester, (E) the north-west regional development area, (F) other regional development areas and (G) England. [44491]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 21 March 2002]:* Information on the regional basis requested is not available. The table shows the different types of insolvency for each year from 1997 to 2001 for England and Wales.

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
(a) Creditors voluntary liquidations	7,875	7,987	9,071	9,392	10,297
(b) Receivership	1,837	1,713	1,618	1,595	1,914
(c) Compulsory liquidation	4,735	5,216	5,209	4,925	4,675
(d) Administrations	196	338	440	438	698
(e) Company voluntary arrangements	629	470	475	557	597

Bankruptcy

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her Department's policy is regarding bankruptcy; and what her policy is on measures to deter individuals and companies from seeking bankruptcy terms. [42055]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Department's policy on bankruptcy is set out in the White Paper "Insolvency A Second Chance" (Cm 5234), which is available in the Libraries of the House. There are no plans to deter individuals or companies from entering into insolvency proceedings, which still have an important role to play in the resolution of financial difficulties.

Business Mergers

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions she has had with the takeover panel in respect of the merger between P&O Princess and Royal Caribbean Cruises. [45361]

Miss Melanie Johnson: None.

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will take action in respect of the proposed merger between KPMG and Andersen's non-US businesses. [45363]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Any proposed merger which meets the qualifying threshold would be considered by the European Commission under European Community Merger Regulation.

The parties concerned have not yet made a formal notification to the Commission.

US Steel Tariffs

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on *(a)* the decision by the US Government to impose tariffs on steel imports and *(b)* the impact on the UK steel industry of the decision; and what assistance she will provide to the UK steel industry. [41863]

Mr. Wilson: I refer my hon. Friend to the statement my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry made to the House on 6 March 2002, *Official Report*, columns 307–19.

The direct impact on the UK steel industry of the additional US tariffs on their steel imports is likely to be a marked reduction in the approximately 300,000 tonnes of UK steel exports to the United States. The indirect impact of US imports being deflected to the EU is of potentially greater significance.

The Department works closely with the UK steel industry to provide support to improve the sector's competitiveness, for example through the Metals Industry Competitiveness Enterprise and the National Metals Technology Centre.

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the impact of US tariffs on the import of steel on the steel industry in south-east Wales; and what action she intends to take. [41866]

Mr. Wilson: The direct impact on the UK steel industry of the additional US tariffs on their steel imports is likely to be a marked reduction in the approximately 300,000 tonnes of UK steel exports to the United States. The indirect impact of US imports being deflected to the EU is of potentially greater significance.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, set out the Government's reaction to the US measure in her statement to the House on 6 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 307–19.

Bioenergy Capital Grants

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will ensure that the bioenergy capital grants scheme is sufficiently flexible to support small and medium sized enterprises, [44052]

Mr. Wilson: After considerable consultation with the industry conducted by my Department and the New Opportunities Fund (NOF), we have recently put forward the initial details of the bioenergy capital grants scheme on our website. The initial design takes into account the policy directions which accompany the NOF funding and the recommendations of the Performance and Innovation Unit which accompany the DTI funding. There is no limit to the size of organisation which can be involved, but we envisage setting minimum project sizes to ensure appropriate economies of scale, appropriate electrical efficiency and sufficient supply chain development.

There may also be scope for support for smaller-scale biomass projects within our forthcoming community and household grants scheme which we are currently developing under the Sustainable Energy Research and Development Programme.

Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment Directive

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what estimate she has made of the cost to the British economy of the waste electrical and electronic equipment directive using the methodology set out in the draft document; [42591]

(2) if she will make a statement on the economic cost of the methods of disposing of waste electrical and electronic equipment in the United Kingdom. [42593]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 12 March 2002]:* An updated partial regulatory impact assessment (RIA) will be placed in the Libraries of the House this month. Based on the latest draft of the directive, the RIA suggests the annual compliance costs of implementing the directive will lie in the range £191 million to £391 million.

Industry estimates suggest that, by weight, around half of the total UK electrical goods waste arisings currently enter a recycling/recovery process on an economic basis. There will be a cost associated with disposal of the remainder. This will primarily relate to landfilling costs.

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has received from greetings card manufacturers and retailers about the inclusion of musical greeting cards within the scope of the proposed waste electrical and electronic equipment directive. [42592]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 12 March 2002]:* I am not aware of any representations.

Fuel Poverty

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how the Government will ensure that sustainable energy and realistic pricing proposals do not increase fuel poverty. [45177]

Mr. Wilson: The Government will continue with actions to put downward pressure on prices. The Government's Fuel Poverty Strategy also sets out a range of programmes to improve the energy efficiency of homes of the fuel poor. This will help households in fuel poverty and minimise the impact of any possible increases in energy prices. The Government are committed to monitor and report on progress in tackling fuel poverty.

Energy Research

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much the Government have spent on energy research and development in each year since 1997. [45175]

Mr. Wilson: Government expenditure on energy research and development since 1997 has been in the fields of sustainable energy and nuclear fusion and is set out in the table.

£ million

	Sustainable energy research:		
	DTI programme	*Research councils*	*Fusion research*
Expenditure			
1997–98	13.0	2.9	16.6
1998–99	11.3	3.1	12.6
1999–2000	12.5	2.4	14.4
2000–01	13.1	2.8	14.3
Provision			
2001–02	18.5	5.5	14.3
2002–03	19.0	7.0	14.3

Publicly funded research into nuclear fission reactors stopped in 1994. The Health and Safety Executive co-ordinates a nuclear safety research programme funded by the relevant nuclear licensees.

Trading Scheme Exemptions

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry pursuant to her answer of 14 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 520W, on the single tier exemption, what representations were made to her Department for an additional exemption from the relevant provisions of the trading schemes legislation for trading schemes with more than a single master franchise in the UK during *(a)* the consultation in 1996 and *(b)* lobbying for the amending SI 1997 No. 1887; and if she will place in the Library the description of Government policy on multi-level trading provided to those requesting additional exemptions during the lobbying for SI No. 1887; and if she will make a statement. [39319]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* At the time of the Trading Schemes Act 1996 and the introduction of supporting subordinate legislation in 1997, parts of the franchise industry proposed exclusion of schemes with more than one master franchiser in the UK.

In response to some of the representations made, the subordinate legislation was amended to reflect more accurately the policy of excluding from regulatory control master franchise operations in which only the UK master franchiser would benefit from the recruitment of others to the scheme. However, it was decided that schemes with more than one master franchiser could leave a loophole allowing illegitimate schemes to avoid regulatory controls.

Government policy for legislation in this area has always been:

to provide a degree of protection to a party who is vulnerable in relation to another, in terms of their financial position and level of business acumen, but

not to burden legitimate business, particularly the franchise sector, with unnecessary regulation.

Galileo Project

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions she has had with representatives of the German and Dutch Governments on the commercial viability of the Galileo project. [43046]

Ms Hewitt: My officials, together with those of other Departments, have held a number of discussions with officials in the German and Dutch Governments about commercial viability and other issues relating to the Galileo project. We share with them and others the view

that we support Galileo in principle, subject to satisfying certain conditions on finance, management and civil use. EU level discussions continue in advance of Transport Council.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if the Government will give financial assistance to the Galileo project. [43045]

Ms Hewitt: We are already providing funding to the European Space Agency for the first phase of the Galileo programme. I am currently in discussion with my ministerial colleagues about subscribing to the development and validation phase. We expect the EU Transport Council to decide on 26 March whether or not to proceed with Galileo. If the decision is positive, a UK announcement on funding will follow.

Respiratory Compensation

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much money has been paid in *(a)* respiratory compensation and *(b)* legal costs to solicitors. [43965]

Mr. Wilson: To date, over £276 million has been paid in compensation and £49 million has been paid to claimants' solicitors in relation to respiratory disease.

Territorial Forces

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many members of staff of her Department are members of the Territorial forces; and if she has a strategy to encourage members of staff in her Department to become members of the Territorial forces. [44067]

Ms Hewitt: My Department does not currently keep records of staff who are members of the Territorial forces. While there is no specific strategy to encourage staff to become members of the Territorial forces, my Department does grant special leave with pay of up to eight days a year (plus additional special leave without pay) for normal training. In the event of mobilisation of reserve forces, my Department would respond sympathetically to requests for staff to serve actively. Such absence would be unpaid but count as reckonable for pensions purposes.

Aerospace Industry

Mrs. Irene Adams: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps the Government have taken to help the aerospace industry since 1997; and if she will make a statement on her plans for further support. [43920]

Mr. Wilson: The Government continue to support the aerospace industry through various programmes. For example, since 1997 we have committed nearly £1 billion in Launch Investment to Rolls-Royce and Airbus UK towards developing engines and wings for new aircraft. The Government have also funded over £100 million of research under their civil aeronautics research programme since 1997. The programme, which was renewed last year for a further five years until 2006, will continue to encourage both research and technology demonstration in civil aeronautics. There are also programmes to encourage cross-sectoral activity, for example, business process improvements, e-business and supply chain activity, from which the aerospace industry benefits. The Government are also making significant investment in the science base with the Research Council funding of research in a wide range of basic technologies of potential application in aeronautics.

The Government are undertaking a study with the SBAC to review the future of support to the sector. The Government have also supported retention of a major aeronautics research programme as part of the forthcoming 6th European Framework programme from which UK companies should gain significant benefit.

Ian Stillman

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Small Businesses held concerning the case of Ian Stillman during his visit to India on 3 to 6 February. [43906]

Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 18 March 2002]:* I understand that Mr. Stillman's case has been raised by ministerial colleagues in the Foreign Office.

Trade Partners UK

Andrew Selous: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what public funding Trade Partners UK has had in each year since 1981 in *(a)* actual and *(b)* real terms. [45008]

Nigel Griffiths: Trade Partners UK was launched in May 2000 and is the trade promotion and development arm of British Trade International. Programme funding of the Government's trade promotion and development activities from 1999, the year British Trade International was established, is as follows:

	£ million
1999–2000 outturn	56.6
2000–01 outturn	70.5
2001–02 budget	68.0

I have placed in the Libraries of the House a more detailed breakdown of current Government support for trade development and promotion, in the expenditure plans reports of British Trade International (Cm 5123), the Department of Trade and Industry (Cm 5112), the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Cm 5110) and British Trade International's resource accounts for 2000–01 (HC 526).

I have placed in the Libraries of the House information about Government support for trade development and promotion in earlier years, in the expenditure plans reports of the Department of Trade and Industry and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on what date Trade Partners UK received a request for advice on the attempted acquisition of Sidex by LNM/Ispat; and on what date it replied. [44473]

Ms Hewitt: In accordance with previous Administrations, it is not our practice to disclose internal advice to Ministers which is exempt under Exemption 2 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

General Agreement on Trade in Services Negotiations

Ann McKechin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the progress her Department has made in consulting universities and colleges of higher education on the inclusion of higher education services in the GATS negotiations at the World Trade Organisation. [44483]

Ms Hewitt: I refer my hon. Friend to my previous answer on 14 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 528–29W. The consultations to which I referred are continuing.

Justices of the Peace

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many members of staff at her Department are justices of the peace; and if she has a strategy for her Department to encourage members of staff to become justices of the peace. [44555]

Ms Hewitt: My Department does not keep records of staff who are justices of the peace. While there is no specific strategy to encourage members of staff to become justices of the peace, my Department does grant special leave with pay of up to 18 days a year (plus reasonable time for travelling to permit up to 26 attendances).

Compensation Applications

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many applications have been made for compensation for vibration white finger/carpal tunnel syndrome, broken down by year of application. [44380]

Mr. Wilson: Carpal tunnel syndrome, CTS, was not originally included in the Handling Agreement and therefore claimants cannot directly apply for compensation for this disability under the present scheme. However, it was agreed last year between the Department and the claimants' solicitors that CTS is a compensatable condition and these claims would be dealt with alongside vibration white finger, VWF, claims. Where claimants have been diagnosed as suffering from CTS following medical assessment, the Department will make an additional payment. The Department cannot therefore state the numbers of CTS claimants until all valid claimants are assessed.

The number of claims registered for VWF by year is as follows:

	Number of claims
1991	1
1994	1
1995	1,201
1996	8,537
1997	9,309
1998	12,079
1999	23,666
2000	60,417
2001	18,474
2002	4,114
Total	137,799

Nuclear Electricity

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much nuclear electricity general capacity is expected to be decommissioned, in each year of decommissioning. [44339]

Mr. Wilson: As with other electricity generation options, decisions on nuclear station lifetimes are a commercial matter for the generating companies. Latest information published by the nuclear generating companies is as follows:

British Energy stations	*Declared net capability (MW)*	*Current expected operational lifetime*
Hinkley Point B	1,220	2011
Hunterston B	1,190	2011
Dungeness B	1,110	2008
Hartlepool	1,210	2014
Heysham I	1,150	2014
Heysham II	1,250	2023
Torness	1,250	2023
Sizewell B PWR	1,200	2035+

Magnox stations	*Capacity (MW)*	*Expected lifetime*
Calder Hall	194	2006–08
Chapelcross	196	2008–10
Bradwell	246	2002
Sizewell A	420	2006
Dungeness A	450	2006
Oldbury	434	2008
Wylfa	980	2009

Gas-fired Power Stations

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations her Department received prior to the lifting of the moratorium on gas-fired power stations. [44665]

Mr. Wilson: Representations were made to the Department throughout the period of the stricter consents policy on the value of the policy and its application to particular projects. It is not realistic to detail all these. However the ministerial decisions of particular cases are a matter of public record.

Construction Skills Certification Scheme

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much public funding, including EU funding has been made available to the Construction Skills Certification Scheme in each year since its inception. [44224]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 18 March 2002]:* CSCS Ltd. is an independent company limited by guarantee. The Department has not provided any public funding to CSCS. Overall funding is a matter for them.

The inquiry has been passed to CSCS with the request that they respond directly.

Women Engineers

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what plans she has to encourage women engineers back to work who have taken time off to raise families; [43576]

(2) what plans she has to promote an increase in the number of women entering the engineering profession. [43577]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 19 March 2002]:* The DTI Promoting SET for Women unit works closely with the WISE campaign on a number of projects designed to attract more girls into engineering. We are funding a pilot mentoring scheme by WES/AWISE which will encourage and support both entrants and returners to science and engineering careers.

Export Licence Requirements

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether export licence requirements extend to the production in countries outside the EU of weapons, vehicles and equipment otherwise licensable in the military list as part of offset deals on the sale of services and intellectual property involving UK firms. [44710]

Nigel Griffiths: An export licence is not required from the Department of Trade and Industry's Export Control Organisation to manufacture items outside the UK. However, where the product to be manufactured under commercial licence has a potential military use, the UK exporter might require an export licence before the goods and technology necessary for the establishment and operation of the licensed production facility can be supplied from the UK.

The Government have made it clear that an export licence will not be issued where to do so would be in contravention of the Consolidated EU and national arms export licensing criteria, including where there is a clear risk that the finished products could be used for internal repression, international aggression, or diverted to an undesirable end-user.

Company Law Review

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress has been made with regard to the company law review; and if she will make a statement. [44778]

Ms Hewitt: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary for State for Competition, consumers and Markets to the hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare (Brian Cotter) on 15 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 982W.

Inward Investment

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the British percentage was of inward investment into the EU from *(a)* the USA, (b) the G7 countries and (c) Japan in each of the last 20 years. [44781]

Ms Hewitt: The information is in the following table:

UK share of G7 foreign direct investment into the EU 1994–99
Percentage of stock level at year end

	USA	*G7 total*[1]	*Japan*
1994	37.1	20.6	23.2
1995	34.6	19.3	23.2
1996	36.0	20.7	25.0
1997	40.1	24.4	27.9
1998	34.5	21.1	25.9
1999	33.0	21.5	14.9

[1] G7 comprises of UK, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Canada and USA.

Note:

Eurostat Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) statistics have been quoted to ensure consistent comparison between countries and are based on inward FDI stock figures as reported by individual EU member states. Outward FDI stocks in the EU published by other non-EU country statistical offices may differ from those published by Eurostat. For example, the US Bureau of Economic Analysis statistics reported than in 1999 the UK received 41 per cent. of US outward FDI stocks. There are a number of widely recognised technical reasons why such apparent discrepancies arise.

Source:

Eurostat New Cronos database.

EU Tariffs

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate she has made of the cost to *(a)* EU countries and *(b)* the UK economy of tariffs applied by the EU in the last year for which figures are available. [44764]

Ms Hewitt: In 2000, the latest full year for which figures are available, on total UK imports of £222.6 billion the customs duty charged was £1.8 billion.

In the same year on total EU imports, including UK imports, of £1,525 billion, the customs duty charged was £8.9 billion.

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many tariffs the EU has applied to goods from outside the EU in each of the last 20 years. [44780]

Ms Hewitt: The European Union's 2002 Common Customs Tariff has 10,400 lines. A positive "most favoured nation" "full" rate of duty is payable on 8,270 of these lines, although in most cases one or more "preferential" (i.e. lower) rates of duty is payable on imports from a range of countries. On the remaining 2,130 lines, no duty is payable.

Equivalent information for earlier years is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Broadband Access

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the *(a)* total number and *(b)* percentage of (i) homes and (ii) businesses in the UK that have broadband access. [44784]

Ms Hewitt: A map showing availability of broadband services in the UK was contained in the UK Online annual report 2001. The report states that 60–65 per cent. of the population (equating to around 15 million households) is now covered by at least one affordable broadband technology.

Oftel have reported that there were some 350,000 subscribers to ADSL and cable modem services as at 25 January 2002.

DTI's Business in the Information Age International Benchmarking Report 2001 provides information on the information and communication technologies used by businesses.

Copies of these documents have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Universal Bank

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the progress made in establishing the universal bank. [44789]

Ms Hewitt: Progress continues to be made on universal banking services.

Trade Union Membership

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many and what percentage of workers belonged to trade unions in each of the last 20 years; and what the figures were broken down into *(a)* public and *(b)* private sector workers. [44765]

Ms Hewitt: The number of workers who are members of a trade union can be estimated annually from the results of the autumn Labour Force Survey. The number and percentage of workers in Great Britain is given in the table. Data are available for union membership from 1990 and can be sub-divided for the private and public sector from 1993.

Union membership in Great Britain, 1990 to 2001

	Workers[1] in employment		*Workers[1] in private sector*		*Workers[1] in public sector*	
Year	*Members (Thousand)*	*Union density*	*Members (Thousand)*	*Union density*	*Members (Thousand)*	*Union density*
1990	8,835	33.9	—	—	—	—
1991	8,602	33.6	—	—	—	—
1992	7,956	32.2	—	—	—	—
1993	7,767	31.5	3,920	23.7	3,847	64.4
1994	7,530	30.1	3,825	22.5	3,705	63.6
1995	7,309	28.8	3,651	21.3	3,658	61.4
1996	7,244	28.2	3,629	20.6	3,615	60.9
1997	7,154	27.3	3,605	19.7	3,548	60.8
1998	7,152	26.9	3,590	19.2	3,561	60.7
1999	7,257	27.0	3,649	19.2	3,609	59.8
2000	7,321	27.0	3,600	18.7	3,720	60.0
2001	7,270	26.5	3,606	18.4	3,664	58.1

[1] Includes all those in employment, excluding members of the armed forces, unpaid family workers, and those on college based schemes.

European Trade Mark Law

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to the answer of 13 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 944W, what progress has been made towards liberalising European trade mark law. [44787]

Ms Hewitt: The European Parliament has called on the Commission to report on the implications for industry, consumers and employment of liberalisation of European trade mark law and to submit detailed proposals by the end of this year.

In the meantime, we continue to work bilaterally with our European partners to build the necessary consensus for change. Unanimity is needed for change to the Community Trade Mark Regulation. Although some member states support change, a number remain unconvinced.

Low Carbon Vehicles

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much the Government have spent on the research and development of low carbon vehicles since 1997. [45176]

Mr. Wilson: The DTI's Foresight Vehicle Programme is supporting 20 "low carbon vehicles" projects valued at £25.5 million of which Government's contribution is £9.7 million. The projects include work on advanced lightweight materials, alternative systems for powertrain such as hybridisation and improved conventional internal combustion engines. The Foresight Vehicle Programme is carrying out technology road mapping which will identify R&D priorities for future phases of Foresight Vehicle and inform requirements such as those outlined in the Government's draft "Powering Future Vehicles" strategy. The strategy seeks to accelerate the transition in the UK to a low carbon transport systems.

Since 1992, the DTI's Advanced Fuel Cells Programme has supported industrial R&D in the fuel cells area including stack development, fuel processing and systems development for both transport and stationary power generation applications. Some of the work is generic so it is not possible to be precise regarding the expenditure specifically relating to vehicles. It is estimated that since 1997 work which is wholly or primarily relevant to vehicle applications of fuel cells has amounted to £2.4 million.

The Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council supports research into transport operations, manufacture and management. Areas covered include improving engine efficiencies, road management, environmental impacts, social inclusion and safety. The £10 million EPSRC research portfolio covering transport operations and management consists of 97 active grants, of which an estimated £500,000 per year relates to low carbon vehicles. EPSRC also supports fuel cell research. The research portfolio is shared between engineering, chemistry and materials programmes of the EPSRC which estimates overall support of around £2 million a year for fuel cell research across all programmes.

Renewable Energy

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if the proposed renewables obligations fund over three years includes research into the nuclear option; [45178]

(2) what proportion of the renewables obligation fund is earmarked for *(a)* solar voltaics, *(b)* offshore wind and *(c)* tidal and/or sea powered power generation. [45179]

Mr. Wilson: The renewables obligation will require licensed electricity suppliers to demonstrate through a system of renewables obligation certificates (ROCs) that they have bought a specified proportion of their electricity from renewable sources. Alternatively, suppliers may meet their obligation through the independent market purchase of ROCs. The renewables obligation will thus provide a substantial market incentive for the UK renewable energy industry as a whole. Electricity suppliers will be free to choose the sources of renewable electricity that enable them to meet their obligation most cost-effectively.

Suppliers who do not present the required number of ROCs will be required to make a buy-out payment corresponding to the extent that their purchases of renewable electricity fall short of the specified amount. The buy-out price will be set initially at 3 pence per kilowatt hour. The proceeds from the buy-out payments will be recycled to suppliers in proportion to the number of ROCs presented. The recycling of the buy-out payments will thus provide an extra incentive to suppliers to meet their obligation.

Separately from the operation of the renewables obligation, the Government are providing over £260 million over the three-year period to March 2004 for the direct support of renewable energy initiatives, including capital grants for early demonstration schemes, and research grants.

Of this direct support money, £20 million has been specifically allocated to solar photovoltaics (PV), £74 million to offshore wind, and £5 million to wave and tidal energy; in addition, finance for research and development projects in these areas will be available through the DTI's Sustainable Energy Programme and through the Research Councils.

The Government do not currently fund nuclear fission research and development, but are currently active participants in a range of international forums that cover nuclear fission including the OECD's Nuclear Energy Agency (NEA), the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the EU's Euratom Framework Programme and the Generation IV initiative.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on plans to utilise renewable energy sources within Wales. [44042]

Mr. Wilson: The Government's role in the promotion of renewable energy is to set the framework but leave the market to decide on the type and location of projects to be pursued.

The Renewables Obligation will apply to Wales and England (with a corresponding arrangement in Scotland), providing an assured market for renewables until 2027. Subject to parliamentary approval, we anticipate that the Renewables Obligation will come into effect on 1 April 2002.

Consent for projects under 50 MW, except offshore wind, is normally a matter for local determination. For larger projects in Wales as in England, I have the appropriate consent powers, which are exercised after extensive consultation with all interested parties, including the Welsh Assembly Government.

Wales has much potential for renewable energy projects. The regional assessment conducted for Wales indicated that Wales could deliver between 4 per cent. and 13 per cent. of the UK Renewables Obligation target. It also said:

> "Whether the higher end of the target range is reached will depend almost entirely on the deployment of wind energy and biomass schemes".

Nuclear Reactor Design

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what evaluations her Department has made of new nuclear reactor and nuclear power plant design and operation in *(a)* South Africa, *(b)* America and *(c)* Canada. [44808]

Mr. Wilson: The UK is involved in international nuclear systems work including the Generation IV International Forum (GIF), started by the United States Department of Energy (USDOE) to promote and develop better longer-term nuclear reactor designs. South Africa, America and Canada are all among the 10 countries that participate in the forum.

The evaluation of specific new reactor designs is a matter for UK generating companies and the market, as with all generation options.

UK Arms Sales

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list arms sales from UK companies to India and Pakistan approved since 1997. [44761]

Nigel Griffiths: The Department of Trade and Industry's Export Control Organisation does not record arms sales. It records details of all export licences issued and refused, which are published in the Government's annual reports on strategic export controls, copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House.

The granting of a licence does not necessarily translate into a sale.

New Deal

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many people have been employed by her Department in each of the last three years under *(a)* the New Deal for Young People, *(b)* the New Deal for the Over 50s and *(c)* the New Deal for Lone Parents; and at what cost, listed by category, to public funds. [44911]

Ms Hewitt: The information is as follows:

Scheme	1999	2000	2001
Young People	4	1	8
Over 50s	0	0	1
Lone Parents	0	0	2

In addition to the above, my Department has appointed 10 New Deal participants from the 25+ scheme during the same period.

New Deal recruits are appointed to existing vacancies so extra costs to public funds are limited to the subsidy, where appropriate, and any additional training and development which may be needed. The cost of the latter cannot be readily identified.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many people employed by her Department under the new deal for young people in each of the last four years have subsequently *(a)* found unsubsidised employment for more than 13 weeks and *(b)* returned to jobseekers' allowance or other benefits. [45090]

Ms Hewitt: My Department has appointed 26 new dealers during the period in question, 24 of whom are, or have been, employed by the Department on an unsubsidised basis. Of those new deal participants appointed under the scheme, four have been successful in securing permanent employment with the Department, while six others have departed, Of the latter, it is not possible to identify how many remained in alternative unsubsidised employment, or returned to jobseeker's allowance or other benefits.

Creche Facilities

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what creche facilities are provided by her Department; and at what cost. [44853]

Ms Hewitt: The following are DTI's child care provisions for its staff.

Holiday Playscheme

Departmental staff in central London have access to a 32-place holiday playscheme for a minimum of 54 days each year. Staff contribute £14.00 per place towards the £31.00 daily fee. DTI HQ staff in Cardiff have access to a local Easter and summer holiday playscheme for a contribution of £8.00 per place towards the £16.00 daily fee.

Nursery Places

Departmental staff in central London have access to six nursery places (divided equally between under 2s and over 2-year-olds) at the inter-departmental nursery. The weekly cost to the Department for a full-time place for an under 2-year-old is £200.50 and £169.00 for 2-year-olds and over. Staff contribution is levied at a flat rate of £103 per week for a full-time place, irrespective of the age of the child. Children attending the nursery on a part-time basis are charged a pro rata rate.

DTI's total expenditure on child care for this financial year is £43,995.00.

PFI/PPPs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the *(a)* private finance initiative and *(b)* public private partnership projects which have been delayed. [44888]

Ms Hewitt: The following projects have been delayed:

Private finance initiative: The redevelopment of the National Physical Laboratory at Teddington.

Public private partnerships: British Nuclear Fuels Ltd.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the difference was between the price offered in reaching preferred bidder stage and the final contract price for PPP contracts let by her Department in each of the last four years; and if she will make a statement. [45617]

Ms Hewitt: My Department has not let any PPP contracts in the last four years.

Human Rights Act

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many cases have been brought against her Department under the Human Rights Act 1998; and what has been the cost in *(a)* legal fees to defend cases and *(b)* compensation payments. [45061]

Ms Hewitt: We do not collect central records of all cases in which the Human Rights Act 1998 is relied on. Human rights are now integrated in the general law and are rarely the sole basis for a challenge. We do monitor centrally those cases which we consider may be of particular significance to this Department.

We do not collect separate information centrally about the costs to public funds, legal fees or compensation payments in cases which include a human rights issue. In most cases it will be difficult to single out associated costs relating to the human rights element.

Public Service Agreement

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which public service agreement targets that are scheduled to be met in 2002 will not be achieved by the due date. [44839]

Ms Hewitt: Information abut progress on public service agreement targets will be published in the DTI's 2002 departmental report.

FYR Macedonia

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what arrangements are in place to encourage trade between the UK and FYR Macedonia. [45242]

Nigel Griffiths: In June 2001, Trade Partners UK organised representation of 12 UK companies at the Skopje International Fair. Trade Partners UK also arranged a programme for representatives of two major Macedonian food importers visiting the International Food Exhibition in London.

A similar programme of events is planed for 2002-03.

In addition, Trade Partners UK offers a full range of services to exporters by way of inquiry handling, briefing, and general advice and support for market entry.

Pollution (Irish Sea)

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list pollution incidents involving discharges above 0.01 tonnes in the Irish sea from 9 July

2001 to the latest available date, stating the *(a)* date, *(b)* size of incident, *(c)* name of company reporting the spill and *(d)* name of the company responsible in each case. [44002]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 21 March 2002]:* The information relating to oil spill incidents in the Irish sea basin, reported to the Department of Trade and Industry, from 9 July 2001 to the present date is as follows.

Date	*Amount*	*Reported by*	*Responsible company*
14 September 2001	0.1	BHP	BHP

DTI only receives reports for oil spills reported from or attributed to offshore installations.

Greenwich Mean Time

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will confine GMT to the period between the last Sunday in November and the last Sunday in January. [45345]

Alan Johnson: There are no plans to reduce the period of GMT. The start and end dates of summer time are harmonised across EC member states through a European directive.

India

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what joint programmes her Department has to promote bilateral trade with India. [43596]

Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 21 March 2002]:* The full range of services of British Trade International—both for trade and investment—are available to British companies seeking to do business with India which is a very important market for the United Kingdom. Trade Partners UK is responsible for helping UK exporters and outward investment, while Invest UK seeks to attract Indian investors, who are coming to the UK in growing numbers.

The Indo-British Partnership (IBP) was created in 1993 to encourage trade and investment between our two countries. Since the inception of the IBP UK-India trade has grown by 45 per cent. and, including invisibles, is now worth £5 billion a year.

The Enterprise Initiative: India is a current Trade Partners UK programme designed to help small and medium sized UK companies to enter the Indian market. The initiative offers a variety of services to British exporters.

Rail Lines (Kent)

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many meetings the South East England Development Agency has had since its inception with *(a)* Railtrack, *(b)* the Strategic Rail Authority and *(c)* Connex SE to discuss the issue of power shortages and infrastructure planning on the (i) London Victoria to Sittingbourne, (ii) London Bridge to Sittingbourne and (iii) Cannon Street to Sittingbourne railway lines. [46183]

Alan Johnson: None.

Fenestration (Self-assessment)

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action her Department is taking to enable small traders to join the fenestration self-assessment scheme. [42720]

Dr. Whitehead: I have been asked to reply.

I recently made regulations which allow a person registered with the Fenestration Self-Assessment Scheme (FENSA) to certify to local authorities that replacement glazing they undertake complies with the Building Regulations. FENSA has been developed by the Glass and Glazing Federation (GGF) in consultation with, among others, key industry representative bodies, local authorities, and my Department.

From the start it was the Department's requirement that the scheme should be open, fair and cost-effective. Any business of any size is able to join the scheme. All firms are required to pay a standard registration fee of £100, in addition to a vetting fee of £200. The vetting fee is not required however, if the firm has already been vetted by another body which has standards comparable to FENSA. Currently 19 such bodies are recognised. Therefore the majority of firms applying to FENSA do not need to pay the vetting fee. On top of the vetting fee there is an annual fee of £50, and a transaction charge of under £1 per certificate issued to local authorities—£2 if not undertaken electronically. All these costs are exclusive of VAT. Inspection will be undertaken on 1 per cent. of installations, subject to a minimum of two and a maximum of 100. These will cost around £100 per inspection. The firm is also required to purchase Approved Documents L1 and N.

I do not consider these costs to be punitive. FENSA represents a cost-effective mechanism for companies to ensure compliance with the Building Regulations, while at the same time, providing the necessary safeguards to ensure consumer confidence. Fees set below this level would not allow the necessary number of checks to be undertaken, or the development and maintenance of a satisfactory database which eases the certification process for the installer. I consider that no special measures are required for small traders.

Business Links

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many calls have been received by the Business Links national call centres since April 2001; and what proportion of these were re-directed to each of the local business link providers. [46191]

Nigel Griffiths: The Business Link National Contact Centre (BLNCC) has received 52,450 calls between 2 April 2001 and 17 March 2002. Of these calls, 11,560 were referred to Business Link operators, while 26,187 calls were fulfilled by the BLNCC (for example arranging mailing of small business literature). The remaining calls were fulfilled by referral to other sources of expertise (such as Farm Business Advisory Service or the Small Business Service equivalents in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland). A full breakdown of the number of calls passed on to the local Business Link operators is as follows:

Local business link provider	Number of calls
Bedfordshire	105
Birmingham	193
Black Country	180
Cambridgeshire	191
Cheshire and Warrington	206
County Durham	114
Coventry and Warwickshire	142
Cumbria	810
Derbyshire	167
Devon and Cornwall	556
East Lancashire	156
Essex	268
Gloucestershire	162
Greater Manchester and Wigan	349
Hereford and Worcester	190
Hertfordshire	184
Humberside	90
Kent	218
Leicestershire	210
Lincolnshire	168
London	2,742
Merseyside	144
Milton Keynes, Oxford and Berkshire	295
North and West Lancashire	211
Norfolk	132
North Manchester Chambers Business Services Ltd.	119
North Yorkshire	218
Northamptonshire	94
Northumberland	124
Nottinghamshire	152
Shropshire	119
Somerset	136
South Yorkshire	143
Staffordshire	140
Suffolk	140
Surrey	236
Sussex	250
Tees Valley	65
Tyne and Wear	112
West	147
Wessex (formally Hampshire, Dorset and IOW)	544
West Yorkshire	335
Wiltshire, Swindon and Berkshire	303

Carbon Emissions

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress her Department has made in cutting carbon emissions; and if she will make a statement on the likelihood of the UK achieving its emissions targets set by the Kyoto protocol. [44416]

Mr. Meacher: I have been asked to reply.

The UK's Third National Communication on Climate Change, published last October, reports progress with implementing our climate change programme. We have made excellent progress so far in cutting greenhouse emissions which we estimate have fallen by about 13 per cent. between 1990 and 2000. The Climate Change Programme, published in November 2000, outlines a range of policies that we estimate could reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 23 per cent. below 1990 levels by 2010. This is well in excess of our 12.5 per cent. Kyoto target.

Industrial Action

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many days were lost due to industrial action *(a)* in the public sector and *(b)* in total in each of the last 20 years. [44783]

Ruth Kelly: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Karen Dunnell to Mr. John Whittingdale, dated 25 March 2002

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent question about the number of days lost due to industrial action in the last 20 years. I am replying in his absence. (44783)

There are no statistics specifically for the public sector but figures on the public administration, education and health industries provide most of the information on the public sector as it is today. The figures are arranged according to the Standard Industrial Classifications of 1968, 1980 and 1992. Because of differences in Standard Industrial Classification coverage and the exclusion of certain industries (e.g. coal and steel) that have dropped out of the public sector since the 1980's, caution needs to be exercised in making comparisons.

Information is given in the attached table. The way the information is presented reflects the changes in Standard Industrial Classification.

Working days lost due to UK labour disputes

£000

SIC 1968	Professional and scientific services; public administration and defence	Whole economy
1981	1,165	4,266
1982	1,201	5,313

Working days lost due to UK labour disputes

£000

SIC 1980	Public administration, sanitary services, education, medical and health services	Whole economy
1983	121	3,754
1984	786	27,135
1985	990	6,402
1986	460	1,920
1987	945	3,546
1988	290	3,702
1989	2,388	4,128
1990	520	1,903
1991	363	761
1992	329	528
1993	341	649

Working days lost due to UK labour disputes

£000

SIC 1992	Public administration, education and health and social work	Whole economy
1994	86	278
1995	178	415
1996	295	1,303
1997	65	235
1998	50	282
1999	66	242
2000	221	499
2001P[1]	327	518

[1] 'P' equals provisional

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

GM Crops

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many GM crop trials there were in each constituency in each year since 1990. [34873]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 11 February 2002]*: Since the Genetically Modified Organisms (Deliberate Release) Regulations (1993) came into force in the UK, a total of 193 consents have been issued to release GM crops to the environment for research purposes. These include the farm scale evaluations, national list trials and a number of other research trials. Releases have taken place at about 1,000 different locations as most consents permit trials at more than one release site. We do not have the figures available in the form requested. However, the DEFRA website contains extracts from the public register, which list the locations by grid reference of all releases as part of experimental trials since 1993 and all sites in the farm scale evaluation programme.

Waste

Andrew Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions she has had with officers from the Greater Manchester Waste Disposal Authority regarding their soil improver product. [38403]

Mr. Meacher: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has had no such discussions. However, I met the authority on 11 March and the issue of composting and the soil improver was raised.

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what work her Department has undertaken to determine final storage quality for the treatment of hazardous waste before acceptance into a hazardous landfill site; [43616]

(2) what representations she has received against requiring hazardous waste from 2004 to be treated to final storage quality before acceptance into a landfill site; [43617]

(3) what risk assessment her Department has undertaken on the impact on the environment and on public health of not requiring hazardous waste from 2004 to be pre-tested to final storage quality before acceptance into a landfill site. [43619]

Mr. Meacher: The Government do not consider that there is as yet a clear or accepted understanding of what is meant by the term "final storage quality". We have therefore not undertaken work to determine what treatment such a standard would require before hazardous waste could be sent to landfill or conducted a risk assessment on the impact of not applying such a standard after July 2004.

The Environment Agency has produced draft guidance on standards for treatment of hazardous waste going to landfill following implementation of the directive. The guidance is based on a determination of the best practicable environmental option for individual waste streams and, where processes are regulated under the PPC, the obligation to employ best available techniques with regard to the production of wastes and their treatment. The Government consulted on this approach in the Second Consultation paper on Implementation of the Landfill Directive. A wide range of responses were received from consultees including a number arguing against the treatment of hazardous waste to "final storage quality" though interpretation of what was meant by the term varied.

The standards to which hazardous waste will have to be treated to go to landfill will ultimately be determined by the waste acceptance criteria for hazardous waste landfills which are still under negotiation in Europe.

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate her Department made of the quantities of hazardous waste that will require treatment in *(a)* 2005, *(b)* 2006, *(c)* 2007, *(d)* 2008, *(e)* 2009 and *(f)* 2010. [43618]

Mr. Meacher: The Department has made no estimates of the amount of hazardous waste that will require treatment from 2005 to 2010.

At present approximately 53 per cent. of hazardous waste arisings are landfilled. It is estimated that approximately 41 per cent. of current arisings will continue to be able to be landfilled following the implementation of the bans in July 2002. The amount of hazardous waste that will continue to be landfilled beyond July 2004 and will hence need to be pre-treated will depend on a range of factors. These include general trends in hazardous waste arisings, changes to the definition of hazardous waste, the availability of hazardous waste landfill capacity, the availability of alternative disposal routes such as incineration, and implementation of the waste acceptance criteria currently under negotiation in Brussels which will set out what hazardous wastes can go to hazardous waste sites or to separate cells in non-hazardous landfill sites.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the answer of 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 217W, on waste disposal, (1) what steps her Department has taken to meet the target of banning the landfilling of hazardous liquid wastes from July; and for what reason her Department does not hold information on the locations of individual treatment facilities for liquid waste; [43428]

(2) how many treatment facilities there are in the UK for liquid waste; what assessment her Department has made of the availability of treatment facilities; and what assessment her Department has made of whether the target of banning the landfilling of hazardous liquid wastes from July will be met. [44363]

Mr. Meacher: The forthcoming Landfill (England and Wales) Regulations will impose the ban on the landfilling of hazardous liquid wastes by making it an offence for landfill site operators to accept such wastes for disposal beyond July 2002.

The regulation of individual waste treatment facilities is the responsibility of the Environment Agency. The agency holds details of the location of all licensed waste treatment facilities on their central licensing and charging databases but these records do not identify which individual sites are permitted to accept liquid wastes. This information is not held centrally because, for the purposes of regulating the sites, the physical nature of the waste is only

significant at the individual site level. Control over the type of waste that can be accepted at any given site and over specific problems associated with handling liquids, is exercised through the conditions of individual licences, details of which are held at local area offices and which could be collated only at disproportionate cost.

The Department, in conjunction with the National Assembly for Wales, the Scottish Executive and the Northern Ireland Assembly, has undertaken an assessment of the landfill directive for the future management of wastes banned from landfill.

The aims and objectives of the study were:

to identify and evaluate the potential impact of the landfill directive on the management of hazardous wastes and liquid wastes in the UK, and

to identify and assess the alternative waste management options that may be available to ensure the continued safe management of wastes for which landfilling will be banned under the landfill directive.

The study found that there was sufficient alternative disposal systems (in use or planned) to cope with the large volume of organic process waste streams requiring diversion from landfill. It also suggested that additional facilities might be required for oily wastes, contaminated soils, and inorganic chemical wastes. A copy of the report will be placed in the Library of both Houses.

Landfill Directive

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate her Department has made of the number of new treatment facilities that will be required to achieve compliance with the United Kingdom's obligations under the landfill directive. [43620]

Mr. Meacher: The Department, in conjunction with the National Assembly for Wales, the Scottish Executive and the Northern Ireland Assembly, has undertaken an assessment of the implications of the landfill directive for the future management of wastes banned from landfill.

The aims and objectives of the study were:

to identify and evaluate the potential impact of the landfill directive on the management of hazardous wastes and liquid wastes in the UK, and

to identify and assess the alternative waste management options that may be available to ensure the continued safe management of wastes for which landfilling will be banned under the landfill directive.

The study found that there was sufficient alternative disposal systems (in use or planned) to cope with the large volume of organic process waste streams requiring diversion from landfill. It also suggested that additional facilities might be required for oily wastes, contaminated soils, and inorganic chemical wastes. Copies of the study have been disseminated widely.

Further work is currently under way to assess the availability of pre-treatment facilities for those hazardous waste streams that can continue to go to landfill after July 2002.

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the landfill directive regulations will be laid before Parliament. [43621]

Mr. Meacher: The Government aim to lay the Landfill (England and Wales) Regulations before the Easter recess.

Sewers

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the timetable is for developing and applying criteria for determining long-term investment in sewers. [39481]

Mr. Meacher: The 10 water and sewerage companies in England and Wales are responsible for managing investment in their sewerage systems, both in capital maintenance and in new provision.

This Department, the Office of Water Services (Ofwat), Environment Agency, Drinking Water Inspectorate and water companies have worked closely together on a water industry capital maintenance framework, covering sewerage systems as well as other asset systems. A jointly commissioned study will be published in May.

Ofwat will shortly hold a preliminary consultation on its approach to capital maintenance at the forthcoming review of price limits. Ofwat with the Environment Agency have consulted on enhancements to the serviceability indicators for assets against which companies report to Ofwat. The new indicators will be used for the first time in companies' returns to be made in June 2002 and so provide better information for draft and final business plans.

Ofwat also issued, on 13 March 2002, "Flooding from sewers—A way forward" which consults on how companies should bring forward investment proposals to address sewer flooding both in the short term before 2005 and in the longer term for the period 2005–10. The consultation ends on 15 June.

The steps and timetable leading up to setting price limits in 2004 for the period 2005–10 are set out in "Ofwat Forward Programme 2002–03 to 2004–05" which was published on 21 March 2002. This year Ofwat will consult on its approach to the periodic review in October and in December the Government will issue guidance on the policies and programmes requiring investment in sewerage services.

Kirkby Stephen (Sheep)

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if the sheep at Kirkby Stephen were tested for the foot and mouth *(a)* virus and *(b)* antibody before restocking; and if she will make a statement. [39509]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 1 March 2002]:* All animals used for controlled restocking must come from farms which have been inspected and found free from foot and mouth disease (FMD).

The sheep used to restock at Kirkby Stephen came from two sources. One source was tested for antibodies in September and in November with negative results on both occasions. The second source was also tested for antibodies in August and November, with negative results on both occasions. Neither flock was tested for virus.

Ofgem

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what action she has

taken to ensure that Ofgem abides by the content and spirit of the Government's departmental guidelines on the integration of environmental policies. [39979]

Mr. Wilson: I have been asked to reply.

The Utilities Act 2000 provided for the Secretary of State to issue guidance to the Gas and Electricity Markets Authority about the making by the authority of a contribution towards the attainment of social or environmental policies set out in the guidance.

The Department has consulted on drafts of the guidance, and is now looking afresh at the guidance in the light of the Energy Review report published on 14 February by the Performance and Innovation Unit, which has implications for the guidance.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will reply to question 31593 tabled for answer on 29 January regarding a breakdown of the total costs of the foot and mouth epidemic. [40368]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him on 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, 916W.

Milk Prices

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much dairy farmers received per litre of milk in each of the past 10 years. [40768]

Mr. Morley: The table shows the annual average farm-gate milk prices, including bonuses, paid to farmers between 1992 and 2001, for raw milk in the UK.

Annual average UK farm-gate milk prices[1]

	Pence per litre
1992	20.95
1993	21.97
1994	22.43
1995	24.94
1996	25.02
1997	22.12
1998	19.37
1999	18.35
2000	16.93
2001[2]	19.26

[1] Actual fat content

[2] Provisional

Source:

1992–94 Milk Marketing Boards; 1995 onwards DEFRA

Scottish Executive

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether a Scottish Executive Minister will be a member of the UK delegation to the Environment European Union Council of Ministers meeting on 4 March; and what information is being provided by her Department to guarantee effective pre-council scrutiny by the European Committee of the Scottish Parliament. [40319]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* A Scottish Executive Minister was not part of the UK delegation at the Environmental Council on 4 March. On the second point, it is the responsibility of the European Committee of the Scottish Parliament to scrutinise Scottish Executive involvement in preparations for EU Council meetings. The Department provides information to Scottish Executive officials as part of that process.

Airports

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 918W, on airport runway capacity, when she will place a copy of the exchange of letters between the Permanent Secretaries in her Department and the DTLR in the Library. [41770]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 8 March 2002]:* This was deposited in the Library of the House on 11 March.

Air Conditioning

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps her Department has taken to notify *(a)* consultants and *(b)* producers involved in advising on the installation of air conditioning during refurbishment of Government buildings of the Government's view on hydrofluorocarbons as a non-sustainable technology; and if she will make a statement. [41182]

Mr. Meacher: The position of HFCs was made clear in the UK climate change programme that was produced in November 2000. It recognised that HFCs are not sustainable in the long-term and that technological developments may eventually make it possible to replace them in applications where they are used. The programme also stated that HFC emission reduction strategies should not undermine commitments to phase out ozone-depleting substances under the Montreal protocol while making it clear they should only be used where other safe, technically feasible, cost-effective and more environmentally acceptable alternatives do not exist. This position is reflected in the advice make available on the Greening Government website for managers on the Government estate, consultants and manufacturers of air conditioning systems. However, there may be scope under the EC procurement rules for Government Departments to work more closely with their suppliers and this is one of the issues that is being considered by the cross-Government Sustainable Procurement Group recently established by the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

Green Classification

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make it her policy to refuse the classification of green to a Government building if the latter procures refrigerants and air conditioners in a manner that conflicts with the Government's objectives on climate change. [41177]

Mr. Meacher: There is already a requirement on Government Departments to contribute to our climate change objectives by achieving high ratings on new buildings and major refurbishments under the Building

Research Establishment's Environmental Assessment Method (BREEAM). BREEAM seeks to discourage the unnecessary use of cooling in buildings through a range of credits relating to emissions of CO_2. There are also specific credits for use of non-ozone depleting refrigerants and leakage prevention systems. The method does not at the moment discourage refrigerants with a high global warming potential as the alternatives that are currently available are not always appropriate. However, the issue is being monitored as part of the annual review of BREEAM.

Food Imports

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what proportion of *(a)* organic and *(b)* non-organic (i) dairy products, (ii) meat, (iii) fruit, (iv) vegetables, (v) cereals and (vi) eggs sold in the UK in the last 12 months were imported; what assessment she has made of the proportion of these products that could be grown in the UK; and if she will make a statement. [42168]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* Official figures are not available on the proportion of organic sales that are imported. The following table provides estimates produced by the Soil Association in their Organic Food and Farming Report 2001.

	Percentage of organic sales imported
Dairy products	35
Meat	45
Fruit and vegetables	85
Cereals (and baked products)	80
Eggs	10

Rural Work Force

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what proportion of the rural work force were employed in *(a)* agriculture, *(b)* rural tourism, *(c)* rural public sector and *(d)* rural private sector jobs by category in each year since 1990; and if she will make a statement. [42912]

Alun Michael: The table identifies the proportion of the rural work force employed in agriculture, tourism, public sector and private sector in England between 1995 and 2000. Data are not available for other years.

	(a) Agriculture	*(b) Tourism*	*(c) Public sector*	*(d) Private sector*
1995	—	25	26	49
1996	—	24	26	49
1997	5	23	25	48
1998	3	23	26	48
1999	3	22	26	49
2000	3	24	26	48

Notes:
1. Agriculture—agriculture and fishing from SIC 1992 broad industrial groups. Data for 1995 and 1996 are not available on a comparable basis.
2. Tourism—distribution, hotels and restaurants from SIC 1992 broad industrial groups (best proxy measure). There are no data specifically on rural tourism.
3. Public sector—public administration, education and health from SIC 1992 broad industrial groups.
4. Private sector—other six categories within SIC 1992.
5. Rural areas are defined as the rural local authority districts and unitary authorities as classified by the Rural Development Commission and currently used by the Countryside Agency.

Sources:
1995–97 data from Annual Employment Survey via NOMIS.
1998–2000 data from Annual Business Inquiry via NOMIS.

Kyoto Agreement

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on progress towards implementation of the Kyoto agreement. [40125]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 13 March 2002]:* Agreement at the climate change talks in Bonn and Marrakesh in 2001 on the detailed rules for implementation of the Kyoto protocol opened the way for ratification and entry into force of the protocol. In order for the Kyoto protocol to enter into force, it must be ratified by at least 55 countries, including countries accounting for at least 55 per cent. of industrialised countries' emissions in 1990. Without US participation, it is essential for both Russia and Japan to ratify as well as the EU.

A European Community decision to ratify Kyoto was adopted on 4 March. This paved the way for the UK and the other EU member states to complete their own ratification procedures. On 7 March, the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs made a statement to the House setting in motion the process of UK ratification. Once the protocol has been before Parliament for 21 sitting days, the Foreign Secretary will be in a position to sign the ratification instrument and will do so on or shortly after 19 April. For legal and presentational reasons, the European Community and each of its member states have agreed to deposit their instruments of ratification with the UN Depository simultaneously. Since entry into force of the protocol will occur only 90 days after the prescribed number of ratification instruments have been deposited, the aim is to do this by early June at the latest to allow entry into force by the World Summit on Sustainable Development. We are encouraging other countries to work to this deadline.

The UK is making strong progress with implementing its climate change programme which we estimate could reduce our emissions by 23 per cent. below 1990 levels by 2010. This is significantly over and above our 12.5 per cent. Kyoto target.

The UK has set a domestic goal to exceed this target through the measures set out in the Government's Climate Change Programme, published in November 2000. This aims to cut CO_2 emissions alone by 20 per cent.—we are well on course to achieve this and shall continue to evaluate our progress regularly. Measures set out in the UK Climate Change Programme aim to drive emission reductions over the next decade and into the future. Some examples include: the climate change levy, a new Energy Efficiency Commitment, an obligation to increase the production of energy from renewable sources by 10 per cent. by 2020 and an emissions trading scheme which is due to go live in April.

Canals

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make

a statement on the use of canals by industry; and what plans there are to improve the canal infrastructure to encourage industry to use them. [43527]

Mr. Meacher: The Freight Study Group was set up by the Government in November 2000 to examine the scope for increasing freight traffic on the inland waterways of England and Wales. My noble Friend the Lord Whitty is considering the Group's report with the Parliamentary Under-Secretary at the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Mr. Jamieson), and will make an announcement in due course.

Air Pollution

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will indicate, in respect of the new risk-based regulation methodology being developed for air pollution, who is carrying out the work; when this process began; when it will end; and if she will place a copy of related documentation in the Library. [43423]

Mr. Meacher: Risk and Policy Analysts Ltd. were commissioned by the Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions in June 2000 to develop a methodology for risk-based regulation in relation to the Local Air Pollution Control system. Their report was published in November 2000 and was placed on the DETR website and is now to be found on the DEFRA website. The same firm was commissioned in May last year to undertake trials of the methodology recommended out of the four drawn up by the first stage of their work. The report is currently being finalised and will be placed on the DEFRA website in due course. I will decide the next steps on receipt of the report.

EU Policy Reform

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her objectives are regarding reform of the *(a)* Common Agricultural Policy and *(b)* Common Fisheries Policy. [43083]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 14 March 2002]:* On the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy, our goal is to reduce the overall burden of the CAP, delivering better value for money to taxpayers and consumers; greater reflection of animal welfare concerns; a better deal for the environment; and a better deal for farmers.

We want to see market price support and production controls phased out, with transitional support payments to help farmers to adjust. This should be complemented by a shift towards the "second pillar" of the CAP, thus expanding the resources available for targeted support for rural development and agri-environment schemes.

Our primary objective for the Common Fisheries Policy must be for a policy which is both economically and environmentally sustainable and one which involves stakeholders more closely in management decisions affecting them. Only in that way will the CFP attract support and credibility from fishermen, ensure responsible stock management and give the promise of a viable future. I strongly agree with the Commission's conclusions in their Green Paper on the operation of the CFP that it is not meeting its objectives. It is failing to provide an adequate living for many fishermen and is failing to conserve fish stocks. The forthcoming review of the CFP will give the opportunity not only to put right what has gone wrong but also to consider how the CFP should develop over the coming years.

EU Water Framework Directive

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations her Department has received concerning the projected costs of implementing the EU Water Framework Directive in the UK; and if she will make a statement. [43602]

Mr. Meacher: A preliminary assessment of the costs and benefits of implementing the directive was set out in the first consultation paper issued jointly by the then Department for the Environment, Transport and the Regions and the National Assembly for Wales. The study estimated total costs for England and Wales in the range of £2 billion to £9.2 billion; benefits in the range of £1.6 billion to £6.2 billion. A copy of the paper is in the House Library.

A number of respondents to the consultation paper indicated that they had concerns about the cost to their industries of implementing the directive. A large majority of those raising concerns were from the farming industry.

A summary report of responses to the first consultation paper will be published as part of a second consultation paper on implementation of the directive later this year. Individual responses will also be available for inspection.

Implementation of the directive in Scotland and Northern Ireland, and with respect to the devolved functions in Wales, are matters for the Scottish Executive, the Northern Ireland Executive and the National Assembly for Wales. The Government and the National Assembly for Wales are working jointly to implement the directive in England and Wales. In Scotland and Northern Ireland, implementation of the directive is being managed wholly by the Scottish Executive and the Northern Ireland Executive.

Nitrates

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will estimate the average annual percentage change in the area of land required to spread a one tonne load of manure on farmland designated as being located in a nitrate vulnerable zone in the last five years. [44059]

Mr. Meacher: There have been controls of applying organic manures in nitrate vulnerable zones (NVZs) since December 1998.

Since then, there have been no changes in the area of land required to spread manure in a NVZ. The controls require farmers to remain within annual whole-farm limits for applying organic manure, allowing maximum nitrogen loadings of 250 kg/ha of total N on grassland and 210 kg/ha of total N on arable land.

From 19 December 2002 the maximum loading for arable land in existing NVZs (but not in new NVZs) will be reduced from 210 kg/ha to 170 kg/ha. At the maximum spreading rate permitted in a NVZ, any given amount of manure will then match the capacity of 24 per cent. more arable land than at present.

The N content of livestock manures depends on the number and type of livestock on individual farms. Farmers in existing NVZs make use of "Manure Planning in NVZs", available through DEFRA publications (08459 556000) or the internet (via a web link at http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/water/quality/nitrate). This document contains simple calculations to identify the amount of manure delivering a particular nitrogen loading.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she expects to announce her Department's decision on the amount of farmland to be designated as nitrate vulnerable zones; and when she expects to implement the nitrate vulnerable zone directive. [44060]

Mr. Meacher: The responses to the public consultation on options for implementing the nitrates directive are currently being analysed and we expect to publish the results, together with our decisions, by May 2002.

I anticipate that measures to implement the directive in new areas, to comply with a European Court Judgment, will come into force from 19 December 2002. Measures to implement the directive have been in force in existing nitrate vulnerable zones since December 1998.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many farms have been found to have exceeded acceptable nitrate levels in the United Kingdom for each of the last five years; and where they are. [44297]

Mr. Meacher: The Environment Agency's water quality monitoring data, aggregated from the years 1996–2000 inclusive, indicate that farmers across about 80 per cent. of England contribute to the greatest nitrate pollution problems. There is no information available about nitrate levels on individual farms.

An indicative map of these areas was included in the DEFRA consultation document "How Should England Implement the 1991 Nitrates Directive" published in December 2001.

Farmers' Markets

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she expects to begin the certification of farmers' markets; if she will make a statement on the links established with regulatory authorities to ensure maintenance of standards; and what powers are vested in the regulatory authorities to restrict unauthorised traders from trading at farmers' markets. [44058]

Mr. Morley: The certification of farmers' markets is a private initiative by the National Association of Farmers' Markets (NAFM). The Department has, however, provided grant under the Agriculture Development Scheme to help fund the development and implementation of the scheme. We understand that the Local Authority Co-ordinating body on food and Trading Standards were involved in the drawing up of the certification handbook produced by NAFM.

The regulatory authorities have no specific powers to restrict traders from trading at farmers' markets. However, there may be scope for action to be taken under the general provisions of the Trade Description Act and the Food Safety Act.

Beef

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent representations the Government have made to the EC on relaxing EU rules on the export of beef. [43968]

Mr. Morley: The Government have made a number of recent representations to the European Commission, in particular concerning a relaxation of the dedication requirement of the Date-based Export Scheme so that establishments could be dedicated to export on certain days, rather than full time. A detailed paper was submitted on 5 March and we expect to discuss it with the Commission tomorrow 26 March.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if imports of beef from animals over 30-months-old at the time of slaughter are banned; and if she will make a statement. [44225]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 18 March 2002]:* Beef from cattle aged over 30 months at slaughter may be imported from any country, but I understand from the Food Standards Agency that it may only be sold for human consumption if it comes from animals that were born, reared and slaughtered in a prescribed list of countries that have historically supplied the UK and in which there is no history of BSE. The list is kept under review, for example in the light of on-going European Union assessments of geographical risk.

Territorial Forces

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many members of staff in her Department are members of the territorial forces; and if she has a strategy to encourage members of staff to become members of the territorial forces. [44074]

Mr. Morley: Available records show that four members of staff are members of the territorial forces.

The Department actively supports its staff in giving more time to their communities and is keen to raise the profile of volunteering. Staff are allowed varying amounts of paid time off for voluntary public duties and for service in the territorial forces.

Packaging Waste

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) if the United Kingdom has met the requirements of the EU Packaging and Packaging Waste Directive; and if she will make a statement; [43511]

(2) when she will publish the recovery and recycling targets, under the Packaging Waste Regulations, for the current calendar year. [43512]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 15 March 2002]:* The EC Directive on Packaging and Packaging Waste—94/62/EC—was implemented in Great Britain by the Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging Waste) Regulations 1997 (as amended).

In order to comply with the requirements in the directive, recovery and recycling targets for 2001 under the packaging regulations were 56 per cent. for recovery and 18 per cent. for material-specific recycling of packaging waste. Data received to date suggest that, if obligated parties meet their obligations, these targets should be met.

I will be announcing the recovery and recycling targets for 2002 very soon.

Recycling

Dr. Pugh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the criteria for local authority bids will be announced with regard to the allocation of the £140 million recycling funds for 2002–03 and 2003–04. [44306]

Mr. Meacher: Final decisions on how we will distribute the fund have been made, following the results of the consultation. Officials have been working on the details of putting in place arrangements for distributing the funds.

Results of the consultation, and information on how the fund will be administered, will be published by the end of March. When this information is published, it will also be posted on the DEFRA website.

Compost

Dr. Pugh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what guidelines she has set for the disposal and use of lower grade compost that will be unfit for agricultural use. [44345]

Mr. Meacher: The recovery or disposal of waste, including lower grade composted waste, must be carried out in compliance with the controls in place to fulfil the requirements of the waste framework directive. The main controls are set out in Part II of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and the Waste Management Licensing Regulations (the 1994 Regulations). We have issued guidance on these controls in DOE Circular 11/94; and statutory guidance to the Environment Agency on waste management licensing in Waste Management Paper Number 4.

Waste compost may be spread on land for agricultural benefit or ecological improvement under the terms of the licensing exemption provided in paragraph 7 of Schedule 3 to the 1994 Regulations and registered with the Environment Agency. The spreading of waste compost in these circumstances is classified as a waste recovery operation. The disposal of waste compost must be carried out under the terms of a licence issued by the Environment Agency.

The Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) has commissioned research investigating the markets for composts fit for restricted use, which will include those unsuitable for use in agriculture. The work will assess how much material could potentially be applied to various land use types and identify key issues associated with establishing quality standards for these materials.

Hemswell Cliff

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what consultation took place between the Intervention Board, her Department and the Home Office before the announcement that the Hemswell Cliff site was a possible site for an asylum seekers' accommodation centre. [44624]

Mr. Morley: No consultations took place between DEFRA and these bodies prior to the Home Office announcement of the potential sites for trial accommodation centres. The Home Office will take a wide range of factors, including environmental, health and safety issues, into account at every site before final decisions are made.

Intervention Board

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the total tonnage is that can be stored in refrigerated stores available to the Intervention Board. [44626]

Mr. Morley: The Rural Payments Agency currently has two Government owned stores, Hemswell Cliff and Locharbriggs near Dumfries the combined capacity of these is 15,000 tonnes. In addition commercial storage is acquired as necessary.

Staff (Local Elected Representatives)

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many members of staff at her Department are locally elected democratic representatives; and if she has a strategy for her Department to encourage members of staff to become locally elected democratic representatives. [44541]

Mr. Morley: Available records show that one member of staff is a locally elected representative.

The Department actively supports its staff in giving more time to their communities. Staff are allowed varying amounts of paid time off for voluntary public duties, including service as locally elected representatives.

Welfare of Laying Hens Directive

Matthew Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what extra welfare standards *(a)* have been implemented and *(b)* are planned to be introduced by the Government over and above the EU Directive 1999/74/EC on the welfare of laying hens. [44629]

Mr. Morley: It is intended that the Welfare of Laying Hens Directive 1999/74/EC will be implemented in England without being added to in any way. Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland will follow suit. If changes are proposed, there will be a full public consultation.

A new welfare code for laying hens will accompany the regulations.

Matthew Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the EU Directive 1999/74/EC on the welfare of laying hens will be fully implemented. [44628]

Mr. Morley: An implementing statutory instrument in respect of English legislation is being prepared and will shortly be presented to Parliament. Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are following a similar timetable.

Rio Earth Summit (Implementation)

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps her Department *(a)* has taken and *(b)* plans to take to re-affirm the Rio Declaration. [44361]

Mr. Meacher: The Government, in common with the rest of the international community, is working on the basis that the Johannesburg Summit is about implementing Agenda 21 and the Rio Declaration rather than renegotiating them. The Johannesburg intergovernmental political declaration should therefore reaffirm and reinforce the Rio Declaration.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps have been taken by the Government since the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 to *(a)* set goals on environmental protection and *(b)* improve eco-efficiency and resource productivity relating to fresh water issues; and what these (i) goals and (ii) improvements have been. [44364]

Mr. Meacher: In 1999 the Government published its strategy for sustainable development for the UK, "A Better Quality of Life". This strategy is supported by a core set of around 150 indicators of sustainable development. A subset of 15 headline indicators focuses on specific issues and reflects targets against which progress is measured and reported annually. River water quality is one of the headline indicators. Over the last decade, general river quality in the UK has either improved or remained high.

In 1995 the Environment Act amended the Water Industry Act 1991 to place water companies under a statutory duty to promote the efficient use of water by their customers. Ofwat enforces this duty and requires companies to produce five-year water efficiency plans on which progress is reported annually. Following the Water Summit in 1997, Ofwat set annual leakage targets for water companies, which have resulted in a reduction of about 30 per cent. Further details are contained in the Ofwat report 'Leakage and the efficient use of water 2000–01', a copy of which is in the Library of the House. In addition, the Government runs the Envirowise programme, which promotes resource productivity—including water use—by industry. This resulted in over 29 million m^3 of water being saved last year.

Sustainable Development

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps the Government have taken since the United Nations General Assembly Special Session in 1997 towards the objectives of *(a)* poverty eradication and *(b)* sustainable production and consumption patterns; and what steps are planned towards further progress on these objectives. [44353]

Mr. Meacher: The issues of poverty eradication and sustainable production and consumption have been addressed by a number of key strategies published since 1997. In particular, the UK Government's Sustainable Development Strategy, 'A Better Quality of Life' sets out an overarching strategy for achieving sustainable development through social progress which recognises the needs of everyone, effective protection of the environment, prudent use of natural resources, and maintenance of high and stable levels of economic growth and employment. It includes a set of indicators to measure progress. The 2001 Annual Report on progress with the strategy was published last week.

Related strategies include: the Government's poverty and social exclusion strategy, set out and monitored in the annual 'Opportunity for All' reports; the Climate Change Programme; the Waste Strategy for England; and the UK Fuel Poverty Strategy, which sets out the framework for addressing the problem of households who cannot afford to keep warm.

In the future, the Government's work will include taking forward the recommendations in the reports to Government from the Performance and Innovation Unit covering Resource Productivity, Energy, and the forthcoming one on Waste.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what preparations her Department is making for the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg. [44362]

Mr. Meacher: DEFRA, working closely with other Departments, is leading on the UK's domestic and international preparations for the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD). The Department is represented on MISC18, the Cabinet Committee set up to co-ordinate, develop and deliver the Government's strategy for WSSD. DEFRA also chairs two official level groups which co-ordinate preparations for the summit and will be attending the third preparatory meeting in New York starting on 25 March.

DEFRA has also led on the development of a cross-Whitehall communications strategy to raise awareness of the summit. We are working closely with local authorities, NGOs, business and other organisations to ensure that we engage a wide range of stakeholders in the summit. DEFRA has also developed the Government sustainable development website (www.sustainable-development.gov.uk) to include information on the WSSD.

Organic Farming

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 12 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 936W, PQ4610, when she will publish her organic action plan. [44227]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 18 March 2002]:* An announcement about the Organic Food and Farming action plan will be made soon.

Timber

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps her Department is taking to curb the importing of illegally cut timber. [44706]

Mr. Meacher: Combating illegal logging requires effort from both timber producing and consuming countries. Timber producing countries are responsible for defining and enforcing the national legislative and regulatory frameworks that define legality.

The Department for International Development (DFID) is working with a number of timber exporting countries to help them improve governance and strengthen forest law enforcement. We are also working to develop capacity for the implementation of timber certification schemes in some producing countries.

Domestically, the UK is working to ensure that the import of endangered timber species is in full compliance with CITES, the Convention on Trade in Endangered Species. We are also implementing a new Government timber procurement policy that seeks to procure forest products only from legal and sustainable sources.

The UK has shown leadership under the G8 Action Programme on Forests in promoting bilateral arrangements with timber producing countries whereby countries work together to tackle illegal logging and associated trade. We are currently negotiating the first of these with Indonesia. We hope that bilateral agreements will lead to regional and, eventually, an international agreement that will have a big impact on illegal trade.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what research her Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the success of the Greening Government scheme in encouraging Government Departments to purchase timber from independently certified sustainable sources; and if she will make a statement. [44704]

Mr. Meacher: The Department has commissioned a report on the scale of timber procurement activities undertaken by central Government Departments and the improved guidance required to help buyers purchase timber and wood products from sustainable and legal sources. The final report is not due to be published until the summer of 2002. The timber trade, non-governmental organisations and other interested stakeholders are being consulted on the options for assessing product supplier claims on the sustainability of the source of the wood in their products. A consultation paper has been published on the website of the Tropical Forest Forum in advance of an open discussion on 25 March 2002. Written comments have been invited too. Following completion of the report it is intended that Departments will be given clearer guidelines including how to monitor and report on the evidence presented by suppliers. Departments will be asked to include information on wood product procurement in their returns for the annual reports on Sustainable Development in Government. This should enable their success in purchasing timber from independently certified sources to be evaluated.

Flood Defences

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what financial assistance is made available by the European Union to assist member states in the provision of coastal and inland flood defences. [44932]

Mr. Morley: No significant financial assistance is made available by the European Union to assist member states in the provision of flood and coastal defences.

Tidal Defences, Hullbridge

Mr. Francois: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when her Department expects to provide consent for the tidal defence works planned for Hullbridge, Essex; and if she will make a statement. [44982]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 21 March 2002]:* I understand that the Environment Agency is seeking to obtain planning permission and to purchase the land necessary to compensate for the loss of internationally important habitats which would result from the construction of tidal defences at Hullbridge. These issues need to be resolved before the agency can submit an application for grant aid to this Department. When an application is received it will be considered against the normal economic, technical and environmental criteria and priority score arrangements for funding flood and coastal works.

Soil Surveys

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will supply data from the National Soil Inventory, using the average figure of all arable sites measured, on the change in *(a)* soil depth, *(b)* pH level, *(c)* nutrient level and *(d)* heavy metals between the 1978 to 1981 survey and 1994 to 1996 soil survey. [44728]

Mr. Morley: The National Soil Inventory can supply no data on changes in soil depth. Data on the other variables requested are not available at "arable sites" level, but data on arable/ley grassland sites are given in the following table.

Arable/ley grassland sites

Variable	*1978–81*	*1994–96*	*Change*
(b) pH	6.76	7.12	+0.36
(c) nutrient level			
(i) organic carbon (percentage)	3.27	2.79	−0.48
(ii) available phosphorus (mg/l)	31.81	41.45	+9.64
(iii) available potassium (mg/l)	199.19	236.01	+36.82
(iv) available magnesium (mg/l)	141.78	143.80	[1]—
(d) heavy metals			
total zinc (mg/kg)	88.64	68.30	−20.34
total copper (mg/kg)	20.24	18.27	−1.97
total nickel (mg/kg)	27.05	24.45	−2.60
total cadmium (mg/kg)	0.80	0.32	−0.48
total lead (mg/kg)	41.46	36.21	−5.25
total cobalt (mg/kg)	11.58	10.94	−0.64
total chromium (mg/kg)	43.82	35.08	−8.74
total arsenic (mg/kg)	4.22	5.36	+1.14
total mercury (mg/kg)	0.06	0.12	+0.06
total selenium (mg/kg)	0.43	0.40	[1]—
total molybdenum (mg/kg)	0.94	0.69	−0.25
total vanadium (mg/kg)	47.77	44.05	[1]—

[1] The change is not regarded as significant in statistical terms.

Note:

"Available" means concentration in extractant.

Source:

SSLRC (2000)—Comparison of original and resampled national soil inventory data. DEFRA R&D Project SP0506, Final Report.

Flooding

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 8 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 642W, on flooding, what plans she has to review groundwater flooding matters. [45195]

Mr. Morley: We have no such plans. While groundwater flooding was recognised as a significant factor in the flooding of autumn 2000, its causes are varied and often complex.

The current legal situation is that, as with land subsidence, responsibility for taking remedial action generally falls to the individual householder or landowner. Only where groundwater problems are directly related to a defined watercourse do flood defence operating authorities have permissive powers to act. In deciding whether to do so they would need to consider the technical, economic and environmental effects of such action.

However, the Environment Agency routinely monitor major groundwater aquifers for water resource purposes. This information, and data on long-term accumulations of rainfall, may be used to provide general warnings for certain vulnerable areas at times of increased risk on a best endeavours basis. It is not technically feasible to provide specific warnings to particular properties though in most cases there are simple steps that individuals can take to monitor their own situation.

Creche Facilities

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what creche facilities are provided by her Department; and at what cost. [44855]

Mr. Morley: The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) provide 145 full-time subsidised nursery places for departmental and agency staff at six sites. The actual number of children using the nurseries is higher than this figure due to many of the places being allocated on a part-time basis. The cost of nursery places and the amount of subsidy varies for each location.

School holiday playscheme places are also available to departmental and agency staff working at eight sites. The number of users varies at each site and for each school holiday period.

The overall cost of this provision for the HQ offices (York and London) during the 2001–02 financial year is estimated to be £60,000, which works out at approximately £17.86 per head of staff at those sites. In actual terms, the benefit per parent is higher as not all staff require child care support. Child care facilities at other sites are funded from local budgets and up to date figures are not available at short notice.

DEFRA keeps its child care provision arrangements under review.

New Deal

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many people employed by her Department under the new deal for young people in each of the last four years have subsequently *(a)* found unsubsidised employment for more than 13 weeks and *(b)* returned to jobseekers' allowance or other benefits. [45088]

Mr. Morley: Information is not held centrally on the number of new dealers who have found unsubsidised employment for more than 13 weeks or who have returned to jobseeker's allowance or other benefits.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many people have been employed by her Department in each of the last three years under *(a)* the new deal for young people, *(b)* the new deal for the over 50s and *(c)* the new deal for lone parents; and at what cost, listed by category, to public funds. [44910]

Mr. Morley: The number of people who have been employed by the Department and its agencies under the new deal programmes for the last three financial years is as follows:

(a) Young people (18 to 24-year-olds)

	Number
1998–99	5
1999–2000	6
2000–01	31

The Department does not hold information on the number of new dealers employed on either the *(b)* over 50s or *(c)* lone parents programmes.

The figures for young people include both subsidised and unsubsidised starts. New deal recruits take up existing vacancies so extra costs to public funds are limited to the subsidy, where appropriate, and any additional training and development which may be needed. The cost of the latter cannot be readily identified.

Pollution (Irish Sea)

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent assessment she has made of the impact of nutrients discharged from land-based sources into the Irish Sea. [44004]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 21 March 2002]:* The Urban Waste Water Treatment and Nitrates Directives require member states to undertake periodic reviews of estuaries and near-shore marine areas to establish whether they are adversely affected (or have the potential to become so) by nutrient inputs from rivers and direct discharges. The latest reviews were undertaken by the discharge regulators during 2001 and the results should be available later this year.

Within the work programme of OSPAR, the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North East Atlantic, Contracting Parties including the UK are currently assessing the eutrophication status of the various parts of the OSPAR maritime area. An initial stage, to identify the more obvious non-problem areas, found that the wider parts of the Irish Sea fell into the "non-problem" category. The area of the Irish Sea to the east of a line from Anglesey to the Solway Firth is being subject to a more detailed evaluation as it is recognised that this area may be at greater risk of being

adversely affected by nutrients from land based sources. The UK is due to present the findings of this more detailed evaluation at the end of 2002.

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what research the Government have recently conducted into pollution of the Irish Sea. [44003]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 21 March 2002]:* The UK Government have supported an extensive programme of research into pollution in the Irish Sea in recent years.

The Department, working in conjunction with the Scottish and Northern Irish Forum for Environmental Research (SNIFFER), made a substantial contribution to the body of evidence from which the co-ordinated UK-Irish assessment of the Celtic Seas was produced in 2000. This Quality Status Report (QSR) for the Celtic Seas, a copy of which is available in the Library of the House of Commons, provides a list of references which includes items of research sponsored by the UK Government.

Since 2000 we have continued to build our evidence base on pollution of the Irish Sea with a view to assessing the status of the North East Irish Sea in relation to nutrient inputs and identifying the key processes determining the potential impact and transport of pollutants. This is a part of our ongoing co-ordinated marine environment research programme which continues to contribute to regional co-operation on research and monitoring through OSPAR (the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North East Atlantic) and its Assessment and Monitoring Committee.

In respect of pollution by radioactive substances, the results of a joint research project between the Environment Agency and SNIFFER, entitled Past, Current and Future Radiological Impacts of Radioactive Marine Discharges on Coastal Communities Surrounding the Irish Sea, was published in 1999. A copy of this report is available in the Library.

Home Energy Efficiency

Mr. Horam: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether a householder who has received a grant under Warm Front or Warm Front Plus can receive further assistance under the scheme for measures in addition to those originally installed; and whether a householder who has received a Warm Front grant is eligible, on reaching the age of 60, for assistance under Warm Front Plus. [44000]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 21 March 2002]:* Paragraph 7(3)(e) of the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme (England) Regulations 2000, as amended, requires applications for assistance under the scheme to contain "a statement that neither the applicant, nor to his knowledge any other person, has received or applied for grant under these Regulations in respect of the dwelling which is the subject of the application". The effect of this paragraph is to limit to one the number of grants under the scheme for any household, whether the occupant is under or over 60 years of age.

Whaling

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs which countries engage in whaling. [45254]

Mr. Morley: The following members of the International Whaling Commission (IWC) engage in whaling activities:

Denmark (Greenland and the Faroe Islands)
Japan
Norway
Russia
St. Vincent and the Grenadines
United States of America.

We have no information on whaling carried out by non-IWC members.

Pig Farms

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) if she will list *(a)* the occasions when and *(b)* the reasons why (i) Oldlands Pig Unit in Wiltshire and (ii) Shoddesden Pig Unit in Hampshire were (A) not accepted onto and (B) suspended from Farm Assurance schemes in the past five years; [45153]

(2) if Farm Assurance scheme inspectors have visited pig units at *(a)* Oldlands Farm, Wiltshire and *(b)* Shoddesden, Hampshire; and what assessments have been made; [45150]

(3) on what grounds pig units of *(a)* Oldlands Farm, Wiltshire and *(b)* Shoddesden, Hampshire were suspended from the Farm Assurance scheme in (i) July 2000, (ii) February 2001, (iii) June 2001 and (iv) other times in the last four years. [45152]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 21 March 2002]:* The main pig assurance scheme was originally established by the Government. However, it was taken over by the industry in September 1996 and has since been run as a private initiative by Assured British Pigs (APB). Membership of the scheme is voluntary.

Following the privatisation of the scheme, the State Veterinary Service (SVS) continued to provide inspection services until September 1999 when its contract with ABP ended. Since then inspections have been carried out by a private independent inspection body and the Government have had no role in the operation of the scheme.

Prior to the ending of the contract the Shoddesden pig unit was inspected by a State Veterinary Service veterinary officer in connection with an application for it to be registered under the ABP scheme. The veterinary officer advised the applicant of action that would need to be taken in order to meet the scheme's requirements. We understand from ABP that the Shoddesden pig unit was subsequently registered under the scheme in March 1999 after the work requested by the veterinary officer had been confirmed as complete.

The SVS was not involved in subsequent APB inspections of the unit.

We are not aware of any application for the Oldlands pig unit to be registered under the APB scheme.

Mink Farming

Mr. Peter Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will announce a scheme of compensation to farmers following the ban on the farming of mink. [45389]

Mr. Morley: A scheme of compensation was set out in SI 2001/3853, the Fur Farming (Compensation Scheme) (England) Order 2001, which was made and laid before Parliament on 3 December 2001 and came into force on 1 January 2002. Following comments by the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments, this SI was revoked and replaced by SI 2002/221, the Fur Farming (Compensation Scheme)(England) Order 2002, which was made on 5 February 2002, laid before Parliament on 7 February 2002 and came into force on 1 March 2002. However, the scheme in the latter SI is identical to the previous one in all material respects and also contains a transitional provision for applications made under the 2001 order to be treated as if they had been made under the 2002 order.

Brucellosis

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on her Department's contingency plans for an outbreak of brucellosis. [45840]

Mr. Morley: The emphasis of the Department's approach to controlling outbreaks of brucellosis is the regular statutory testing of both dairy and beef herds to ensure that Great Britain maintains its brucellosis free status.

All dairy herds are tested monthly using the bulk milk tank test. If there is a positive result, blood samples are taken from all cattle in the herd and tested. Blood samples are taken from all adult breeding cattle in 50 per cent. of the national beef herd every year. This far exceeds the requirements of EC Directive 64/432. Under the Brucellosis (England) Order 2000, and equivalent legislation in Scotland and Wales, there is a statutory requirement for farmers to report abortions and premature calvings to the Local Animal Health Office of DEFRA. Investigative tests are then carried out.

To lessen the risk that brucellosis might be imported during the controlled restocking of farms following the foot and mouth disease epidemic, my Department has issued instructions to introduce even tighter surveillance and control for brucellosis under the cattle tracing system. All imported female cattle will be targeted for testing at strategic points. Reports are generated in the event of calving, absence of notified calving when a female reaches 30 months and when no calving has been registered for females over 30 months within 12 months of import. These reports are then followed up and testing carried out accordingly.

If an animal tests positive, it will be slaughtered with compensation and the rest of the herd will be placed under movement restrictions while further confirmatory testing is carried out. A veterinary investigation into the cause of the positive blood test result will be initiated immediately and movements on to and off the affected premises will be traced. It usually takes up to three weeks to confirm whether or not the animal was infected. In the event that brucellosis is confirmed contact herds will be tested. If the veterinary investigation reveals that some contact animals are at risk, these will also be slaughtered. This may involve the slaughter of all the affected herd. This strategy worked when one case of imported brucellosis was confirmed in Great Britain in 1993.

Livestock Movements

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the Government plan to remove the restrictions for hauliers on the collection of livestock from more than one farm for transport to market. [46199]

Mr. Morley: Multiple pick-ups are permitted for livestock movements subject to conditions. They are limited to five farms per trip and may only take place at premises which have prior approval to operate as a pick-up site. Further details of the conditions that apply to multiple pick-ups and drop-offs are available at www.defra.gov.uk/footandmouth/movements/transport/index.htm.

Noxious Smells

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what advice and guidance she has issued to local authorities concerning the exercise of their powers to control remissions into the atmosphere of noxious smells. [46204]

Mr. Meacher: Local authorities have powers to control smells which are a statutory nuisance under Part III of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. No guidance has been issued to authorities in relation to these powers.

Local authorities also regulate smells as part of their responsibilities under Part I of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 to control air pollution from a range of industrial processes (Local Air Pollution Control). The Government issue a series of statutory guidance notes for local authorities on what constitute the Best Available Techniques Not Entailing Excessive Cost for minimising air emissions from a range of industrial processes. Odour is addressed in these guidance notes where appropriate. The notes are all published and are listed on my Department's website http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/airquality/lapc/default.htm. A programme to review all the guidance notes is under way, and draft revisions can be found either on the DEFRA website or on the Environment Agency's website (www.environment-agency.gov.uk/business/lapc/?version=1), depending on the stage of progress.

An additional guidance note was issued to local authorities by my Department in January this year reminding them that their responsibilities under Part I of the 1990 Act included the control of air emissions which may not cause a local nuisance.

Foot and Mouth

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if the sheep at Hawnby were tested for the foot and mouth *(a)* virus and *(b)* antibody before restocking; and if she will make a statement. [40701]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 5 March 2002]:* All animals used for controlled restocking must come from farms which have been inspected and found free from foot and mouth disease (FMD).

Two of the three farms which restocked the Hawnby premises had on previous occasions tested antibody negative for foot and mouth disease in November 2001 and October 2001. Testing for virus did not take place.

At the time of restocking in 2002, there was no requirement for pre-movement testing to be carried out as all counties had achieved FMD-free status.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs where the Hawnby sheep originally came from; and what steps she is taking to test the original flock for foot and mouth. [40700]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 5 March 2002]:* Three farms provided sheep to restock the Hawnby premises. They were in the Bosall, Helmsley and Hawnby areas of North Yorkshire. At the time the Hawnby sheep came under suspicion on 26 February, the source farms were immediately placed under Form D restrictions and a Veterinary Clinical Inspection was carried out on the stock.

No signs of foot and mouth disease were found.

Restrictions remained in place until after the restrictions on the Hawnby flock were lifted following negative results. There was no basis for further testing on the farms of sheep origin.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the value is of outstanding claims for foot and mouth disease compensation from Scotland. [44367]

Mr. Morley: All claims from Scottish farmers for compensation for compulsorily slaughtered livestock have been paid amounting to £161.5 million. 136 valuations, on which compensation has been paid totalling around £32 million, are the subject of disputes lodged by the farmer. Two disputed claims to the value of £360,599 have been settled.

Abattoirs

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the *(a)* shire districts, *(b)* metropolitan districts, *(c)* unitary authorities and *(d)* London boroughs which lie, wholly or in part, (i) more than 50 miles from and (ii) more than 90 minutes' journey time from a licensed abattoir or slaughterhouse. [40974]

Yvette Cooper: I have been asked to reply.

The Food Standards Agency does not hold information on the siting of licensed abattoirs in the format requested. However, I have arranged for lists of licensed red and white meat abattoirs, arranged by county and local authority respectively, to be placed in the Library of the House.

TREASURY

VAT

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people were sentenced to imprisonment in *(a)* 1999–2000, *(b)* 2000–01 and *(c)* 2001–02 to date following the completion of VAT criminal prosecutions; what was the sum total of custodial sentences imposed in each year; and if he will make a statement. [12216]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 6 March 2002]:* The number of people sentenced to imprisonment in the year 1999–2000 following the completion of VAT criminal prosecution was 83 and custodial sentences totalling 213 years were imposed.

The number of people sentenced to imprisonment in the year 2000–01 following the completion of VAT criminal prosecutions was 61 and custodial sentences totalling 116 years were imposed.

The figures for the number of people sentenced and the custodial sentences imposed for the current year 2001–02 will not be available before the end of the financial year.

Ms Oona King: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether small businesses which make appropriate arrangements with the VAT Office to spread their VAT payments are liable to a surcharge in addition to their original VAT bill; and whether firms are advised of this surcharge at the time of renegotiation. [44749]

Mr. Boateng: A business which has incurred a surcharge because of a failure to meet VAT obligations, may include that surcharge in any subsequent arrangements made with Customs and Excise to clear their VAT arrears by instalments. Any business which enters into an agreement will remain subject to the default surcharge provisions if subsequent VAT returns or payments of tax due are received late. This is made clear in correspondence issued by customs when they confirm such payment arrangements.

However, following changes announced in the Chancellor's autumn statement when small businesses start to have difficulties in meeting VAT obligations, they are first offered advice and support, rather than incurring automatic surcharges.

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to ensure that VAT on hot take-away food is charged in a uniform way across different types of retail outlets. [45137]

Mr. Boateng: There have been no changes to the VAT treatment of hot take-away food. Customs and Excise plan to issue further advice to confirm that hot take-away food is VAT standard rated, regardless of the type of retail outlet that supplies it.

Benefits in Kind

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the number of individuals in his *(a)* Department, *(b)* related agencies and *(c)* related non-departmental public bodies whose annual remuneration including benefits in kind exceeded (i) £100,000 and (ii) £200,000 in each of the last four years. [26323]

Dawn Primarolo: *(a)* The number of individuals in the Chancellor's Departments whose annual remuneration exceeded £100,000 in each of the last four years is as follows:

1 April 1998: 11

1 April 1999: 12

1 April 2000: 15

1 April 2001: 21.

(b) The number of individuals in Related Agencies whose annual remuneration exceeded £100,000 in each of the last four years is as follows:

1 April 1998: 2

1 April 1999: 3

1 April 2000: 6

1 April 2001: 7.

There were no individuals in either Departments or Agencies in any of the four years whose remuneration exceeded £200,000.

(c) I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given to him on 29 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 253W.

Treasury Website

Mr. Chope: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the items of material which have been removed from the Treasury website in each of the last four years. [36799]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 25 February 2002]:* The Treasury's website www.hm-treasury.gov.uk currently contains more than 3,000 pages. Pages are frequently updated with certain sections of the site, such as the economic data and careers areas, being changed on a weekly basis.

The website was relaunched in November 2001 to provide the Treasury with a more robust, better organised and searchable platform for its website. At that time, the opportunity was taken to remove a number of older documents, including files relating to the previous administration. Material removed at that time included expenditure reviews, press releases from 1994 to 1996 and older budget and spending review information. However, as a consequence of the relaunch, the site is significantly more robust and, with its search engine and simple navigational structure, documents are now easier to access and read.

Consultants

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the total cost to his Department was of the use of external consultants in each of the last four years. [35022]

Ruth Kelly: The costs to HM Treasury for external consultants were as follows:

Year	
1996–97	1,032,250
1997–98	1,159,530
1998–99	1,788,706
1999–2000	1,489,024
2000–01	1,666,799
2001–02	1,160,099

Special Advisers

Mr. Collins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on how many occasions since 1 May 1997 *(a)* departmental and *(b)* non-departmental special advisers have travelled abroad in an official capacity; and if he will list the total cost, including (i) travel, (ii) accommodation and (iii) subsistence allowance, for each occasion. [37981]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 27 February 2002]:* Between 1 April 2000 and 31 March 2001, special advisers in the Treasury travelled abroad on 31 occasions, at an average cost of £1,431 per trip. All travel by special advisers is undertaken in accordance with the rules set out in the Ministerial Code, and the Civil Service Management Code.

Smaller Quoted Companies

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps have been taken by the Inland Revenue to define the smaller quoted companies for tax purposes. [40251]

Dawn Primarolo: There are no areas of tax legislation that refer to small or smaller quoted companies, so no definition is needed.

Small Landlords

Margaret Moran: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the net cost to the Treasury of bringing small landlords within the same tax regime as other small businesses. [41669]

Dawn Primarolo: All landlords, irrespective of size, and others with assets giving rise to rental income or other receipts from land and buildings (taxable under Schedule A) are taxed in the same way on that income. There is no separate definition of "small".

If the hon. Member has in mind treating all assets giving rise to Schedule A income as qualifying for reliefs available to trading assets, the full-year cost is tentatively estimated to be £400 million.

Inheritance Tax

Mr. Love: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many *(a)* buildings and *(b)* works of art are covered under the conditional exemption scheme for inheritance tax; how many visitors there have been to each in each of the last 10 years, including an estimate for the current year; and if he will make a statement. [42561]

Dawn Primarolo: There are currently 288 cases of conditionally exempt land and/or buildings. Available figures for 65 conditionally exempt properties where visitors are admitted by ticket show an average of about 24,000 visitors per property per year.

86,000 chattels (including works of art) are currently conditionally exempt. Visitor numbers to conditionally exempt chattels are not available.

Mr. Love: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much inheritance tax has been deferred under the conditional exemption scheme in each year since 1984. [42560]

Dawn Primarolo: The estimated cost to the Exchequer of conditional exemption from inheritance tax (and its predecessor, capital transfer tax) is as follows:

	Amount of relief (£ million)
1984–85	45
1985–86	30
1986–87	25
1987–88	55
1988–89	50
1989–90	100
1990–91	170
1991–92	20
1992–93	45
1993–94	40
1994–95	60
1995–96	30
1996–97	35
1997–98	40
1998–99	35
1999–2000	10
2000–01	20

Parental Leave Directive

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the *(a)* financial costs and *(b)* benefits to his Department of the parental leave directive. [42484]

Ruth Kelly: Treasury staff are eligible for unpaid parental leave under the parental leave directive. Central records are not kept on the amounts of unpaid parental leave taken. The Treasury also has a number of other family friendly policies in place, for example alternative working practices, paid special leave, career breaks, to help staff strike a balance between home life and work.

Age Discrimination

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his Department's policy is towards age discrimination. [42571]

Ruth Kelly: The Treasury has taken steps to integrate age into its equal opportunity policies and the Department has a commitment that there should be no unfair discrimination on the basis of age. Action on diversity has and will continue to tackle any negative attitudes towards older staff particularly through the training and development of managers and through the monitoring of recruitment, selection and appraisal statistics.

Celebrations

Tim Loughton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what arrangements his Department has made to celebrate *(a)* St. Patrick's Day, *(b)* St. George's Day, *(c)* St. Andrew's Day and *(d)* Her Majesty the Queen's Golden Jubilee; and how his Department celebrated St. David's Day. [42296]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* There are certain days of the year known as "named days" when the Union flag must be flown from Government buildings. The days include St. David's Day (in Wales), St. George's Day (in England), St. Andrew's Day (in Scotland) but not St. Patrick's Day.

The Union flag will be flown on the Treasury building on Coronation Day (2 June) as this is a named day. Whether the Treasury will further celebrate the Queen's Golden Jubilee will depend on the outcome of the Department of Culture, Media and Sport's current consideration of the Union flag flying protocol procedure for the Jubilee.

I would also refer the hon. Member to the answer the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport gave to the hon. Member for Suffolk South (Mr. Yeo) on 11 February 2002 *Official Report,* columns 58–59W. In the Treasury, all staff will be given an additional public holiday on 4 June 2002 to celebrate Her Majesty's Golden Jubilee.

Minimum Wage (Paisley, North)

Mrs. Irene Adams: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many employers within Paisley, North have been found to be breaching the minimum wage legislation. [43916]

Dawn Primarolo: This information is not available. For Scotland, over 1,600 investigations have been completed since the introduction of the national minimum wage in April 1999 with non-compliance being discovered in 27 per cent. of cases. During this period wages arrears of £550,000 have been identified.

Mrs. Irene Adams: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many employers within Paisley North, having advertised with the Employment Service, have subsequently been found to have breached the minimum wage legislation. [43918]

Dawn Primarolo: The information is not available.

The Employment Service (ES) will not accept for display any vacancy that does not meet the requirements of the National Minimum Wage (NMW) Act 1998. ES has in place a robust and ongoing monitoring system to ensure it meets its commitment to display only NMW compliant vacancies. However, with over two million vacancies handled every year there is always a risk that a "rogue vacancy" will slip through the net. Where ES is made aware of this, services to the employer may be suspended while the complaint is investigated. All complainants in these circumstances are advised to contact the Inland Revenue, as the NMW enforcement agency, to allow further investigation.

Staff (Local Elected Representation)

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many members of staff at his Department are locally elected democratic representatives; and if he has a strategy for his Department to encourage members of staff to become locally elected democratic representatives. [44539]

Ruth Kelly: Information on whether staff are locally elected democratic representatives is not held centrally. Staff who are representatives of bodies covered by Section 50 of the Employment Rights Act 1996 are allowed 10 days paid special leave to undertake their duties.

Inland Revenue Customer Call Centres

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what targets are in place at Inland Revenue contact centres in respect of the time taken to answer to customer telephone inquiries; and if he will make a statement. [44702]

Dawn Primarolo: Inland Revenue contact centres work to the following targets for call handling:

No more than 5 per cent. of attempted calls to reach an engaged tone.

No more than 5 per cent. of attempted calls to be abandoned.

Of the calls not engaged or abandoned, 90 per cent. to be answered within 20 seconds.

An attempted call is counted each time a customer dials the contact centre number.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the policy of the Inland Revenue is with respect to providing customers with direct line numbers for inquiries to customer call centres; and if he will make a statement. [44699]

Dawn Primarolo: Ten million PAYE taxpayers have new Inland Revenue contact centres as their first point of telephone contact. By July 2002 this number will have grown to 15 million (50 per cent. of PAYE taxpayers).

For these taxpayers, where there is ongoing correspondence with an individual tax officer or inspector, a direct dial number will be provided so that the customer can make contact with the individual concerned. Unsolicited calls are handled by the contact centre, which provides a local rate number to customers.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what mechanisms exist to establish whether sufficient telephone lines are in place at Inland Revenue customer call centres to handle the volume of customer telephone inquiries. [44700]

Dawn Primarolo: Staffing levels of the first five of Inland Revenue taxpayer contact centres were based on analysis of an experimental IR contact centre opened in 1998 in East Kilbride. Statistical analysis of call volumes there was used to inform the rollout programme.

The number of advisers is intended to allow the centres to meet targets on all but 15 days each year using a mixture of full and part time staff. Resource teams in each office match staff resources to the predicted call volumes.

On the 15 days where excess volumes are anticipated, calls are overflowed to customer service units in local offices.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what targets exist at Inland Revenue contact centres for the time taken returning customer calls; and if he will make a statement. [44701]

Dawn Primarolo: Where a customer has raised a query that cannot be handled by the Inland Revenue contact centre they have contacted, the call will be passed to an officer in the service office to resolve the inquiry. Where that is not possible, or where further research is required, the target is to return to the customer within one working day. This will be extended if

another time would be more convenient to the customer, or

research will take longer than one working day.

In these situations a different time scale would be agreed with the customer.

Business Regulations

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has received from groups representing business and commerce regarding the burden of regulation and taxation on businesses. [44690]

Dawn Primarolo: As is normal in the run up to the Budget, the Government have received a number of representations from business organisations.

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if it is a goal of his policies to improve United Kingdom productivity that the burden of regulation on business should fall. [44724]

Mr. Boateng: The Government are committed to ensuring that regulations are fair and effective, so that they protect the vulnerable but do not stifle enterprise or productivity.

The Government have significantly strengthened the systems that control the regulatory burden. In February the Cabinet Office announced the "Government's Action Plan for Regulatory Reform" which included 260 reforms, with over 60 expected to make use of the Regulatory Reform Act.

National Insurance

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the number of people who would pay more in national insurance contributions if the ceiling on Class 1 contributions were aligned with the higher rate tax threshold. [44687]

Dawn Primarolo: Around 3¼ million people would pay more in national insurance contributions on an average weekly basis during 2002–03 if the Class 1 ceiling were aligned with the income tax higher rate threshold. This estimate was provided by the Government Actuary's Department.

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the revenue implications of removing the upper earnings limit on employee national insurance contributions. [44688]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) on 1 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 1573W.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been *(a)* the maximum and *(b)* the average underpayment to pensioners adversely affected by NIRS2 since its introduction. [42516]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: I have been asked to reply.

The maximum underpayment of retirement pension caused by the NIRS2 problems is not known. The average underpayment to the small percentage of pension claims that have been affected by NIRS2 problems since June 1998 is £339. The arrears have been paid in nearly all the affected cases along with compensation, where appropriate. The NIRS2 computer is now stable and the difficulties caused to pensioners and other benefit claimants by the delayed implementation of some of the functions are now almost resolved.

Annuities

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he intends to reform the requirement to purchase an annuity at the age of 75 years. [44723]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the hon. Gentleman to my answer of 4 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 9W.

Tax Law Rewrite Project

Barbara Follett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what further developments there have been as a result of the Tax Law Rewrite Project. [46550]

Dawn Primarolo: The Tax Law Rewrite Project continues to make good progress. At the end of this month it will be publishing its thirteenth Exposure Draft, containing draft clauses on foreign income and property income.

The project is also currently working on an Income Tax Bill rewriting the provisions on employment income, pension income and taxable social security benefits. In preparation for that Bill, this year's Finance Bill will included some small amendments to the tax legislation on employment income. Copies of this draft Finance Bill legislation will shortly be published on the project's website.

Copies of the Exposure Draft and the draft Finance Bill legislation will be placed in the Library as soon as they are available.

Preston Case

Ian Stewart: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the tax treatment of settlements between employers and employees to implement the House of Lords decision in the Preston case. [46642]

Ruth Kelly: The Preston judgment means that many employers must give all their part-time employees and certain of their ex-employees, retrospective access to membership of their occupational pension schemes from April 1976 or in some cases later. The employers concerned have a responsibility to settle with their employees and ex-employees how this should be achieved in each case. There are outstanding cases before Employment Tribunals which are designed to determine how employers and employees should meet their liabilities.

Where employees are entitled to membership rights in an occupational scheme in respect of past periods of employment, the normal rules about tax relief on contributions continue to apply. That is:

all employers' contributions to occupational pension schemes, including any for past service, qualify for corporation tax relief;

employees' contributions up to 15 per cent. of their salary from the employer concerned in the year the contributions are paid qualify for income tax, irrespective of whether any part of the contribution is in respect of previous years' service;

employees may make contributions to their schemes above 15 per cent. of salary in any tax year but any such contributions do not benefit from tax relief.

In some cases, employers and employees may prefer to agree on lump sum settlements rather than additional membership rights in occupational schemes. In these cases, the lump sums are not taxable as income under schedule E but will be liable to capital gains tax subject to the normal annual exemption.

Government Debt and Asset Management

Mrs. Lawrence: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the future organisational arrangements for government debt and asset management. [46643]

Ruth Kelly: Following a detailed review of the current arrangements and future requirements for government debt and asset management, the National Debt Office (NDO) and the Public Works Loans Board (PWLB) will be integrated with the UK Debt Management Office (DMO) with effect from 1 July. Both the NDO and the PWLB are part of the National Investment and Loans Office (NILO) and the relevant staff will be relocated to the DMO's offices. This reorganisation, while maintaining provision of existing services, is designed to deliver improved management of the central Government balance sheet, and to offer a more robust, flexible and innovative service to public sector clients.

At the same time the remaining part of NILO, the Office of HM Paymaster General (OPG), will be merged with the Treasury, while also maintaining the provision of its existing services. NILO will thereafter cease to exist.

Tax Credits

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many disabled people have benefited from the fast track to disabled person's tax credit since this provision was introduced. [44459]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 19 March 2002]*: The number of recipients of the disabled person's tax credit (DPTC) entering via the fast-track is shown in table 2.3 of each DPTC Quarterly Enquiry, copies of which are in the Library.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects the new working families tax credit unit in Livingston to be operational. [45311]

Dawn Primarolo: The Livingston Contact Centre, which will handle telephone inquiries about tax credits, is expected to be operational from 1 August 2002.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what estimate he has made of the number of people living on below 60 per cent. of median income who have an entitlement to the working families tax credit and are not in receipt of any payment; [45286]

(2) how many families living on below 60 per cent. of median income are in receipt of the working families tax credit; and what percentage of the total working families tax credit case load this represents. [45289]

Dawn Primarolo: No such estimates for working families tax credit will be available until the Family Resources Survey data for 2000–01 have been analysed.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer for what reason *(a)* a widow receiving a widowed mother's allowance is not eligible for working

families tax credit and *(b)* a mother receiving maintenance payments from a living ex-partner is eligible for the credit. [45858]

Dawn Primarolo: A widow in receipt of widowed mother's allowance and a mother in receipt of maintenance payments may both be eligible for the working families tax credit.

Mrs. Lawrence: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the compliance statistics for working families tax credit were in the nine months to 31 December 2001; and what the comparable statistics were in the previous year. [46644]

Dawn Primarolo: Compliance statistics for the nine months to 31 December 2001 show an increased effectiveness in the Inland Revenue's compliance programme. Of the 16,016 inquiries completed in this period, 5,427 cases (34 per cent.) were found to contain discrepancies and these produced a compliance yield of £10.4 million.

I very much regret having to report that the Inland Revenue have advised me that some previous statistics relating to tax credit compliance have proved to be incorrect or incomplete. The correct equivalent figures for the year ended 31 March 2001 are that, of the 31,211 inquiries completed in that year, 5,573 cases (18 per cent.) were found to contain discrepancies producing a compliance yield of £7.7 million.

These errors in the Inland Revenue's tax credit statistics have also resulted in incorrect information being given in responses to some written parliamentary questions, in letters to hon. Members and during debates. I am writing to the Members concerned correcting errors and I will place a copy of the letters in the Libraries of both Houses.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many families living on below 60 per cent. of median income are in receipt of the children's tax credit; and what percentage of the total children's tax credit caseload this represents. [45284]

Dawn Primarolo: This information is not available.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he plans to introduce incentives for tax credit towards training personnel employed in small and medium sized enterprises. [45561]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government keeps all taxes under review and any changes will be announced in the Budget report.

The Government is taking forward its Budget 2001 commitment to consider policies, possibly including a tax credit, to encourage low skilled workers to train. The PBR announced pilot schemes to start this year which will test a range of policy options to support and encourage training.

Creche Facilities

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what creche facilities are provided by his Department; and at what cost. [44861]

Ruth Kelly: The Treasury offers staff access to subsidised places on a holiday playscheme and pays £15.60 towards the cost of each place, which represents 60 per cent. of the total cost. Around eight staff take up places for their children. Staff can also reclaim additional child care costs incurred, including the tax liability, if they have to work longer or later than normal.

Parliamentary Questions

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer for what reason officials in his Department draw up background briefing notes concerning the reason that an hon. Member is asking a parliamentary question; and if he will make a statement. [45119]

Ruth Kelly: Ministers would be advised of Members' reasons for tabling particular questions to facilitate the provision of appropriate replies.

Sport

Bob Russell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many responses to the Treasury Consultation Document, "Promoting Sport in the Community", *(a)* agreed and *(b)* disagreed with the need to proceed with a separate Inland Revenue-administered tax package; [45170]

(2) how many responses to the Treasury Consultation Document, "Promoting Sport in the Community", *(a)* agreed and *(b)* disagreed with the assessment that the charitable route offered clubs better prospects than the Inland Revenue administered tax package. [45169]

Mr. Boateng: A range of responses have been received. Decisions on the best way forward will be made with regard to these responses and in the context of subsequent meetings with sports' representative bodies and the Charity Commission. A summary of responses will be made publicly available at the time of any announcement.

Bob Russell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many responses to the Treasury Consultation Document, "Promoting Sport in the Community", called for the Inland Revenue-administered tax package to include mandatory rate relief. [45172]

Mr. Boateng: Ministers are considering responses to the questions for consultation contained in the "Promoting Sport in the Community" document. A summary of responses will be made publicly available at the time of any announcement. The separate Inland Revenue administered tax package that the Government consulted on did not include business rate relief. However, CASCs gaining charitable status—for which they are able to apply immediately—are eligible for 80 per cent. mandatory business rate relief.

Bob Russell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many responses have been received to the Treasury Consultation Document, "Promoting Sport in the Community". [45168]

Mr. Boateng: The "Promoting Sport in the Community" consultation document attracted over 2,400 responses, for which we are grateful. Ministers are considering responses and decisions will be made as part of the normal Budget process. A summary of responses will be made public at the time of any announcement.

Correspondence

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the target time will be in 2002–03 for *(a)* Ministers to reply to letters from hon. Members and *(b)* officials in his Department to reply to letters received directly from members of the public. [44945]

Mr. Boateng: The target time for replying to all correspondence will be 15 working days from receipt.

EU Economic and Finance Council

Roger Casale: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the outcome was of the ECOFIN Council held in Barcelona on 14 March; what the Government's stance was on the issues discussed, including its voting record; and if he will make a statement. [45951]

Mr. Gordon Brown: I attended ECOFIN on 14 March.

Following previous discussions at the March ECOFIN and at the General Affairs Council, ECOFIN discussed further the draft EU position for the UN Financing for Development Conference in Monterrey. This was subsequently endorsed by heads of government at the Barcelona European Council. This position commits EU member states to increasing overseas development assistance as a proportion of Gross National Product to an EU average of 0.39 per cent. by 2006. This is a significant step forward for global social justice, that will provide around $7 billion a year in additional aid.

ECOFIN also considered proposals for strengthening EU development assistance to the Mediterranean region. It was agreed that a European Investment Bank Facility should be set up, and that this would be evaluated after a year and a decision then taken on whether it should be developed into a subsidiary involving other shareholders. This agreement was endorsed by the Barcelona European Council.

The implications of the Enron affair for corporate governance were discussed. It was agreed that ECOFIN would look again at this issue in light of work being undertaken by the Finance Stability Forum.

ECOFIN discussed whether Government-backed airline insurance schemes for covering third party war and terrorism risks should be extended beyond the end of March. It was agreed that further analysis should be provided before the discussion at the Transport Council on 26 March.

No votes were taken at the meeting.

Criminal Damage

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the cost has been of criminal damage to his Department's buildings in each of the last four years. [44826]

Ruth Kelly: None.

New Deal

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people employed by his Department under the New Deal for Young People in each of the last four years have subsequently *(a)* found unsubsidised employment for more than 13 weeks and *(b)* returned to jobseekers' allowance or other benefits. [45082]

Ruth Kelly: We do not have this information.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people have been employed by his Department in each of the last three years under *(a)* the New Deal for Young People, *(b)* the New Deal for the Over 50s and *(c)* the New Deal for Lone Parents; and at what cost, listed by category, to public funds. [44918]

Ruth Kelly: The latest complete years for which we have figures for people specially recruited under the New Deal arrangements are as follows:

New Deal

	1998–99		*1999–2000*		*2000–01*	
	Young People	*Other*	*Young People*	*Other*	*Young People*	*Other*
Inland Revenue[1]	0	0	46	10	30	10
Office for National Statistics	0	0	4	0	1	1
Royal Mint	3	0	0	0	0	0

[1] Including Valuation Office Agency

HM Treasury specially recruited three people under the New Deal in 1999, four in 2000 and four in 2001, but does not differentiate between individual New Deal schemes. (None of these recruits was subsidised).

Customs and Excise have employed a total of 129 people under the New Deal for Young People since its inception, but by year figures are not available. They have employed no-one under the New Deal for Over 50s or Lone Parents.

No further classification of New Deal recruits is available.These recruits took up existing vacancies so extra costs are limited to the subsidy, where appropriate, and any additional training and development which may have been needed.

Running Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Buckingham of 8 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 808W, if he will provide a full breakdown of the main items comprising the increase in the running cost between April 1997 and April 2001 of *(a)* his private office and *(b)* his Department; and if he will break down the increase in the cost of staff in his private office over the same period. [45120]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Bus Fleets

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of *(a)* how many

insurance companies offer fleet insurance for bus fleets in the UK and *(b)* what level of competition this represents; and whether buses will be able to operate without fleet insurance in the event of the remaining insurance for bus fleets being withdrawn. [45122]

Ruth Kelly: Further to my answer on 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 830–31W, we have a long standing agreement with the insurance industry that cover will always be provided for anyone legally entitled to drive.

Customs and Excise

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will provide a disaggregated analysis of how Her Majesty's Customs and Excise plans to spend its supplementary estimate for the purposes listed on page 54 of HC 636. [44084]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 20 March 2002]:* The purpose of the HM Customs and Excise spring supplementary is set out on page 1 of Cm 5380. The additional net cash requirement is required to pay for the provision of serviced accommodation under an estates PFI contract. These charges replace non-cash charges for the opportunity cost of utilising civil estate freehold assets. There is no increase to departmental expenditure limits as a result of the supplementary. The estates costs will cover all activities and purposes listed in HC636.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer for what reasons the annual report of HM Customs and Excise for 2000–01 has not yet been published. [45745]

Mr. Boateng: Publication has been delayed because finalisation of the Trust Statement for Customs and Excise, which must be included in the report, took longer than expected. The Trust Statement now has an audit certificate, and the annual report for Customs and Excise has been laid before Parliament today.

Plant and Machinery (Investment)

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what incentives are in place for small and medium-sized manufacturing enterprises to invest in plant and machinery. [45562]

Dawn Primarolo: The tax system gives incentives for investment through capital allowances. Small and medium-sized enterprises qualify for 40 per cent. first year capital allowances for all investment in plant and machinery, in place of the usual 25 per cent. The rate is increased to 100 per cent. for businesses of all sizes if the plant or machinery is energy efficient, or is used for research and development purposes.

Secondments

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many members of staff were employed by the Treasury on secondment from non-governmental organisations in *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* 2001. [45222]

Ruth Kelly: The numbers of people seconded to the Treasury from non-governmental organisations were as follows:

1999—6
2000—11
2001—16.

Details of current secondees from all sectors outside central Government can be found on the Treasury website.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many members of staff were employed by the Treasury on secondment from the private sector in *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* 2001. [45257]

Ruth Kelly: The numbers of Treasury staff on secondment from the private sector in 1999 was two, in 2000 was four and in 2001 was eight.

Details of current secondees from all sectors outside central Government can be found on the Treasury website.

Norman Baker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many BP employees are on secondment to his Department; for what purposes; on what terms; and how many BP employees have been on secondment to his Department since January 2000. [45887]

Ruth Kelly: There are no BP employees currently on secondment to HM Treasury. There have been no BP employees on secondment to HM Treasury since January 2000.

Details of current secondees from outside central Government can be found on the Treasury's website.

Construction Industry (False Self-Employment)

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the extent of false self-employment in the construction industry; and if he will make a statement. [45758]

Dawn Primarolo: The tax and national insurance rules, which distinguish the employed from the self-employed, are intended to apply to all workers. The Inland Revenue policies compliance with those rules in all industries, including the construction industry, to ensure that people are paying their tax and national insurance contributions on the correct basis.

Insurance Guidance

Mr. Chope: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will place in the Library a copy of the insurance guidance that went to the Economic Secretary to the Treasury at the end of November 1998. [46219]

Ruth Kelly: Insurance guidance on reserving for guaranteed annuities was issued by HM Treasury in December 1998 and is included as an appendix to the FSA's report into the regulation of Equitable Life. This was published on 16 October 2001 and a copy placed in the Library.

Equitable Life

Mr. Chope: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if Treasury Ministers have been shown the documentation covering the period in 1998 when the Treasury was directly responsible for regulating Equitable Life. [46107]

Ruth Kelly: Treasury Ministers are aware of the sequence of events in 1998 and have had access to all relevant documentation.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will place in the Library a copy of the Treasury's written evidence to the Penrose Inquiry. [46106]

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what evidence the Government have been requested to provide the Penrose Inquiry into Equitable Life other than the Baird Report. [45884]

Ruth Kelly: Lord Penrose has been given access to all available information. The Treasury provided evidence to the Treasury Select Committee and arranged for publication of the FSA's report into the regulation of Equitable Life, copies of both of which have already been placed in the Library.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether the Treasury has responded to the formal notice from the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration of his intention to inquire into the regulation of Equitable Life. [45736]

Ruth Kelly: Yes. I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) on 3 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 66W.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what meetings have taken place since September 2001 between Lord Penrose and Treasury ministers. [46014]

Ruth Kelly: None.

Pensioners (Communication)

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the *(a)* number and *(b)* percentage of pensioner households that do not have (i) a telephone, (ii) e-mail and (iii) internet facilities. [45687]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Mr. Webb to Mr. Len Cook, dated 25 March 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent question concerning the number and percentage of pensioner households that do not have (I) a telephone, (ii) e-mail and (iii) internet facilities. (45687).

The General Household Survey classifies pensioner households as those which contain a man aged 65 or over, or a woman aged 60 or over. Other non-pension age persons may also be in the household.

Unpublished data from the General Household Survey show that in Great Britain in 2000 (the most recent year available):

161,000 pensioner households did not have a telephone

6,688,000 pensioner households did not have internet facilities

These figures have been weighted and grossed to population values from the survey sample.

2% of pensioner households did not have a telephone

89% of pensioner households did not have internet facilities

These percentages are based on a weighted figure of 7,528,000 pensioner households in Great Britain (2649 in the survey sample).

The survey does not have information on e-mail.

Aggregates Levy

David Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) when the regulations dealing with the Aggregates Levy will be laid before Parliament; and when they will come into force; [46212]

(2) if he will delay the introduction of the Aggregates Levy to allow the publication of the regulations necessary to implement it in draft form; and if he will allow three months consultation on them before the levy commences; [46214]

(3) what factors he will take into account in deciding the date for the implementation of the Aggregates Levy. [46213]

Mr. Boateng: The levy will be implemented on 1 April 2002.

The draft regulations have been the subject of extensive consultation with the aggregates industry since November 2001.

The regulations were laid on 21 March and enter into force on 1 April 2002.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make draft regulations for the implementation of the Aggregates Levy before 26 March. [45390]

Mr. Boateng: The Aggregates Levy (Registration and Miscellaneous Provisions) Regulations 2001 were made on 19 December 2001 and the Aggregates Levy (General) Regulations 2002 were made on 21 March 2002.

Whisky

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations have been received from the Scottish Executive regarding the proposals for a strip tax on whisky. [45817]

Mr. Boateng: I have received a number of representations about the consultation by Customs and Excise on the costs, benefits and practicalities of a tax stamps system for spirits, including representations from the Scottish Executive.

Oil Prices

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will assess the impact on the United Kingdom economy and *(a)* domestic and *(b)* business consumers of oil prices of (i) $30 a barrel, (ii) $35 a barrel and (iii) $38 a barrel for over 12 months' duration; and if he will make a statement on the implications for the economy of higher prices for oil produced on the UK Continental Shelf. [45158]

Ruth Kelly: As detailed in the Pre-Budget Report 2000 (Cm 4917, Box A3, page 153) higher oil prices would, all else equal, tend to reduce GDP growth and increase inflation. However, the UK differs from most other major industrialised economies in that it is a small net exporter of oil, so potential GDP losses may be partly offset by increased North Sea production.

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what risk assessment he has made of the effect on the *(a)* price of oil, *(b)* availability of oil and *(c)* UK economy of UK military action in Iraq. [45160]

Ruth Kelly: As the Prime Minister has made clear, most recently on 11 March, no decision has been made on whether to take military action against Iraq. Iraq currently contributes supplies of oil equivalent to about three per cent. of world production. Spare oil production capacity worldwide is currently several times this amount. Moreover, there are also International Energy Agency and international agreements on holding stocks of oil, and procedures to deal with any oil supply disruptions. Oil markets are, however, volatile and to some extent driven by expectations, as well as responding to the near-term actual balance of supply and demand. It is therefore difficult to predict the impact on oil prices from any supply disruptions, and the question of military action against Iraq is only one of a wide range of influences. The Government will publish an updated forecast for the UK economy in the Budget on April 17, taking account of all relevant economic factors.

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if the service delivery agreement to reduce sickness absence by 0.5 days by April 2001 was met; [46103]

(2) what recent assessment he has made of whether the PSA target for the increase in net public investment and improvement of the public capital stock in 2002 will be met; [46000]

(3) when he estimates the PSA target for the publication of the whole of Government accounts for 2001–02 will be met; [46003]

(4) if the PSA target for the achievement of investors in people accreditation was achieved on time; [46004]

(5) if the PSA target for the completion of the information strategy review was met on time; [45982]

(6) what recent assessment he has made of whether the PSA target for achieving a declining trend in excessive hours worked will be met on time; [46005]

(7) what recent assessment he has made of progress with the public service agreement target for securing an increase in the number of successful high growth business start-ups; [46001]

(8) if he estimates that the PSA target for 2002 for increasing the proportion of business undertaken electronically will be achieved on time; [46006]

(9) if he estimates the PSA target for moving to electronic publishing of material hitherto published on paper will be met on time; [45983]

(10) if the PSA target for the reduction of unfilled vacancies was achieved on time; [45984]

(11) what recent assessment he has made of whether the PSA target for reducing the number of households facing marginal deduction rates over 70 per cent. will be achieved on time; [46002]

(12) if he estimates that the PSA targets for correspondence and parliamentary response times will be met on time. [45981]

Ruth Kelly: Information about progress on PSA targets will be published in the Treasury's 2002 departmental report.

European Single Currency

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what research is being carried out in his Department concerning the benefits of the single currency to the United Kingdom. [46174]

Ruth Kelly: As the Chancellor said in his October 1997 statement, the five economic tests will define whether a clear and unambiguous case can be made for UK membership of the single currency. The assessment of the five tests has not yet started, but the necessary preliminary analysis—technical work necessary to allow us to undertake the assessment within two years as promised—is under way.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 29 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 224W, to the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Laws), for what reason he is unable to specify the Treasury management units which are contributing to the evaluation of the five economic tests for membership of the euro; and if he will make a statement. [44931]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the hon. Member to the comments I made during the adjournment debate on the preliminary and technical work held on the floor of the House on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 268.

Pre-Budget Report

Ian Stewart: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a further statement on measures for business in relation to the pre-Budget report in November 2001. [46549]

Mr. Gordon Brown: As announced in the pre-Budget report in November 2001 and following consultation with business:

the new corporation tax regime for substantial shareholdings will apply for disposals on or after 1 April 2002;

the new corporation tax regime for intangible assets will also apply with effect from 1 April 2002.

In addition the Government are also proceeding with the new tax credit to encourage research and development by large companies which will apply from 1 April 2002. The credit will follow a simple volume based approach, final details of which will be announced in the Budget.

Technical details of these measures will be published tomorrow and will be available to Members from the Vote Office.

PPPs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had with his counterparts in other European Union member states about the use of public-private partnerships in the delivery of public services. [43123]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Government discusses PPPs in a variety of fora. In this context, Treasury Ministers share information on existing UK policy on PPPs with a range of European colleagues.

Current Receipts

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the cash-terms change in current receipts has been since 1997. [44685]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Estimates of Government receipts are published quarterly by the ONS and HM Treasury in "Public sector finances".

Taxation

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the tax burden was as a proportion of national income in *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* 2001–02. [44686]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Estimates of net taxes and social security contributions as a percentage of GDP are contained in table B22 and table B10 of the November 2001 pre-Budget report.

Wanless Report

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he last met Derek Wanless to discuss the contents of the final Wanless report. [44689]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Chancellor has held no meetings with Derek Wanless to discuss the contents of his final report.

Health Expenditure

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he last met ministerial colleagues in the Department of Health to discuss value for money in health expenditure. [44692]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Chancellor meets with ministerial colleagues in the Department of Health to discuss a variety of issues on a regular basis.

Infrastructure Investment

Mr. Chope: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will set out the percentage of gross domestic product and expenditure per capita represented by public infrastructure investment in *(a)* the UK and *(b)* other EU member states. [45977]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Table B23 of the pre-Budget report sets out public investment as a proportion of GDP in the UK and the Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses, published in April 2001, include information about public expenditure on a per capita basis. Chart 6.2 in the Treasury publication "Realising Europe's potential", published in February 2002, compares general Government net investment across all member states.

HEALTH

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made in investigating his Department's performance in answering parliamentary questions. [46407]

Mr. Milburn: As indicated in my reply to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W, a full investigation has now been carried out into the circumstances which led to delays in dealing with parliamentary questions in the Department of Health, including apparent falsification in recording the handling of parliamentary questions in the Department's parliamentary section. The aim of the investigation was to establish the facts and to ensure that the necessary remedial action is taken.

An audit of outstanding questions was carried out immediately after the apparent falsification of the electronic database used in the parliamentary section to track the handling of parliamentary questions in the Department was discovered. This identified 411 outstanding questions due for reply before 14 February, with 214 of those questions having been recorded as answered when no reply had been given. This information formed the basis for my reply on 5 March and for replies to subsequent questions to hon. Members. Further more detailed investigation of the information derived from this audit reduced the number of outstanding questions due for reply before 14 February to 354, with 202 questions recorded as having been answered when no reply had been given. The balance was accounted for by questions which further investigation showed had in fact been answered where this had not been clear previously or which were due for reply after 14 February, questions transferred to other Departments for answer, duplicate entries on the database and incorrect entries on the database. Of these 354 questions, 348 received replies by 12 March, the remaining 6 on 13 March.

In addition this more detailed investigation identified a further 11 outstanding questions due for reply before 14 February. Six of these were recorded as having been completed and given a false Hansard reference on the database; two previously unidentified questions were found which had been recorded as having received replies when they had not; and three outstanding questions were discovered which had not been recorded on the database at all. All these questions have now been answered.

Of the total of 365 questions finally identified as due for reply before 14 February which had not received replies when I reported the situation on 5 March, 33 received an answer within one month of the due date for reply and 95 were answered within two months. The remaining 237 had been awaiting replies for more than two months; and 77 of these were asked before the summer recess in 2001.

The overall number of cases where the database had been falsified to show questions as having been answered when they had not was 210, broken down by party as follows:

Conservative 88
Labour 69
Liberal Democrats 42
Scottish Nationalist 9
Plaid Cymru 2.

The investigation has also established that according to the Library of the House there are a number of outstanding questions from previous Sessions. Regrettably, because the Department had not been following the normal practice of sending all questions answered by letter to the Library of the House, we are unable to confirm how many of these questions were not in fact answered. All of the questions answered by letter during the last summer recess have now been placed in the Library; and this practice will be followed assiduously in future. There are, however, some indications that falsification of the database may have taken

place during previous Sessions; and this will be pursued in the context of the disciplinary process which is taking place.

The main conclusions of the investigation were as follows:

(i) There is clear evidence of the systematic falsification of records on the database which tracks the handling of the parliamentary questions received in the Department of Health. Questions were recorded as having been answered when no replies had been passed to the Member of Parliament or the *Official Report*; incorrect information appears to have been entered on the whereabouts of parliamentary questions within the system and in a number of cases a false Hansard reference was entered to indicate that the process was complete and had been externally validated. There have been three cases where questions that appeared on the Order Paper were not entered on to the database, thus preventing their being processed at all.

(ii) Examination of the questions in the backlog revealed no consistent pattern either by party or subject matter.

(iii) All the indications are that previously unidentified delays in handling cases in the parliamentary section were the overwhelming contributory factor, leading to the backlog of outstanding questions that developed, and that these delays were not identified through routine monitoring systems because of deliberate falsification of the database.

(iv) The number of parliamentary questions listed for answer by the Department of Health has increased significantly during this Session. During the 2000–01 Session (December 2000—May 2001) 1,754 questions were asked in 83 sitting days. For the current Session to date (June 2001—20 March 2002) 5,748 questions have been asked in 120 sitting days. This increase has tested the resources of the parliamentary section, particularly in the timely and diligent follow up of ministerial queries on draft answers. Pressure of work cannot, however, explain the failure to answer all the parliamentary questions in an appropriate and timely manner.

(v) Although some concerns were raised both within the Department and by MPs about delays in responding to questions and these concerns were followed up by Ministers and managers, suspicion was successfully deflected to others within the organisation. This was possible because the management information provided by the database had been corrupted by the false entries and because the increased volume of parliamentary questions made it increasingly difficult to track the physical progress of parliamentary questions folders in a small and cramped office. The falsification of the database also prevented the size of the backlog emerging in routine monitoring of progress on answering questions. Currently there is no external system against which the Department can validate its performance. From April the Leader of the House will make available to all Departments regular lists of the parliamentary questions the Library's records show are outstanding, so that such a check can be made.

(vi) An official in the parliamentary section has been suspended and is awaiting disciplinary action, in accordance with departmental disciplinary procedures. The detailed evidence found by the investigation will be used in this process. There is no evidence to suggest that any other member of staff was improperly involved.

Line managers had already put in hand action to manage the increased volume of parliamentary questions, to speed up their processing, and to share the tasks more widely within the unit. The database was in the process of being modified to provide more accessible and timely management information on the handling of parliamentary questions to enable improved tracking, early intervention and a clear audit trail. The staffing complement of the unit had been increased from seven to eight.

A summary of the process for dealing with parliamentary questions in the Department of Health prior to this investigation is being placed in the Library of the House. The following further remedial action was identified as necessary by the investigation and is being put in hand immediately:

(i) New arrangements will be established within the parliamentary section to ensure that the process for tracking parliamentary questions cannot be manipulated by any one individual. This will include a clear separation of tasks and building in a greater degree of external checking and validation, including regular checks against information held by the Library of the House.

(ii) The electronic database will be modified and shared across the Department and Ministers' Private Offices to allow for a more transparent system of tracking the handling of parliamentary questions.

(iii) Questions are already handled electronically between the parliamentary section and officials. This will be extended to include Ministers' Private Office to simplify and speed the process.

(iv) Ministers' Private Secretaries will be responsible for dealing with outstanding queries on draft parliamentary questions before they are returned to the parliamentary section.

(v) The parliamentary section will be moved to more suitable accommodation as a matter of urgency.

(vi) In addition to the extra capacity already introduced, there will be an immediate review of the staffing complement within the parliamentary section to reflect the increase in work load and to ensure proper controls mechanisms are in place, using other Departments' parliamentary sections with similar volumes of work as comparators.

I expect that these changes will prevent any recurrence of the lapse in my Department's standards of accountability to the House, which I deeply regret and for which I apologise.

Inter-country Adoptions

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions his Department has had with Romanian authorities about inter-country adoption. [26494]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 11 January 2002]:* I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

Department of Health officials have had regular contact with the National Authority for the Protection of Children and Adoption (formally the Romanian Committee for Adoption) concerning individual inter-country adoption applications.

An informal Co-operation Agreement between the Department of Health and the Romanian Committee for Adoptions was signed on 17 February 1998. A copy of the Co-operation Agreement has been placed in the Library for information. The Agreement was drawn up in consultation with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, following the introduction of new adoption legislation in Romania in 1997. The Co-operation Agreement embodies the principles of the Hague Convention for the Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption 1993.

A one-year moratorium on international adoptions from Romania was announced by the Romanian National Authority for Child Protection and Adoption, formerly the Romanian Committee for Adoptions, on 13 July, following a recommendation from the European Parliament. The United Kingdom Government have expressed their support for the one-year moratorium, which will allow the Romanian authorities time to redraft legislation on adoption and get the necessary framework in place to support it.

Overseas Treatment

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he collated on the relative pay scales of *(a)* general practitioners and *(b)* publicly funded hospital consultants in the UK and France. [31176]

Mr. Hutton: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

The Department does not collate information on the pay scales of general practitioners and publicly funded hospital consultants in France.

For 2000–01 the Intended Average Net Income (IANI) for a full time GP for delivering General Medical Services (GMS) is £60,655.

For 2000–01 the salary scale for NHS consultants ranges from £50,810 to £66,120. The discretionary points scheme extends consultants' salary scale range by eight steps of roughly £2,645 each, up to a maximum of £87,280. Distinction awards may be paid in addition to consultants' basic salaries but subsume the value of any discretionary points previously held.

West Midlands South Strategic Health Authority

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the Chairman of the West Midlands South Strategic health authority was consulted about the appointment of the Chief Executive of the authority; and if he will make a statement. [28194]

Yvette Cooper: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave him on Tuesday 22 January at column 766W.

Hospital Waiting Times

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on progress with, and the cost to public funds of, the policy of enabling patients whose operations are cancelled on the day they are due to take place either to choose another date within 28 days at the hospital or to have it carried out at another hospital. [16248]

Mr. Hutton: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March (at column 192W).

The patients' guarantee will come into force in April 2002. When a patient's operation is cancelled by the hospital on the day of surgery for non-clinical reasons, the hospital will have to offer another binding date within a maximum of the next 28 days or fund the patient's treatment at the time and the hospital of the patient's choice. Patients may choose NHS or private treatment and the NHS will fund the operation. Trusts will meet the cost from their existing budgets.

By reducing overall cancelled operations and ensuring that where patients are cancelled, they are offered another binding date within a maximum of the next 28 days, NHS Trusts will not incur any additional costs.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the waiting time for joint replacements at *(a)* the Southampton University Hospital NHS Trust, *(b)* the Royal Bournemouth and Christchurch Hospitals NHS Trust and *(c)* the Poole Hospital NHS Trust. [41690]

Ms Blears: Action has been taken to improve waiting times for Orthopaedics waits in Southampton. This included additional consultants, two new operating theatres and 10 additional beds for orthopaedics. An area wide steering group has also been established.

The information collected centrally on joint replacement operations at Southampton University Hospitals NHS Trust and the Royal Bournemouth & Christchurch Hospitals NHS Trust is as follows:

Waiting times for waiting list and booked admissions by main operation and selected NHS trusts, 2000–01. Total joint replacement operations

Waiting times	*Southampton University Hospitals NHS Trust*	*Royal Bournemouth and Christchurch Hospitals NHS Trust*
0 to 3 months	34	411
3 to 6 months	33	542
6 months to 1 year	65	281
1 to 2 years	387	11
Over 2 years	23	1
Not known	2	129
Total	544	1375
Mean days	458	132
Median days	516	135

Source:
Hospital Episode Statistics (HES), Department of Health

Notes
1. Waiting time statistics from HES are not the same as the published waiting list statistics. HES provides counts and waiting times for all patients admitted to hospital within a given period whereas the published waiting list statistics count those waiting for treatment at a given point in time and how long they have been on the waiting list.
2. HES calculates the waiting time as the difference between the admission and decision to admit dates. Unlike published waiting list statistics, this is not adjusted for self-referrals or periods of medical/social suspension.
3. The main operation is the first of four operation fields in the HES data set and is usually the most resource intensive procedure performed during the episode.
4. Figures in this table have not yet been adjusted for shortfalls in data.

There are no waiting list or booked admissions recorded for the Poole Hospital NHS Trust for these operations.

Waiting Lists

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 25 January, 2002. *Official Report*, column 1121W, on waiting lists, when the review by the regional offices of the 13 trusts will be made *(a)* public and *(b)* available to Ministers. [40076]

Mr. Hutton: I refer the hon. Member to the response I gave him on 7 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 544W.

Autism

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how much is being spent by the Government into research on autism; [41462]

(2) what research the Department is conducting into autism which has an impact on policies on *(a)* respite care from the social services and *(b)* specialist speech therapy. [41464]

Jacqui Smith: The main Government agency for research into the causes of and treatments for disease is the Medical Research Council (MRC), which receives its funding via the Department of Trade and Industry. The MRC spend on autism research for 2000–01 was approximately £1.2 million. The MRC funds a large amount of work on the causes and treatment of autism, and to increase the knowledge base of issues surrounding autism. As part of this ongoing work the MRC has recently published a review of the current state of knowledge about the causes and epidemiology of autism. The MRC has also recently been given an extra £2.5 million by the Department to do further research into autism.

The Department funds research to support policy and the delivery of effective practice in health and social care. The Department also provides national health service support funding for research commissioned by the research councils and charities that takes place in the NHS. Management of much of the research supported by NHS Research and Development Funding is devolved and expenditure at project level is not held centrally by the Department.

There are a number of research projects on autism for which the Department provides support costs. Details of these individual projects are available on the National Research Register (NRR), which can be accessed via the internet: http://www.doh.gov.uk/research/nrr.htm. The NRR shows that the Department supports a number of research projects on speech therapy and respite care although not specifically relating to autism.

NHS Professionals

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what measures he is taking to ensure that nurses working through NHS Professionals are paid on time and in full; [30774]

(2) whether nurses working through NHS Professionals will be paid weekly. [30772]

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what the length of time is within which he expects NHS Professionals to pay its temporary staff; [39683]

(2) if the payroll costs in respect of NHS Professionals staff are charged out to its clients; [39681]

(3) what steps he is taking to ensure that the costs of *(a)* time sheet processing and *(b)* payroll functions of NHS Professionals are identified and reported. [41728]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answers 1 March 2002]:* I apologise to the hon. Members for the delay in responding to these questions. I refer them to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March, 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

HSC 2001/002 and guidance "NHS Professionals—A co-ordinated, NHS-led approach to temporary staffing" sets out NHS Professionals national standards for good employment practice, including provision for weekly payment upon submission of completed and authorised time sheets.

Local, regional and national project boards are in place to monitor the implementation of NHS Professionals to meet the required standards.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how an NHS employee will become entitled to extra *(a)* maternity and *(b)* sickness pay in return for working additional hours for NHS Professionals; and what is the nature of the extra entitlement; [41724]

(2) whether a permanent NHS employee will be entitled to be paid at their substantive grade and substantive scale point, when working additional hours for NHS Professionals; [41720]

(3) how an NHS employee will accrue additional pension entitlement in return for working additional hours for NHS Professionals; and what is the nature of the enhancement; [41722]

(4) whether NHS Professionals nurses will be entitled to full Whitley council terms and conditions as for permanent staff; and if he will make a statement; [41718]

(5) how an NHS employee will become entitled to additional holiday pay in return for additional hours worked for NHS Professionals; and what the nature is of the addition; [41723]

(6) whether a permanent NHS employee will be entitled to overtime, if additional hours are worked for NHS Professionals over and above a normal full-time working week. [41719]

Mr. Hutton: NHS Professionals "A co-ordinated, NHS-led approach to temporary staffing" published in November 2001 highlights guidance on pay and conditions for NHS Professionals staff including maternity, sickness, pension and annual leave entitlement.

For maternity and sickness leave statutory provisions apply. Staff have the opportunity to join the NHS Pension Scheme and accrue benefits under the terms of that scheme. The number of days annual leave entitlement is as per the Working Time Regulations and the payments are pro rata to hours worked within a reference period, with staff taking the leave within their NHS Professionals

shifts. Salary and grade levels are agreed at the recruitment stage with the understanding that staff have the opportunity to complete shifts below their substantive grade but not over. There is no provision for overtime payments.

Non-consultant Doctors

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he is taking to ensure non-consultant career grade doctors can be appointed to NHS specialist posts; and if he will make a statement. [40967]

Mr. Hutton: We have proposed amendments to the European Specialist Medical Qualifications Order 1995. The amendments will increase the number of doctors in non-consultant career grades eligible to apply for consultant posts in the national health service subject, where appropriate, to the successful completion of a period of further training. It is not possible to extend this to all doctors in non-consultant career grades as they will not all have the required qualifications and training.

Nurse Recruitment

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what evaluation was made by his Department of the Sharing Ideas nurse recruitment project. [40883]

Mr. Hutton: The "Sharing Ideas" resource pack was published in March 1998, supported by the "Working Lives" published in March 1999. "Sharing Ideas", "Working Together", "Making a Difference" and "Working Lives" were the building blocks of the current successful returner, recruitment and retention and improving working lives programmes aimed at delivering the NHS Plan.

Speech Therapists

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he is taking to increase the number of speech and language therapists for children. [38438]

Jacqui Smith: Speech and language therapists working in the national health service have a broad range of responsibilities and children are one of the many important groups they help. Since 1997, the number of qualified speech and language therapists has increased by 17 per cent. (from 4,870 to 5,680 in 2001). We are also committed in the NHS plan to increasing the number of training places for therapists (including speech and language therapists) and other professional staff by 4,450 by 2004. The number of speech and language therapy training commissions increased by 101 between 1999 and 2000 and 2000 and 2001, 11 in 2001–02 and further increases are planned for 2002–03.

Health Authority Appointments

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women from an ethnic minority background have been appointed to a health authority covering the Greater London Area since May 1997. [40519]

Mr. Hutton: The appointments made of people from an ethnic minority background to health authorities serving the London region since 1 May 1977 and at 5 March 2002 are given in the table.

	Appointment made since 1 May 1997		*Appointments as at 5 March 2002*	
Ethnic origin	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*	*Male*
Asian Bangladeshi	1	0	0	0
Asian Indian	5	6	4	3
Black African	2	3	1	3
Black Caribbean	7	6	5	0
Black other	1	0	1	0
Other	6	2	4	1
White	49	68	31	29
Sub-total	71	85	46	36
Total	156		82	

General Practitioners

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give a profile of practising GPs in England and Wales, based on age and sex. [39208]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* The information requested is shown in the table.

General medical practitioners in England by age and sex, 2001

	Total	*Under 30*	*30–34*	*35–39*	*40–44*	*45–49*	*50–54*	*55–59*	*60–64*	*65 and over*
All practitioners	31,835	1,325	3,578	5,590	6,254	5,221	4,680	3,244	1,396	546
All UPEs	27,843	270	2,466	4,844	5,777	5,012	4,564	3,154	1,325	431
Male—all practitioners	19,743	445	1,535	2,885	3,765	3,510	3,463	2,545	1,139	456
Male- UPEs	18,574	114	1,222	2,740	3,673	3,451	3,419	2,494	1,093	368
Female—all practitioners	12,092	880	2,043	2,706	2,489	1,711	1,217	699	257	90
Female-UPEs	9,269	156	1,244	2,104	2,104	1,561	1,145	660	232	63

Notes:
All practitioners include Unrestricted Principals and Equivalents, Restricted Principals, Assistants, GP Registrars, Salaried Doctors, PMS Other and GP Retainers.
UPEs (Unrestricted Principals and Equivalents) include GMS Principals, PMS Contracted GPs and PMS Salaried GPs.

Information for Wales is a matter for the Welsh Assembly.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many GPs in England and Wales work part-time; and how many worked part-time in 1997. [39207]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* Part-time working among general practitioners (GPs) is growing as the numbers and proportion of women GPs increase. Many of these prefer more flexible working arrangements than are offered by traditional General Medical Services principal posts. One of the strengths of

the Personal Medical Services arrangements which were first piloted in 1998 is that it readily offers such flexibility. In 1997 4,823 GPs worked part time in England. By 2001 (latest available data) this had increased to 6,252. The equivalent data for Wales are a matter for the Welsh Assembly.

Agency Nurses

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) whether he intends to exempt existing agency nurses from the requirement to obtain a GP health report; [41714]

(2) what his policy is on commercial nurses' agencies *(a)* providing both nursing and domiciliary services to customers, *(b)* maintaining combined records in respect of both services and *(c)* both services being managed in one business; and if he will make a statement. [41726]

Jacqui Smith: The Government have recently consulted on the "Nurses Agency National Minimum Standards and Regulations" under the Care Standards Act 2000. The consultation document is available on the Department's website at www.doh.gov.uk/ncsc.

We will be considering any revisions to the standards and regulations in the light of responses to the consultation.

Consultant Vacancies

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many consultant vacancies there were by specialty in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 2001. [41716]

Mr. Hutton: The NHS vacancy survey has been conducted in March each year since 1999 and information is not available for 1997. Information for 2001 is shown in the table.

Three month vacancy rates[1,2] for consultants[3]. Three month vacancy numbers and staff in post employed within trusts, by specified specialty in England

	3 month vacancy rates	*3 month vacancy numbers (wte)*	*Staff in post (wte)*
Total consultants	3.0	670	21,630
Specific specialties			
Accident and emergency	7.9	40	440
Anaesthetics (including intensive care)	1.7	60	3,170
General surgery	1.7	20	1,260
Obstetrics and gynaecology	1.5	20	1,050
Ophthalmology	0.8	10	610
Oral and Maxillo Facial Surgery	5.6	10	210
Otolaryngology	2.9	10	420
Paediatric surgery	5.7	10	100
Plastic surgery	2.9	10	170
Trauma and orthopaedic surgery	2.2	30	1,150
Urology	2.7	10	370
Cardiology	2.6	10	480
Cardiothoracic surgery	1.6	0	180
Clinical oncology	3.8	10	280
Clinical radiology	4.6	70	1,460
Haematology	2.1	10	430
Histopathology	6.0	50	780
Medical oncology	3.8	0	100
Palliative medicine	7.4	10	90
Forensic psychiatry	5.2	10	150
General psychiatry	7.8	130	1,490
Learning Disabilities	13.3	30	170
Geriatric medicine	3.0	20	730
Old Age Psychiatry	9.3	30	310
Diabetes medicine	2.7	10	360

[1] Three month vacancies are vacancies as at 31 March 2001 which trusts are actively trying to fill, which had lasted for three months or more (whole time equivalents).
[2] Three month vacancy rates are three month vacancies expressed as a percentage of three month vacancies plus staff in post from the September 2000 medical and dental workforce census (whole time equivalent)
[3] Excludes staff working within HA
Notes:
1. Numbers are rounded to the nearest ten
2. Percentages rounded to one decimal place
3. * = figures where staff in post and number of vacancies are less than 10
4. England totals include staff from special health authorities
5. Totals may not equal sum of component parts due to rounding.
6. Staff in post figures as at 30 September 2000
Source:
Department of Health Vacancies Survey March 2001
Department of Health 2000 medical and dental workforce census

Women GPs

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many GPs in England and Wales are women. [39206]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* At 30 September 2001 there were 12,092 women general practitioners (GPs) in England. The number of women GPs in Wales is a matter for the Welsh Assembly.

St. Bartholomew's

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received concerning the possible re-opening of the accident and emergency department at St Bartholomew's hospital; and what response he has given. [36614]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 25 February 2002]:* Since 1997 there have been approximately 250 pieces of correspondence concerning the accident and emergency department at St Bartholomew's hospital and ten parliamentary questions.

My right hon. Friend, the Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham), was presented with an 8, 000 signature petition by the Islington Gazette in March 2001. I met with the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster on 23 October 2001.

The Tomlinson and the Turnberg reports confirmed that there was insufficient demand to justify supporting two full service A and E departments at both the St. Bartholomew's and the Royal London sites. There are currently no plans to return A and E services to St. Bartholomew's Hospital. St. Bartholomew's does however, run a minor injuries unit.

Podiatric Care

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent changes in the level of podiatric care there have been in the Portsmouth and South East Hampshire Health Authority area. [31853]

Ms Blears: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

Increasing demand for podiatry care has placed intense pressure on the local chiropody service. As a result service provision was reviewed in order to ensure that care was provided safely and within available resources. Clearer admissions criteria have been introduced, designed to address the needs of those patients with high and medium clinical need across the current caseload of approximately 35,000 patients.

NHS (East Lancashire)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the cost of re-configuring the structure of the NHS in East Lancashire; and if he will make a statement. [27148]

Mr. Hutton: I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

A number of simultaneous reconfigurations are taking place, both across and beyond East Lancashire. The cost of these reconfigurations will be met from within NHS allocations and is intended to result in a higher share of resources reaching frontline patient care.

Transplant Centres

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) whether reducing the number of transplant centres in the United Kingdom is expected to lead to a reduction in the number of retrieval teams available; [4516]

(2) what financial savings would be made by reducing the number of heart and lung transplant centres to *(a)* four and *(b)* five; [4517]

(3) what policies are being put in place to increase the level of transplants and organ donation, per head of population; [4519]

(4) if the study relating to the number of transplant units undertaken by Finnamore management consultants for the national specialist commissioning advisory group will be made available for public study. [4518]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 19 July 2001]:* I apologise to the hon. Member for the delay in responding to this question. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

Our long term goal for the cardiothoracic service is to increase the number of patients who receive successful heart and lung transplants, to ensure that today's high quality service is sustained in the future and to improve the working lives of the professionals who provide this crucial service.

To meet this goal, we issued a discussion document on 21 September 2001. It announces that all six cardiothoracic transplant units will continue to provide a service to NHS patients. To do so, they will need to meet the clear and explicit requirements set out in the new monitoring framework proposed in the discussion document. These requirements include staffing levels and qualifications, arrangements for retrieval of organs, the number of transplants carried out or the number of patients seen in follow-up clinics and survival and rejection rates. All six units will be inspected against these requirements.

The new service standards and effective monitoring will help ensure continued improvement to the quality of cardiothoracic transplant services, and provide patients with a national service of the highest possible quality. A copy of the discussion document, which invites comments on the standards and specification for the service, is in the Library.

Hospital Stays (Children)

Mrs. Humble: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children stayed in hospital for four weeks or more in *(a)* Blackpool Victoria Hospital and *(b)* hospitals nationwide in the last 12 months. [39526]

Yvette Cooper: The table below shows a count of episodes of care where the length of stay was longer than four weeks.

Finished provider spells for 0–18 year olds where length of stay was over 4 weeks—Blackpool Victoria NHS Trust and all other Trusts in England, 2000–01

	Age Total (0–18)
Blackpool Victoria Hospital NHS Trust	55
Other NHS trusts	15,292
England	15,347

Notes:
A finished provider spell is defined as a period of in-patient care within one health care provider that commences with the patients' admission and ends on the date of discharge. It may comprise one or more FCEs (finished consultant episodes).
Figures in this table have not yet been adjusted for shortfalls in data.
Source:
Hospital Episode Statistics (HES), Department of Health

Genito-Urinary Consultants

Laura Moffatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he will take to increase genito-urinary consultant numbers in line with Royal College of Physicians, Consultant Physicians Working for Patients, recommendations. [40871]

Mr. Hutton: The NHS Plan sets a target of 7,500 additional consultants by 2004 (England), over the 1999 baseline, needed to deliver the service targets set out in the Plan. There are currently around 275 consultants in genito-urinary medicine in England. We anticipate that by 2004 there will be an increase of around 35 trained specialists in genito-urinary medicine, and a further 25 by 2009. We have also agreed an increase in specialist registrar numbers of up to 16 by 2004.

We continually review future requirements for trained specialists as part of the NHS's new multi-disciplinary workforce planning processes. These will look at the requirements for doctors alongside other staff focusing on the potential for new ways of working and developing new roles. As part of this process we discuss with the Royal College of Physicians their view of workforce needs in genito-urinary medicine.

Projections of need will change as modernisation of the workforce progresses. Supply projections will also change as numbers in training are varied in response to identified need.

Blood Donations

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many 17 year-olds have given blood in each of the past five years. [40875]

Yvette Cooper: In April 1998 donor selection criteria were altered to enable 17-year-olds to donate. The table shows the number of donors making their first donation aged 17 by financial year since this change was made.

Financial Year	*17-year-old donor count*
1998–99	13,777
1999–2000	19,133
2000–01	19,718
2001–02[1]	16,109

[1] Data for 2001–02 taken period ending 3 March 2002. Forecast total as at end of 2001–02: 17,420

NHS Equality Awards

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the winners of the NHS equality awards in each year since 1998. [40882]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is shown in the table.

1998 Award Winners

Rotherham Alcohol Advisory service
North Staffordshire health authority
Lewisham and Guys mental health NHS trust
Newham community healthcare services NHS trust
West End health resource centre, Newcastle
University hospital Birmingham NHS trust
Bay community NHS trust, Barrow in Furness
City hospitals Sunderland NHS trust
North West Lancashire health authority
Warrington community healthcare NHS trust
Barnet healthcare NHS trust
Manchester health promotion service
East Cheshire NHS trust
Shropshire Disability Consortium
Asian health development project, Ashton
Southampton university hospitals NHS trust
North Manchester healthcare NHS trust

1999–2000 Award Winners

Northern Birmingham mental health trust
Southern Birmingham community health NHS trust
Redbridge and Waltham Forest health authority
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth health authority
Tameside and Glossop community and priority services NHS trust
North West Lancashire health promotion unit
Leeds teaching hospitals NHS trust
Bradford community health NHS trust
Partners Advocacy Services, Blackberry Hill hospital, Bristol
South London and Maudsley NHS trust
Berwick family centre
Northern Birmingham community NHS trust
Southampton and south-west Hampshire health authority.

The national health service Equality Awards ran for two years with the focus on greater equality for all service users. Since the launch of the NHS Plan, the NHS Equality Awards have been combined with other national award schemes—the Nye Bevan Awards and Social Care Awards—to form the Health and Social Care Awards. This single set of awards recognises and rewards the excellence of staff working in vital services across both health and social care departments.

Abattoirs/Slaughterhouses

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the abattoirs and slaughterhouses which are licensed by the Food Standards Agency, stating in each case their maximum weekly throughput. [40972]

Yvette Cooper: The Food Standards Agency is responsible for the licensing of abattoirs in the United Kingdom. I have arranged for lists of all licensed red meat and white meat abattoirs in the UK to be placed in the Library of the House.

Licensed abattoirs are classified as either full or low throughput. Low throughput red meat abattoirs are limited to slaughtering no more than 1,000 livestock units per year at a rate not exceeding 20 livestock units per week. Low throughput white meat abattoirs are limited to slaughtering no more than 150,000 birds or 300,000 rabbits per year.

I am unable to provide the hon. Member with details of the throughput of individual abattoirs as this information is commercially confidential.

Hearing Aids

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what provision will be made to Hull and East Yorkshire NHS trust for the replacement of analogue hearing aids with digital ones. [41308]

Jacqui Smith: The Hull and East Yorkshire hospitals national health service trust has submitted a bid to the Department for second wave funding for the provision of digital hearing aids. The closing date for the submission of bids was 8 March 2002 and the bids are currently being evaluated.

Care Homes

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many applications the National Care Standards Commission has received from care providers wishing to register as a care home, under the Care Standards Act 2000, which are not existing residential care homes or existing nursing care homes; and if he will make a statement. [41606]

Jacqui Smith: Under the Care Standards Act 2000, the National Care Standards Commission takes over its responsibility for the regulation of social care and independent health care services on 1 April. Care providers who are not existing providers, in other words either they are not registered (the home is not operating) or exempt from registration under current legislation, may not apply to the Commission before the 1 April. On that basis the Commission has not received any applications for registration from such potential providers. The

Commission is receiving applications under transitional arrangements from existing providers and managers of care services who must be registered from the 1 April.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many applications the National Care Standards Commission has received from *(a)* existing nursing homes, *(b)* existing residential homes and *(c)* bed and breakfast accommodation under pilot schemes wishing to register as a care home under the Care Standards Act 2000. [41605]

Jacqui Smith: The National Care Standards Commission is now receiving applications for registration from providers and managers of care homes previously exempt from the requirement to register under current legislation. This is part of a planned transitional process but the full number of applications will not be known until 31 March 2002, which is the cut of date for applications under the transition. The Commission has to date received no applications from bed and breakfast accommodation under pilot schemes wishing to register under the Care Standards Act. Such provision, which will be regulated under the Act if it provides accommodation with personal care, cannot make applications to the Commission until 1 April 2002.

Residential Homes

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many vacant places there are in residential homes in the Barrow and Furness parliamentary constituency. [45262]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is not available.

Leukaemia

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many over 60-year-olds suffering from chronic myeloid leukaemia have received bone marrow transplants in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [41600]

Yvette Cooper: The information is detailed in the table. Bone marrow transplants are usually more suitable for younger patients. A range of other treatments is available for older patients with the disease.

Finished consultant episodes for patients aged over 60 where the main diagnosis was myeloid leukaemia and a bone marrow graft was performed. NHS Hospitals, England 1998–99 to 2000–01

	Number of episodes
1998–99	3
1999–2000	8
2000–01	9

Source: Hospital Episode Statistics (HES), Department of Health

Respiratory Syncytial Virus

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of RSV requiring hospital admission there have been in the last three years for which figures are available, broken down by age. [41477]

Yvette Cooper: Figures for all admissions to NHS hospitals in England for respiratory diseases with a subsidiary classification of respiratory syncytial virus, are shown in the table.

	1998–99	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Age			
0–4	523	300	182
5–19	5	2	4
20–64	6	4	6
65 and over	6	4	3
Total	540	310	195

Notes:
These figures do not represent the number of patients as a person may be admitted more than once during the year.
Figures in this table have not been adjusted for shortfalls in data (i.e. they are ungrossed)
Source:
Hospital Episode Statistics (HES), Department of Health

Health Authority Debts

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the bad debts and moneys written off by each health authority in each year since 1997. [41711]

Mr. Hutton: Losses due to bad debts and claims abandoned for each English health authority since 1997 are shown in the table.

Losses for health authorities

£000

Health authority area	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Avon	1	0	0	0
Barking and Havering	0	0	46	12
Barnet	1	0	0	0
Barnsley	0	0	0	0
Bedfordshire	0	0	0	0
Berkshire	6	0	10	0
Bexley and Greenwich	17	9	1	16
Birmingham	0	0	0	0
Bradford	2	1	1	2
Brent and Harrow	0	0	0	0
Bromley	0	0	0	0
Buckinghamshire	1	0	1	0
Bury and Rochdale	0	0	0	0
Calderdale and Kirklees	0	2	7	4
Cambridge and Huntingdon	0	0	n/a	n/a
Cambridgeshire	n/a	n/a	0	6
Camden and Islington	0	0	0	0
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	0	0	0	3
County Durham and Darlington	0	0	0	0

Losses for health authorities

£000

Health authority area	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Coventry	0	3	0	32
Croydon	0	0	0	0
Doncaster	0	0	0	0
Dorset	0	0	0	0
Dudley	0	2	3	0
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	0	0	0	0
East and North Hertfordshire	0	0	0	0
East Kent	0	0	1	0
East Lancashire	0	0	0	0
East London and the City	0	1	3	0
East Norfolk	0	0	n/a	n/a
East Riding and Hull	2	0	0	0
East Surrey	0	9	0	0
East Sussex, Brighton and Hove	2	2	2	0
Enfield and Haringey	15	2	1	16
Gateshead and South Tyneside	9	3	0	0
Gloucestershire	0	0	0	0
Herefordshire	0	0	0	0
Hillingdon	26	0	0	0
Isle of Wight	0	0	0	0
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	0	0	95	41
Kingston and Richmond	0	0	0	0
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	20	59	0	0
Leeds	0	0	4	0
Leicestershire[1]	1	0	525	0
Lincolnshire	3	8	0	0
Liverpool	0	6	0	0
Manchester	1	1	0	0
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	0	0	0	2
Morecambe Bay	0	1	0	1
Newcastle and North Tyneside	112	0	1	0
Norfolk	n/a	n/a	0	0
North and East Devon	0	0	0	0
North and Mid Hampshire	40	27	24	0
North Cheshire	0	0	0	0
North Cumbria	0	1	0	0
North Derbyshire	0	0	0	12
North Essex	6	1	0	0
North Nottinghamshire	0	0	0	0
North Staffordshire	4	0	2	1
North West Anglia	0	0	n/a	n/a
North West Lancashire	0	0	0	0
North Yorkshire	0	2	0	0
Northamptonshire	1	0	2	0
Northumberland	1	0	0	0
Nottingham	18	5	0	0
Oxfordshire	1	0	0	0
Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	0	0	0	0
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	1	0	0	0
Rotherham	5	0	2	1
Salford and Trafford	0	0	0	0
Sandwell	0	0	0	2
Sefton	0	0	0	0
Sheffield	281	63	0	2
Shropshire	0	0	23	0
Solihull	131	0	0	0
Somerset	0	1	0	2
South and West Devon	0	0	0	0
South Cheshire	0	0	0	0
South Essex	0	0	0	0
South Humber	0	0	0	1
South Lancashire	0	0	45	37
South Staffordshire	0	2	0	4
Southampton and South West Hampshire	0	1	1	1
Southern Derbyshire	1	0	7	0
St. Helens and Knowsley	2	0	0	0
Stockport	0	0	0	0
Suffolk	13	0	0	0
Sunderland	0	9	0	7
Tees	0	0	0	0
Wakefield	2	0	0	0
Walsall	2	0	0	5
Warwickshire	0	0	0	0
West Hertfordshire	0	0	0	0
West Kent	0	0	0	3

Losses for health authorities

£000

Health authority area	1997–98	1998–99	1999–2000	2000–01
West Pennine	0	0	5	3
West Surrey	1	1	1	0
West Sussex	0	0	0	10
Wigan and Bolton	0	4	2	0
Wiltshire	1	3	2	11
Wirral	0	0	2	1
Wolverhampton	1	0	0	0
Worcestershire	0	0	2	2

[1] Although the loss shown for Leicestershire health authority was recorded in 2000–01, it relates to events which occurred between 1992 and 1994 and involved overpayments to a company which went into receivership.

Note:

Data for 2000–01 is the last period available.

Source:

Health authority audited accounts 1997–98 and 1998–99.

Health authority audited summarisation forms 1999–2000 and 2000–01.

Mental Health

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent assessment he has made of the risk of abuse of elderly people with mental health problems in different care environments. [41710]

Jacqui Smith: Older people with mental health problems are as potentially susceptible to abuse as any other group of vulnerable adults. The Department takes the protection of vulnerable adults extremely seriously and is determined to stamp out abuse wherever it occurs. We are actively seeking to tackle the problem through a variety of initiatives. These include the launch of guidance titled 'No Secrets' and the planned implementation of the Protection of Vulnerable Adults list.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much funding has been allocated to the treatment of *(a)* psychosis and *(b)* other mental health problems in adults in financial year 2001–02. [45942]

Jacqui Smith: The majority of funding for the treatment of psychosis and other mental health problems is allocated as part of health authority allocations and separate figures on allocations for psychosis or other mental health problems are not available.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the *(a)* amount and *(b)* proportion of mental health expenditure has been on child and adolescent services in financial year 2001–02; and if he will make a statement on his assessment of the adequacy of the (i) amount and (ii) proportion of expenditure devoted to child and adolescent services. [45941]

Jacqui Smith: This information requested is not readily available. However our estimate for likely mental health expenditure in 2001–02 and the proportion spent on child and adolescent services is shown in the table, with the personal social services (PSS) expenditure particularly difficult to estimate.

We recognise that much still needs to be done to improve child and adolescent mental health. The work currently ongoing on the child and adolescent mental health module of the Children's National Service Framework will do much to inform our future expenditure.

Estimated mental health expenditure 2001–02

	HCHS[1]		PSS[2]		Total	
	£ million	Per cent.	£ million	Per cent.	£ million	Per cent.
CAMHS	289	8	269	20	558	11
Adult MH	3,171	87	678	51	3,849	77
Elderly	194	5	376	28	570	12
Total	3,654	100	1,323	100	4,977	100

[1] Hospital and community health services (HCHS) costs exclude the costs of primary care and drugs.

[2] Personal social services (PSS) costs include children's social services (CSS) costs where appropriate.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much was spent on mental health in each health authority as a percentage of total expenditure in each year since 1997. [41707]

Jacqui Smith: Figures showing how much was spent on mental health in each health authority as a percentage of total expenditure in each year since 1997–98 are shown in the table.

The figures in the answer are not comparable to those provided previously on a national basis, which cannot be analysed by health authority. The total expenditure used in this answer includes all the expenditure accounted for by the health authority whereas previous answers have provided spend on mental health as a proportion of total Health and Community Health Service expenditure. This excluded expenditure on primary care and authority administration.

Expenditure on mental illness by health authorities and primary care trusts as a percentage of total expenditure in each health authority area

	Health authority area	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
	England	9.24	8.99	9.10	9.63
QD8	Avon	8.86	7.99	8.62	7.99
QAP	Barking and Havering	9.93	10.30	9.20	10.55
QAQ	Barnet	8.65	9.99	10.89	8.26
QCG	Barnsley	8.14	8.22	7.12	7.02
QA6	Bedfordshire	8.16	7.73	7.87	7.66
QA7	Berkshire	7.94	8.53	8.61	9.32
QAA	Bexley and Greenwich	5.76	10.14	10.73	11.36
QD9	Birmingham	9.11	8.37	9.51	10.59
QDD	Bradford	8.55	8.19	7.69	8.41
QAR	Brent and Harrow	12.11	11.96	10.25	9.22
QAC	Bromley	9.99	8.30	7.76	8.92
QA8	Buckinghamshire	8.36	8.14	4.25	9.52
QCT	Bury and Rochdale	6.24	6.28	6.66	7.34
QDT	Calderdale and Kirklees	8.19	7.62	11.08	12.23
QA9	Cambridge and Huntingdon	10.37	9.86	n/a	n/a
QER	Cambridgeshire	n/a	n/a	8.41	9.57
QAT	Camden and Islington	16.20	15.01	15.21	14.49
QDV	Cornwall and Isles Of Scilly	8.48	8.87	7.11	8.65
QDE	County Durham	9.30	8.46	8.37	9.30
QEA	Coventry	9.34	8.19	7.98	9.39
QAD	Croydon	9.28	10.20	9.52	9.55
QCK	Doncaster	7.65	6.54	7.58	8.94
QDW	Dorset	7.53	7.14	8.00	7.67
QEC	Dudley	8.50	8.15	7.79	8.18
QAV	Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	13.68	12.54	12.37	12.58
QEP	East and North Hertfordshire	8.96	8.86	8.37	8.48
QAE	East Kent	7.61	8.98	7.14	7.11
QCX	East Lancashire	8.20	8.18	8.00	8.69
QAW	East London and The City	12.43	11.20	10.92	12.11
QCA	East Norfolk	9.47	8.09	n/a	n/a
QDF	East Riding	6.55	6.35	5.55	7.07
QAK	East Surrey	11.91	11.19	10.68	10.45
QAM	East Sussex, Brighton and Hove	9.47	8.25	7.83	8.64
QA4	Enfield and Haringey	13.37	10.98	11.63	13.30
QDG	Gateshead and South Tyneside	10.74	10.69	10.36	9.93
QDY	Gloucestershire	7.39	7.83	8.19	8.77
QED	Herefordshire	6.99	6.88	7.14	5.53
QA2	Hillingdon	7.32	6.45	5.65	8.70
QD4	Isle Of Wight	7.89	7.33	7.52	7.97
QA3	Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	16.60	16.04	14.67	12.49
QAG	Kingston and Richmond	10.20	8.82	11.82	11.53
QAH	Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	17.54	17.09	16.82	18.38
QDH	Leeds	8.98	7.72	8.87	9.69
QCL	Leicestershire	9.32	9.86	9.89	10.17
QCM	Lincolnshire	7.43	5.54	7.52	6.98
QC2	Liverpool	10.37	10.53	9.40	9.42
QC3	Manchester	11.17	10.89	10.04	9.58
QAJ	Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	11.25	11.16	10.27	11.27
QC4	Morecambe Bay	11.25	9.10	7.65	6.63
QDJ	Newcastle and North Tyneside	8.55	8.14	7.49	8.41
QET	Norfolk	n/a	n/a	10.09	10.13
QDX	North and East Devon	8.01	7.88	8.42	8.32
QD1	North and Mid Hampshire	8.29	8.66	9.25	8.83
QCV	North Cheshire	12.02	12.25	10.80	8.87
QDK	North Cumbria	8.83	9.54	8.82	9.95
QCH	North Derbyshire	7.95	7.79	8.27	5.68
QAX	North Essex	8.66	8.64	9.66	8.80
QCN	North Nottinghamshire	6.65	6.13	6.47	6.82
QEH	North Staffordshire	9.82	7.79	8.27	7.70
QCD	North West Anglia	9.02	8.92	n/a	n/a
QCY	North West Lancashire	9.38	9.38	9.87	10.47
QDR	North Yorkshire	8.26	8.40	7.50	9.13
QCC	Northamptonshire	8.79	9.10	10.09	11.46
QDM	Northumberland	9.11	8.43	7.97	9.50
QCP	Nottingham	11.26	10.06	9.78	10.42
QCE	Oxfordshire	9.24	9.22	9.34	11.35
QD2	Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	11.34	10.07	9.96	10.49
QA5	Redbridge and Waltham Forest	12.08	11.96	11.66	10.51
QCQ	Rotherham	7.00	7.10	7.63	7.03
QC6	Salford and Trafford	9.47	8.67	8.76	8.75
QEE	Sandwell	6.98	7.14	7.86	7.96

Expenditure on mental illness by health authorities and primary care trusts as a percentage of total expenditure in each health authority area

	Health authority area	1997–98	1998–99	1999–2000	2000–01
QC7	Sefton	6.59	6.60	7.85	24.13
QCR	Sheffield	7.68	7.57	8.01	8.30
QEF	Shropshire	8.04	8.02	7.63	7.35
QEG	Solihull	5.71	5.09	7.87	7.74
QD5	Somerset	8.40	8.63	8.63	8.40
QD6	South and West Devon	7.30	8.66	9.10	8.91
QCW	South Cheshire	9.88	9.63	10.87	9.77
QCJ	South Derbyshire	7.82	8.05	9.82	10.54
QAY	South Essex	9.95	9.95	10.32	11.37
QDL	South Humber	5.21	5.41	6.10	6.39
QC1	South Lancashire	5.56	6.67	7.23	7.22
QEJ	South Staffordshire	7.03	6.95	6.94	8.55
QD3	Southampton and South West Hampshire	9.43	9.34	9.68	9.02
QC5	St. Helens and Knowsley	8.29	8.89	8.32	8.52
QC8	Stockport	7.21	7.31	6.71	7.40
QCF	Suffolk	10.08	9.74	9.47	10.75
QDN	Sunderland	10.64	9.64	9.62	9.12
QDP	Tees	8.15	7.93	7.28	11.58
QDQ	Wakefield	7.62	7.69	9.26	8.95
QEK	Walsall	7.03	6.56	7.09	7.57
QEL	Warwickshire	7.43	7.47	7.60	8.17
QEQ	West Hertfordshire	8.20	8.08	9.32	9.42
QAF	West Kent	7.99	8.31	8.10	8.43
QC9	West Pennine	9.39	9.15	7.77	8.27
QAL	West Surrey	9.84	9.26	9.65	10.27
QAN	West Sussex	9.54	8.92	9.38	9.70
QDA	Wigan and Bolton	8.18	7.83	8.44	8.79
QD7	Wiltshire	8.79	8.30	8.07	7.29
QDC	Wirral	5.77	5.85	6.10	6.95
QEM	Wolverhampton	6.52	7.10	7.95	8.22
QEN	Worcestershire	4.29	5.01	8.85	8.03

Source:
1. Health authority annual accounts 1997–98 and 1998–99.
Health authority audited summarisation forms 1999–2000 and 2000–01.
Primary care trust audited summarisation schedules 2000–01.
2. Cambridge and Huntingdon, East Norfolk and North West Anglia merged on 1 April 1999 to form Cambridgeshire and Norfolk health authorities.
3. 2000–01 is the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients with learning disabilities have been detained under the Mental Health Act 1983 in each year since 1997. [41708]

Jacqui Smith: The information is not collected in the form requested.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which health authorities have put out to tender the *(a)* arrangement and *(b)* provision of mental health services. [41699]

Jacqui Smith: Following 'Shifting the Balance of Power' primary care trusts will secure delivery of the majority of services, including mental health services, to meet their population needs. Their local health improvement plan will indicate the extent of that clinical need and services will be commissioned from a range of appropriate providers accordingly.

Maternity Services

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his Department's policy is on the benefits of locating maternity services within general hospitals. [41403]

Yvette Cooper: The national health service provides care for women during pregnancy and childbirth in various types, sizes and locations of maternity units, including units within general hospitals or stand alone units. The Department expects this choice to continue. It is for local health authorities, Trusts and communities to decide on the pattern of service provision, taking into account the needs of local people, evidence of effectiveness and available resources.

The Department has set up a maternity and neonatal workforce Group to make recommendations through the children's taskforce on workforce issues and various models for configuration of maternity services. This will feed into the children's national service framework to set national standards of care.

Diabetes

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action the Government have taken to inform people of ways to avoid contracting diabetes. [41326]

Jacqui Smith: The risk factors for diabetes include poor diet, physical inactivity and obesity. We are taking forward a wide range of work across Government to reduce obesity, to increase physical activity and improve diet, especially among children. Prevention of diabetes is one of the key areas covered by the diabetes national

service framework standards, published in December 2001. Local strategies on promoting healthy eating and physical activity, and reducing overweight and obesity, are also being developed as part of the implementation of the national service framework for coronary heart disease.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money the Department has spent on research into diabetes since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [41322]

Jacqui Smith: The Department has consistently supported research into diabetes but has not in the past collected information on its total expenditure in this field. The greater part of the funding has gone to the clinical service support costs of research funded by other agencies such as the Medical Research Council and Diabetes UK. The landmark "UK Prospective Diabetes Study", a randomised multi-centre trial in more than 5,000 patients over 20 years, has been supported in this way and continues. The Department has also funded the direct costs of research through its national and regional research and development programmes.

A joint Department of Health/Medical Research Council research advisory committee on diabetes is currently reviewing this whole field of research, as part of the work to underpin the eventual implementation of the Diabetes National Service Framework.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assistance is provided to diabetics who are affected by *(a)* sudden and *(b)* gradual loss of vision. [41324]

Jacqui Smith: The National Institute for Clinical Excellence published a clinical guideline on the early management of and screening for diabetic retinopathy on 5 March, as part of its series on the management of Type II diabetes.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many medical practitioners in the NHS are specialised in diabetic detection and treatment. [41323]

Jacqui Smith: As at 30 September 2001, there were 23,142 general practitioner unrestricted principals and equivalents in England offering diabetes chronic disease management (CDM).

In addition as at 30 September 2001, there were 987 hospital medical staff working in endocrinology and diabetes mellitus in England, of which 428 were consultants.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what provision is made for the *(a)* early screening and *(b)* management of diabetes. [41325]

Jacqui Smith: Services for the screening and management of diabetes are provided in a variety of health care settings and are of varying quality. There is evidence to show that the onset of Type II diabetes can be delayed, or even prevented, that effective management of diabetes increases life expectancy and reduces the risk of complications, and that self-management is the cornerstone of effective diabetes care. This evidence underpins our development of a national service framework for diabetes, for which we published the standards in December 2001. They set out 12 standards covering the prevention, identification and management of diabetes and its complications. The delivery strategy for the framework will follow later this year.

The diabetes national service framework provides the opportunity to clarify policy on screening for Type II diabetes, and we have requested advice from the UK National Screening Committee. The Committee has decided that further research, which may require some complex studies, is needed to inform its advice. It will report to the Department of Health in 2005.

Epilepsy

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assistance is provided to carers of severe epileptic sufferers. [41319]

Jacqui Smith: The National Carers strategy is providing better support, information, and care for carers. Carers of people with epilepsy will benefit from the strategy, which includes: extending the Carers Grant to ensure that 75,000 carers will receive a break by 2004; improving social security provision to benefit 300,000 carers financially; providing information and guidance through the Carers UK help-line, Government and voluntary sector booklets and leaflets, carers centres and on-line services, and telephone conferencing to bring carers together to discuss their experiences and provide mutual support; and, allowing carers to access relevant services and support from general practitioners.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people he estimates suffer from epilepsy in the UK. [41320]

Jacqui Smith: Epilepsy is the commonest serious neurological disorder affecting around one in 130 of the UK population, or 380,000 people.

Around seventy per cent. of people newly diagnosed with epilepsy are prescribed oral anti-epileptic drugs (anti-convulsants). It has been estimated that seventy per cent. of people taking anti-convulsants have their seizures prevented completely or greatly reduced.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the Government have done since 1997 *(a)* to raise awareness of epilepsy and *(b)* to reduce triggers of epilepsy in the environment. [41321]

Jacqui Smith: The Government has undertaken a range of co-ordinated initiatives to raise awareness of epilepsy. These include: supporting the Epilepsy Advisory Board to produce "Epilepsy Care—Making it Happen", a highly useful publication for improving epilepsy services; holding a NHS Epilepsy Day in October 1999; commending the Clinical Standards Advisory Group (CSAG) report, Services for people who have epilepsy, to the NHS; providing Section 64 funding to the Joint Epilepsy Council (JEC) to undertake a project to draw upon the good practice advice in the CSAG report and other recent epilepsy initiatives; supporting the National Sentinel Audit into Epilepsy Related Deaths which is expected to be published in May 2002; and, publishing the Chief Medical Officer's (CMO) Annual Report 2001, On the State of the Public Health, which included information on epilepsy.

The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) is producing a clinical guideline for epilepsy to help address widespread variations in clinical practice and contribute to the delivery of improvements in prevention, diagnosis, treatment and management of epilepsy. This will be supported by an appraisal of the clinical and cost effectiveness of new "add-on" drugs in children and adults, to help promote appropriate uptake and equitable access.

People with epilepsy will also benefit from the emerging Expert Patients Programme, which aims to provide training in self-management skills for people with long term chronic conditions. The first pilot phase will begin shortly in selected primary care group and trust sites, one of which will focus activity on people with epilepsy.

The CMO's Annual Report makes a commitment to putting in place an action plan which will cut the level of preventable deaths from sudden unexpected death in epilepsy three months after the National Sentinel Audit into Epilepsy Related Deaths is published in May 2002.

These initiatives will contribute to raising awareness of epilepsy and specific trigger factors.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many medical practitioners in the NHS are specialised in epilepsy detection and treatment. [41318]

Jacqui Smith: The Department does not collect information about the number of general medical practitioners in the NHS who are specialised in epilepsy detection and treatment.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money the Department has spent on research into epilepsy since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [41317]

Jacqui Smith: The Department funds research to support policy and the delivery of effective practice in health and social care. The Department's expenditure on completed and ongoing directly commissioned projects since May 1997 is about £1.5 million.

In addition to specific projects, the Department also provides support for research commissioned by charities and the research councils that takes place in the national health service . Management of much of the research supported by NHS research and development funding is devolved and expenditure at project level is not held centrally by the Department. The total investment is therefore considerably greater than just the spend on directly commissioned projects.

The main Government agency for research into the causes of and treatments for disease is the Medical Research Council (MRC) which receives its funding via the Department of Trade and Industry. In 2000–01 the MRC spent £3 million on epilepsy research.

Contraception

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the effect of the price of emergency contraception upon the extent of its use; and if he will make a statement. [41885]

Yvette Cooper: Direct sale of emergency contraception in pharmacies has provided a welcome additional point of access to emergency contraception. Data are not collected on over the counter pharmacy sales of emergency contraception. Supply of a pharmacy medicine outside national health service arrangements is a private transaction and payment is therefore required. The cost is entirely a matter for the product licence holder and community pharmacies.

We do however recognise that the cost of this product may be a barrier for some women and that emergency contraception must continue to be widely available under NHS arrangements. Emergency contraception continues to be available free of charge, on prescription, from general practitioners, contraceptive clinics, youth clinics, and walk-in centres. In addition pharmacists in some areas are supplying emergency contraception free of charge under a patient group direction. We welcome the introduction of these schemes and have recently provided funding to 14 areas to enable further pharmacy schemes to be developed.

Chinese Language Services

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what services the NHS provides to meet the language needs of the Chinese community in Barnet. [45313]

Mr. Hutton: The NHS Plan signals that a key part of modernising the NHS and Personal Social Services is the need to be more responsive to black and minority ethnic groups, and to provide services for each individual which take account of their religious, cultural and linguistic requirements.

Barnet primary care trust (PCT) is already beginning to address the health needs of its diverse local communities. The PCT have established an Inequalities Group which meet frequently and feed into the health improvement programme.

Interpreting services for people attending general practitioners surgeries in Barnet, including the Chinese community, are managed and provided through the Linkworker service at Barnet and Chase Farm hospitals. All GP surgeries are aware of the arrangements for accessing these services and posters and circulars are provided for communications purposes. Interpreting services for clinics and health centres in Barnet are managed and provided through the PCT. The manager for these services is based at Edgware community hospital.

Dental Services (Wiltshire)

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what the cost is of the mobile dental clinic at Highworth; and how many patients used it per day on average in the last 12 months; [45466]

(2) what the annual cost is of the Dental Access Centre in Swindon; and how many patients have been treated in the Centre since its opening; and how many on average per day; [45463]

Ms Blears: In 2001–02 revenue costs of £1.233,000 were allocated to the Swindon Dental Access Centre by the Department of Health.

8,424 patients were seen in the Swindon Dental Access Centre between April 2000 and February 2002. Local management information is that in January 2002 the Centre saw an average of 41.2 patients a day across the three sites. The Centre provides a seven-day service.

It is not possible from the information collected centrally to identify cost and activity information for the individual sites within the Dental Access Centre. For more detailed information on cost and activity the hon. Member should contact the Chair of Wiltshire health authority.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what consideration he has given to opening a dental access centre in North Wiltshire. [45465]

Ms Blears: Approval has been granted for the expansion of the Swindon Dental Access Centre to cover Chippenham. Planning permission has been granted for the development of a clinic and building work is expected to commence in April. The clinic is due to open in December 2002.

NHS Targets

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he expects to meet each of the targets originally set out in *(a)* National Service Frameworks and *(b)* the NHS Plan. [45933]

Mr. Hutton: We remain confident that the national health service is on course to deliver NHS Plan and NSF commitments. Progress against these commitments is reported annually by the Department in the departmental report.

NHS Finance

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether *(a)* assets and *(b)* liabilities will be transferred to strategic health authorities; and if he will make a statement. [45940]

Mr. Hutton: Subject to legislation enabling strategic health authorities to be established, assets and liabilities appropriate to their role will be transferred to them.

Most assets and liabilities which currently rest with health authorities are expected to transfer to primary care trusts along with the health commissioning functions.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what accumulated NHS deficits there are within each health authority area; [45939]

(2) what *(a)* current and *(b)* accumulated deficits there are in health authorities. [45938]

Mr. Hutton: The introduction of resource accounting and budgeting across all Government Departments from 2001–02 means that health authorities are no longer required to account on an income and expenditure basis. The concept of accumulated income and expenditure deficits is, therefore, no longer applicable, having been replaced by a measure which seeks to ensure that health authorities live within the approved resource limits set by the Department.

By the year end, we expect all health authorities to live within their agreed resource limits and not to overspend.

Surrey Health Trusts

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what was *(a)* the original budgeted expenditure and *(b)* the actual expenditure of West Surrey health authority in each of the last five years; [45502]

(2) what the debt is of West Surrey health authority; and to which bodies it will be allocated when the authority is abolished; [45467]

(3) if he will list the land and buildings identified to his Department as the source of funds to pay off the debt of West Surrey health authority. [45504]

Ms Blears: West Surrey health authority's original budget and expenditure is as follows:

£ million

	Original planned expenditure	*Final budget*	*Expenditure*
1997–98	330.2	369.8	374.3
1998–99	341.6	390.1	389.1
1999–2000	381.4	465.0	460.2
2000–01	411.4	478.6	477.8
2001–02	486.5	520.2	519.9

Notes:
Final budget and expenditure figures as per accounts.

The successor body to West Surrey health authority is the new Surrey and Sussex strategic health authority. It is responsible for the transfer of the balance sheet position, as at 31 March 2002, to the NHS organisations, which assume West Surrey health authority's functions from 1 April 2002. The exact transfer of specific assets and liabilities will be determined by the accounting process that is planned to be completed by 16 May 2002. The new health authority and local primary care trusts will be allocated the main proportion of West Surrey's balance sheet. The funding requirement for these successor organisations into 2002–03 will be concluded upon the closure of its accounts.

Land and properties that could be sold within the West Surrey health economy as follows:

(1) Currently owned by Surrey Hampshire Borders NHS trust:

Ridgewood site.

(2) Properties to be developed to Guildford and Waverley primary care trust:

Farnham hospital—surplus land;

Farnham health centre;

Cranleigh hospital and health centre.

(3) Currently owned by Bournewood community and mental health trust:

Property at rear of Ashford hospital (West Byfleet health centre);

Central site at St. Peter's campus.

Total sale proceeds from all these properties would be in the region of £16 million to £17.5 million of which £5 million–£7 million would be expected in 2002–03.

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was *(a)* the original budgeted expenditure and *(b)* the actual expenditure of the Ashford and St. Peter's Hospitals NHS Trust in each of the last five years. [45501]

Ms Blears: The information requested is shown in the table. Figures for 2001–02 are not yet available.

£ million

Ashford & St. Pete	Original budget	Turnover	Expenditure
1997–98	[illegible]	89.1	91.2
1998–99	91.3	96.9	96.8
1999–2000	98.7	108.9	110.5
2000–01	106.1	111.2	116.0
2001–02	121.0	123.7	125.7

Notes

1. The Ashford and St. Peters NHS Trust was created 1 April 1998 from the merger of the St. Peters Hospital Trust and the Ashford Hospital Trust. The figures for 1997–1998 are the sum of the figures for the two Trusts.

2. The original budget differs from the actual turnover of the Trust due to in year contract adjustments.

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the new Chairman of the Ashford and St. Peters Hospitals NHS Trust was appointed; and who was informed. [45468]

Ms Blears: Mr. Clive Thompson was appointed to chair the Ashford and St. Peter's National Health Service Trust on 11 March. The appointment was announced by press release on 14 March. A further letter was sent by the trust to all local hon. Members on 20 March informing them of the appointment.

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* directly employed nurses and *(b)* agency nurses were employed by the Ashford and St. Peters Hospital NHS Trust on 1 January (i) 1999, (ii) 2000, (iii) 2001 and (iv) 2002; and how much the use of agency nurses added to the expenditure of the Trust in each of the last three years. [45503]

Ms Blears: Information on the number of agency nurses employed by the Trust and the cost incurred are not collected centrally. The number of nurses employed by Ashford and St Peter's Hospitals NHS Trust in the years 1999 to 2001 are given below. Figures for 2002 are not yet available.

NHS Hospital and Community Health Service (HCHS): Nursing, midwifery andhealth visiting staff employed by Ashford and St. Peters Hospitals NHS Trust as at 30 September each year

whole-time equivalents

	1999	*2000*	*2001*
All nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff	980	1,030	1,020
of which:			
Qualified	810	830	780
Unqualified		200	250
All nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff	1,290	1,350	1,340
Of which:			
Qualified	1,080	1,090	1,030
Unqualified	210	260	310

Notes:

Figures are rounded to the nearest 10 due to rounding totals may not equal the sum of component parts Figures exclude learners and agency staff

Source:

Department of Health Non-Medical Workforce Census

Human Rights Act Compliance

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 6 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 46W, on Human Rights Act 1998 compliance in hospitals, how many complaints made on human rights grounds have been made by detained patients through the NHS complaints procedures. [44772]

Jacqui Smith: This information is not held centrally.

NHS Service Reviews

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of services have been reviewed in line with Government policy in the handbook "Better Quality Services" since September 1999. [45726]

Ms Blears: The Department has reviewed approximately 25 per cent. of its services and activities since September 1999 in line with Government policy in the handbook "Better Quality Services" (BQS).

However, since March 2001 specific BQS activity has been overtaken by a fundamental review of the Department, which covered all its services and activities.

This has been carried out in the spirit of BQS in line with Government policy and has generated a programme of change that focuses on our delivery contract and aims to improve efficiency and effectiveness.

Correspondence

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was, for each year since 1995, the average response time for providing a substantive answer to *(a)* hon. Members' correspondence, *(b)* correspondence from members of the public and *(c)* written parliamentary questions in the (i) Commons and (ii) Lords. [7046]

Ms Blears: The available information is in the table.

Percentage of replies sent

	to MPs within service first targets of 20 day	*members of the public within service first targets of 20 days*
1995	79	
1996	87	
1997	76	4
1998	61	63
1999	47	56
2000	50	80.5
2001	60	87.5

I regret that comparable data about parliamentary questions is not readily available in the form requested because the record management database from which it is drawn is currently not reliable, for the reasons set out in the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 192W.

Delayed Discharge (Barrow and Furness)

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many delayed discharge patients there are in the Barrow and Furness constituency waiting to leave hospital. [45263]

Jacqui Smith: On 17 March 2002, there were 52 delayed transfers of care recorded at Furness general hospital in Barrow. Of these, 32 awaited placement in a nursing or residential home; seven were awaiting completion of assessment; six were waiting for NHS non-acute care; five were there for reasons of patient choice and two for other reasons.

The number of delayed transfers of care in Cumbria is being reduced with the additional funds allocated to Cumbria county council as part of "Building Capacity" and the implementation of the report of the Change Agents, which was commissioned by the Department of Health. This improvement is expected to continue through 2002–03.

Personal Care

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimates his Department has made of the total cost of making the provision of personal care for retired people free. [45508]

Jacqui Smith: I refer the hon. Member to the reply which I gave my hon. Friend for Selly Oak (Lynne Jones) on 7 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 542W. In making estimates, we have assumed that only a small proportion of self-funders in residential care are of working age, so that the vast majority of the costs relate to older people.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 26 March 2002

NORTHERN IRELAND

Saville Inquiry

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the cost of the Saville Inquiry to his Department has been to date; and what his current estimate is of the final cost of the whole inquiry. [46024]

Mr. Browne: The cost of the Bloody Sunday Inquiry to the Northern Ireland Office, as at 22 March 2002, is £56.8 million. The current estimated cost of the Inquiry to the Northern Ireland Office is £120 million.

The £20 million increase as compared with the figure given on 17 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 40W, is accounted for by two factors. First, an estimated £15 million of net additional costs arises from the transfer of the hearings to London this September. Secondly, the Senior Costs Judge's judgment of 21 March implies additional expenditure of, on best current estimates, around £5 million on solicitors for the families; expenditure on costs arising from this case is expected to run into several hundreds of thousands of pounds.

If my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's challenge to the Senior Costs Judge's ruling on payments to counsel for the families is unsuccessful, that will add an estimated sum of at least £6 million to the estimated £120 million cost.

These figures do not include costs to other Departments such as the Ministry of Defence.

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he expects Lord Saville to report his findings. [46023]

Mr. Browne: Publication of the report is a matter for the independent Tribunal. Based on my current understanding of the Inquiry's future timetable, I do not expect the Tribunal to publish its report before 2004.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland further to his answer of 26 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 757W, on the Saville Inquiry, how much public funding has been provided to the legal representatives of other parties represented at the Saville Inquiry, broken down by each *(a)* barrister and *(b)* firm of solicitors involved. [41239]

Mr. Browne: The answer of 26 February set out the amount of public funding that has been provided to the legal representatives of the families and the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA). The majority of the other parties represented at the Inquiry have their legal costs met through the Ministry of Defence. The public funding made available to these parties is therefore a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence.

The Tribunal has allowed certain persons limited legal representation during the course of the hearings. The costs of this representation are paid by the Inquiry. In addition a large number of witnesses have received legal assistance at the statement-taking stage and have had the costs of this met by the Inquiry. The cost of this assistance and representation therefore falls to my Department.

Much of the assistance to witnesses has been provided by solicitors to the families: insofar as it has been, the costs are included in the payments to the solicitors concerned shown in the parliamentary answer of 26 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 757W. However, a large number of other lawyers from across the United Kingdom and beyond have also been involved in providing assistance to individual witnesses or representing those additional persons referred to above. Given the numbers of lawyers involved it is taking a little time to compute the amounts paid to the individual teams. I will undertake to write to my hon. Friend with this information as soon as possible. A copy of the letter will be placed in the House Library.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Arthur Andersen

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the total cost to her Department has been of services provided by *(a)* Andersen and *(b)* Accenture, Andersen Consulting for (i) accountancy services, (ii) consultancy work and (iii) other work in each year since 1997; and if she will make a statement. [32107]

Ms Hewitt: The total costs of contracts awarded by year are set out below.

Company	*Service*	*Year*	*£*
Andersen Consulting (later Accenture)	Consultancy	1999	10,000
Arthur Andersen	Consultancy	2000	594,000
	Consultancy	2001	213,000
	Accountancy	2001	4,100,000

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much work from her Department has been given to Andersen Consulting formally known as Arthur Andersen in each year since 1992. [46221]

Ms Hewitt: Contracts agreed with Andersen Consulting were listed in my reply to my Friend the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) on 11 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 61W. Information on contracts for the five years prior to May 1997 is not centrally available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Departmental Events

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the *(a)* conferences, *(b)* seminars, *(c)* workshops, *(d)* exhibitions and

(e) press conferences which have been sponsored by her Department and which took place on non-departmental premises in each of the last four years giving the title, purpose, date and cost of each. [34300]

Ms Hewitt: My Department uses the mechanisms that are the most appropriate and effective in communicating with specific audiences, including all those listed in the question. Some of these events are held on Departmental premises and others at different venues. But no central records are kept that would enable the information requested to be supplied, and it could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Publicity Expenditure

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the total real terms expenditure of her Department, its agencies and non-departmental public bodies on publicity in each of the years *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000, *(d)* 2000–01 and *(e)* 2001–02 (i) to date and (ii) as estimated for the whole of the present year; and if she will break these figures down to indicate expenditure on (A) advertising and (B) press and public relations. [36157]

Ms Hewitt: This information is not held centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Insolvency Service

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many warning letters were issued as a result of investigations by the Insolvency Service in each year since 1997. [42071]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The number of warning letters issued were as follows:

1 January 1997 to 31 December 1997:	582
1 January 1998 to 31 December 1998:	549
1 January 1999 to 31 December 1999:	385
1 January 2000 to 31 December 2000:	287
1 January 2001 to 31 December 2001:	228.

The numbers reflect better policy guidance provided to Official Receivers in 1997–98, who have focused investigatory resources on the more serious offences and director disqualification, both of which lead to court hearings and convictions rather than resulting in warning letters.

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what checks are in place to ensure an agreed high standard of correspondence is achieved when the Insolvency Service communicates with customers. [42068]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Insolvency Service's target for replying to correspondence is published in the Annual Report and in leaflets that are available from the Insolvency Service and can also be found on the website, www.insolvency.gsi.gov.uk.

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures are used by her Department to review the *(a)* performance and *(b)* efficiency of the Insolvency Service. [42084]

Miss Melanie Johnson: A number of targets are set annually to measure the performance and efficiency of the Insolvency Service. They are published in the Annual Report, a copy of which is available in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many rogue directors have been reported on the Insolvency Service hotline since its inception; and how many of these *(a)* in total and *(b)* as a percentage of total calls have resulted in successful prosecutions. [42076]

Miss Melanie Johnson: By 28 February 2002, 2,978 calls had been received which generated 1,167 substantive complaints. The remaining complainants failed to provide the information requested in support of their complaints.

By that date, 31 related convictions had been obtained and a further 27 written warnings had been issued. 563 remain under investigation and 450 were not proceeded with due to insufficient evidence.

Staff Numbers

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many staff have been employed by her Department in each of the last 10 years. [42461]

Ms Hewitt: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him on 19 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 295W, by my hon. Friend the then Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office.

Internet/e-Government

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of *(a)* internet and *(b)* e-Government access in rural areas; and what measures she it taking to broaden access. [41917]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 11 March 2002]*: The 2001 UK online annual report: http://www.eennovy.gov.uk/ukonline/champions/anrep—menu.htm detailed progress towards our internet and e-Government targets.

A copy has also been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Correspondence

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 11 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 678W, on correspondence, for what reason 21 letters sent to her Department were awaiting a reply; and for how many of the 21 an acknowledgement of their correspondence has been sent to the letter-writer. [43689]

Ms Hewitt: There are several reasons why a letter may not receive an answer within my Department's target of 10 days. On this occasion I am unable to give specific reasons as I am unable to identify which letters were outstanding at the time, but all outstanding correspondence will be dealt with as quickly as possible and my Department will continue to endeavour to respond to letters within 10 days.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the target time will be in 2002–03 for *(a)* Ministers to reply to letters from hon. Members and *(b)* officials in her Department to reply to letters received directly from members of the public. [44939]

Ms Hewitt: The agreed target time for my Department to reply to hon. Members is 10 working days for the year 2002–03.

The target for letters received directly from members of the public for the year 2002–03 is 15 working days.

Aerospace Industry

Mrs. Irene Adams: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many jobs she estimates are dependent on the aerospace industry in the United Kingdom. [43919]

Mr. Wilson: The latest figures I have are for 2000. DTI working with the Society of British Aerospace Companies estimates that the UK aerospace industry employed 150,000 and indirectly supported a further 200,000 jobs in the supply chain.

Sellafield

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to the answer of 14 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 529W, on Sellafield, if she will place in the Library the review of the B30 nuclear waste storage facility performed by BNFL. [44286]

Mr. Wilson: I understand no such document exists.

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to the answer of 14 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 529W, on Sellafield, what remedial work has been carried out on the B30 nuclear waste storage facility. [44287]

Mr. Wilson: Management of the B30 facility is an operational matter for BNFL subject to regulations by the Health and Safety Executive's Nuclear Installations Inspectorate (HSE's NII). The effective management of the facility and the historic legacy wastes it contains is a high priority for both the Government and BNFL. BNFL is taking forward a range of work programmes at B30. These are aimed at improving the way the building itself is cared for as well as characterising the contents of the building and retrieving these and converting them into a more stable form.

Legal Costs

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much her Department has paid to lawyers dealing with chronic bronchitis and emphysema, broken down by firm. [44378]

Mr. Wilson: There are 471 firms of solicitors/organisations who are processing claims in relation to respiratory disease. The following list details the costs for the 10 solicitors/organisations who represent the largest numbers of claims in ascending order based on total claims intimated.

No.	*Solicitor*	*Costs paid (£ million)*
1	Thompsons	10.8
2	Hugh James Ford Simey	8.0
3	Union of Democratic Mineworkers	3.0
4	Raleys	4.5
5	Mark Gilbert Morse	0.7
6	Browell Smith & Co	3.5
7	Graysons	2.1
8	Watson Burton	1.5
9	Irwin Mitchells	2.3
10	Randell Saunders	0.5

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much her Department has paid to lawyers dealing with vibration white finger/carpal tunnel syndrome, broken down by firm. [44379]

Mr. Wilson: There are 460 firms of solicitors/organisations who are processing claims in relation to vibration white finger. The following list details the costs for the 10 solicitors/organisations who represent the largest numbers of claims in ascending order, based on total claims intimated.

No.	*Solicitor*	*Costs paid (£ million)*
1	Thompsons	6.0
2	Browell Smith & Co	4.3
3	Union of Democratic Mineworkers	3.7
4	Raleys	3.1
5	Hugh James Ford Simey	3.1
6	Graysons	2.1
7	Moss	1.5
8	Watson Burton	2.0
9	AMS Law	1.1
10	Towells	1.4

Textile Industry

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many firms in the textile industry that received grants from the Department have subsequently ceased production in Britain and utilised grants in overseas locations in each of the last five years. [44559]

Mr. Alexander: Offers of grant from the Department are subject to a finite period of monitoring.

The Department's selective assistance database shows that in the last five financial years to 31 March 2001, 242 offers of Regional Selective Assistance or Enterprise Grant were made in England to firms in the textile sector. Of those which received payments of grant and were subject to conditions of the grant offer letter, 10 firms ceased trading. Eight of these firms went into liquidation. In the other two cases, one closed without notice after receiving £8,000 grant. The second, involving grant of £825,000 was subject to a Management Buy Out and remains active in the UK.

Electricity

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions her Department had with representatives of *(a)* Powergen, *(b)* East Midlands Electricity and *(c)* the US Department of Commerce in 1997 and 1998. [44666]

Mr. Wilson: The Department has discussions on a wide range of issues from time to time with UK Electricity Companies and with the Departments of other Governments.

Nuclear Reactors

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what evaluation her Department has made of emerging pebble-bed nuclear reactor design and operation in other countries; and if she will make a statement. [44809]

Mr. Wilson: None. BNFL has a minority investment in the Pebble Bed Modular Reactor (PBMR) project, the feasibility of which is currently being studied. I look forward to seeing the results in due course.

CISWO

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many partnerships CISWO has with Sport England, regional development agencies and the private sector; and how many jobs have these created in the last three years. [45095]

Mr. Wilson: CISWO collaborates with Sport England in many areas in preparing bids for National Lottery money for projects that will develop or enhance local sporting facilities. Such activity is not formalised as a partnership and does not have job creation as an objective although extra employment opportunities may be created. CISWO is associated with seven RDA projects and, as before, although job creation is not a central feature, there has been, for example, an education project in Yorkshire has created five jobs and a similar number at a project in the West Midlands.

CISWO's involvement with the private sector is a matter for CISWO.

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what Government funding has been received by CISWO in each of the last five years. [45096]

Mr. Wilson: CISWO has not received any Government funding in any of the last five years. CISWO was given a cash endowment from the Bristol Coal Corporation upon the Corporation's privatisation in 1994 and, in addition, between 1994 and 1999 received under covenant £1 million per annum from the successor mining companies to the Corporation.

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what requests for Government funding have been made by CISWO this year. [45094]

Mr. Wilson: In October of last year the Chair of the Trustees of CISWO wrote to me seeking a meeting to discuss funding. In January of this year I attended a presentation given by the Chief Executive and a number of the organisation's trustees and at that presentation I undertook to give careful consideration to CISWO's concerns over their future funding requirements.

Post Office

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the operating profits were for the Post Office/Consignia in each of the last 20 years. [44776]

Ms Hewitt: The operating profits figures for the Post Office/Consignia are set out in the company's Annual Report and Accounts. Since 1982 these have been:

Year	*£ Million*
1981–82	90
1982–83	151
1983–84	131
1984–85	142
1985–86	141
1986–87	130
1987–88	171
1988–89	116
1989–90	78
1990–91	106
1991–92	250
1992–93	264
1993–94	300
1994–95	[1]461
1995–96	387
1996–97	481
1997–98	528
1998–99	394
1999–2000	381
2000–01	[1]22

[1] As restated.

Note:

Profit figures do not include tax, interest, exceptional items or (after 1990–91) sale of assets.

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions have taken place about the possible sale of Consignia Holdings plc or its component parts; and if she will make a statement. [44769]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 21 March 2002]*: There are no proposals to sell Consignia Holdings, its mail business, Parcelforce or the network of post offices.

Consignia was given commercial freedom by this Government in response to demands from the company and unions. It is therefore entirely logical that Consignia considers it commercial strategy, including relationships or ventures with other operators.

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proportion of first class letters reached their destination the day after posting in each of the last 20 years. [44788]

Ms Hewitt: This matter falls to the day to day responsibility of Consignia and I have therefore asked the Chief Executive to reply direct to the hon. Member.

Inward Investment

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the total level of inward investment was from *(a)* the EU, *(b)* the USA, *(c)* the G7 countries and *(d)* Japan into the UK in each of the last 20 years. [44782]

Ms Hewitt: The information is in the following table:

Level of foreign direct investment in the UK 1981–2000
Stock level at year end *£ million, current prices*

	EU15	USA	G7 total	Japan
1981	3,225	9,559	12,049	324
1984	12,203	19,576	24,237	806
1987	16,363	25,838	35,359	2,039
1988	23,593	28,257	41,441	3,082
1989	28,711	37,093	55,307	3,965
1990	33,707	43,784	65,799	5,648
1991	38,036	44,434	68,453	5,346
1992	39,546	46,001	70,216	4,929
1993	40,266	49,537	73,741	5,427
1994	39,998	49,829	73,683	5,105
1995	43,493	55,129	81,689	5,542
1996	43,774	55,956	85,004	5,888
1997	44,927	70,270	105,743	6,562
1998	69,248	93,419	134,140	7,387
1999	107,429	93,469	162,300	4,174
2000	137,468	100,526	195,465	7,770

Notes:
G7 comprises of UK, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Canada and USA.
Prior to 1987, data were only collected every three years.
Source:
National Statistics.

Consumer Protection

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to amend the Consumer Protection (Cancellation of Contracts Concluded away from Business Premises) Regulations 1987. [45364]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I have no plans at present to amend the Regulations.

Nuclear Power Stations (Scotland)

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she expects to make a decision on her responsibility for planning permission in relation to recent legislation on nuclear power stations in Scotland. [45305]

Mr. Wilson: I have no such responsibility.

National Physical Laboratory

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the progress of the PFI project at the National Physical Laboratory, Teddington; what the extent is of *(a)* delays from the original timetable and *(b)* cost overruns; and to what extent liability for failure to meet deadlines falls on the (i) Government and (ii) contractor. [45704]

Ms Hewitt: The new accommodation for the National Physical Laboratory is being handed over, as planned, in phases. Nine of 16 modules have been handed over.

The original date for completion of construction of the final module was 22 January 2001. The PFI Contractor's reported date for construction completion is now 12 November 2002.

Since this is a PFI project, construction cost overruns are a matter for the PFI Contractor and liability for failure to meet deadlines does not fall to Government.

Asteroid 2002 EM7

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what monitoring her Department has undertaken of the asteroid 2002 EM7 and its orbit. [46007]

Ms Hewitt: Asteroid 2002 EM7 was first observed on 12 March 2002, four days after it had passed within 500,000 km of the Earth, a distance greater than that between the Earth and the Moon. The object had not been detected previously because its approach had been from the direction of the Sun. Observations have determined that the object takes 323 days to orbit the Sun, and that its next close approach to the Earth will occur on 1 July 2011, at a minimum distance more than eight times greater than that of 8 March 2002. The size of 2002 EM7 is estimated to be between 50 and 100 m.

The Government's approach to Near Earth Objects (NEOs) is to work with its international partners to develop a complementary and co-ordinated response to what is, by its nature, a global issue. A National NEO Information Centre has been established at the National Space Science Centre in Leicester to provide objective information on NEOs to the public and media.

Website Security

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information posted on the departmental website, or websites of non departmental public bodies reporting to her Department, has been *(a)* modified or *(b)* removed as a consequence of the events of 11 September 2001. [46198]

Ms Hewitt: No information has been modified or removed from the core pages of the DTI website as a result of the events of 11 September. Information on changes to other DTI-related websites is not held centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Coal Mineshafts

Ross Cranston: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she is taking to compensate home owners whose properties *(a)* have suffered a substantial fall in value and *(b)* are unsaleable because of abandoned mineshafts nearby. [46300]

Mr. Wilson: The Coal Authority or relevant coal mine operator will repair any physical damage caused to a property by an abandoned mineshaft. That being the case, I have no plans to introduce any scheme of compensation in respect of properties the value and saleability of which are allegedly affected by the presence of a mineshaft. Nevertheless, my Department is examining with other interested parties how the difficulties experienced by the owners of property with mineshafts nearby might be addressed.

Ross Cranston: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she will announce her conclusions on the Heriot-Watt University study on the impact of coal mineshafts; and if she will make a statement. [46262]

Mr. Wilson: The Heriot-Watt University study provided valuable information on the effect of former mineshafts on property values, in particular in Stoke-on-Trent. Subsequent to the study's publication the Department has established a Working Group to examine what steps might be taken to address this issue. The Working Group, which includes representatives from the Coal Authority, the Council of Mortgage Lenders, the Association of British Insurers, the Law Society and the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors, met for the first time last month. Good progress has already been made in identifying measures which the various parties might take to improve the situation.

Postcomm

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she is taking to ensure Postcomm consults all local authorities on its proposals to increase competition in postal services; and if she will make a statement. [45953]

Mr. Alexander: I refer my hon. Friend to answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (Geraldine L Smith) on 26 March 2002 PQ No. 46321.

Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of Postcomm proposals for Consignia and the introduction of competition into postal markets ahead of European proposals. [46230]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* The Government's priority is to ensure the universal postal service and this is Postcomm's primary statutory duty. In exercising its functions Postcomm must act in accordance with its primary and other statutory duties including compliance with EU obligations.

Currently EU legislation allows member states to reserve certain mail services to universal service providers but only to the extent necessary to maintain the universal service. There are maximum limits to the services that may be reserved; but there is no minimum and some EU countries have determined either that they no longer need to reserve services or that the level of service they need to reserve is lower than the maximum limits.

Discussions are in progress to amend the current European Postal Directive with regard to the further opening to competition of Community postal services and when the new Directive is adopted the Government will consider with interested parties what action is necessary for its transposition in the United Kingdom.

Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what previous experience Postcomm commissioners have regarding postal services in the United Kingdom. [46251]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* Postcomm was the first body to have a collegiate approach to regulation in the UK. This approach aims to de-personalise regulation and bring a greater range of expertise to bear on regulatory decisions. The experience of the Commissioners was outlined in a press release by this Department on 6 November 2000, copies of which have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how the appointments for Postcomm commissioners were advertised; how many applications were received; who appointed the Postcomm commissioners; and what criteria were used for the appointments. [46252]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* The advertising, recruitment and appointments process was conducted by this Department in accordance with the Commissioner for Public Appointments' Code of Practice. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry made the appointments.

Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) which district councils and unitary authorities Postcomm have consulted regarding their proposals affecting Consignia; [46229]

(2) if Postcomm has consulted *(a)* the Steve King Orchestra, *(b)* Victoria's Jewellers, *(c)* Lancashire County Council, *(d)* Lancaster City Council and *(e)* hon. Members regarding their current proposals affecting Consignia; [46231]

(3) if Postcomm is consulting with selected local authorities on their proposals for Consignia. [46250]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answers 25 March 2002]:* This is a matter for Postcomm. Interested parties who have concerns about the process or substance contained in the document Postcomm issued on Thursday 31 January should communicate these to Postcomm.

Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if Postcomm has indicated to Consignia during the last 18 months that it would not allow an increase in the price of postage. [46249]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* On 10 April 2001 Postcomm received a request from the Royal Mail for increases in a wide range of postal rates including a penny on first and second class post. This request was made under provisions of the Consignia license. Consignia suspended that request on 19 June 2001.

Aggregates Levy

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions her Department has had with the Treasury on a delay to the aggregates levy. [46475]

Mr. Wilson: Government Departments continue to have detailed discussions on the implementation of the aggregates levy.

Broadband

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she is taking to increase broadband coverage in Monmouthshire. [45866]

Mr. Alexander: The Government broadband strategy can be found in the second annual UK Online Report and sets out a number of measures to stimulate broadband supply in areas without coverage.

Last year we announced a £30 million fund to encourage broadband rollout in each region of the country and last week I set out how that money would be spent in each region.

Wales will receive £2.67 million which will be used to: further develop the all-Wales broadband Lifelong Learning Network which will link up all educational facilities, libraries and adult learning centres within Wales with broadband services to allow the public to access broadband services; and develop a wireless broadband project that will utilise wireless technology to enable online communities to use and create digital content.

Coal Health Compensation Scheme

Andy Burnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many applications have been made under the coal health compensation scheme for *(a)* chronic bronchitis and emphysema and *(b)* vibration white finger from residents of (i) Leigh constituency, (ii) Wigan constituency, (iii) Makerfield constituency and (iv) Wigan borough; and how many of these applications have been (A) settled and (B) received interim payments. [45265]

Mr. Wilson: The information is in the following tables:

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease

	Applications[1]	*Full and final offers made*[2]	*Interims made*
Leigh	1,467	187	351
Wigan	799	89	202
Makerfield	975	116	266

Vibration white finger

	Applications[1]	*Full and final offers made*[2]	*Interims made*
Leigh	598	185	196
Wigan	296	76	107
Makerfield	545	140	201

[1] Statistics are compiled by IRISC, the Department's claims handlers, on a parliamentary constituency basis rather than according to local government boundaries. The above figures represent the bulk of applicants from the Wigan Borough area, but will understate the position to the extent that applications from the constituencies of West Lancashire, Bolton West and Chorley are also from persons resident in the Wigan Borough area.

[2] IRISC are not able to produce individual constituency figures for applications settled. They do provide figures for those claims on which a full and final offer has been made.

Secondments

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many BP employees are on secondment to her Department; for what purposes; on what terms; and how many BP employees have been on secondment to her Department since January 2000. [45889]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* From records held centrally, we currently have two BP employees on secondment into the Department. One is on secondment to the Chemicals and Biotechnology Directorate, based in the USA as a US Chemical Advisor. The other is seconded to Trade Partners UK (BTI) as an Export Promoter for East and West Europe. The secondments are covered by standard contractual arrangements setting out terms and conditions.

In addition, there have been a further two BP employees on secondment to the Department since January 2000, both of whom have now finished their attachments.

Companies House

Mr. Connarty: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what targets she has set the Department's executive agency, Companies House for 2002–03. [47422]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I have set Companies House the following targets for the 2002–03 year.

Operational Targets

To process 99 per cent. of statutory documents within five days of receipt at Companies House;

to achieve, on average, a monthly compliance rate for accounts submitted of 95 per cent.;

to ensure that 96 per cent. of all forms submitted to Companies House are captured error-free; and

to ensure that 98 per cent. of all images placed on the Companies House image system are error-free.

Questions delegated to the Chief Executive

The Chief Executive to reply within 10 days to all letters from Members of Parliament delegated to her for reply.

Customer Service and Complaints Handling

To ensure that products and services on Companies House Direct are available for 98 per cent. of the time between the supported hours of 7 am and 8 pm, Monday to Friday;

to ensure that products and services on the Companies House website are available for 98 per cent. of the time between the supported hours of 7 am and 8 pm, Monday to Friday;

to achieve a score of more than 80 per cent. in each quarterly Companies House Customer Satisfaction Survey;

to clear up 90 per cent. of complaints within five days.

Financial Targets

To maintain a unit cost reduction of 3 per cent. in real terms on document registration;

to achieve, taking one year with another, a 6 per cent. average rate of return based on the operating surplus expressed as a percentage of average net assets;

to pay all bills due within 30 days, or on other agreed credit terms, on receipt of goods or services or a valid invoice, whichever is later.

Universal Bank

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if the proposed Universal Bank Account will be available to those who have existing banking facilities. [41932]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* Our operational assumption is that around three million benefit and tax credit recipients will open a POCA, but there will not be a cap on numbers or eligibility criteria for a POCA. The emphasis will be upon ensuring that each customer gets the best account for his or her circumstances. Conventional and basic bank accounts offer more services and do not have the limitations of the POCA and so are likely to be the best option for the vast majority of people.

Astra Windows Ltd.

Mr. Fallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on what date Companies House was informed that Astra Windows Ltd. had gone into voluntary liquidation. [45926]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Companies House received notice of the appointment of a liquidator and an extra-ordinary resolution to wind up the company on 19 January 2001.

A400M

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when manufacture of the A400M will start in the UK; and how many jobs the programme is expected to *(a)* generate and *(b)* safeguard in the North West. [46206]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* Once the A400M contract is activated, I would anticipate that production of the aircraft would begin shortly thereafter.

Airbus UK has estimated that the A400M programme will directly create up to 2,500 high quality jobs—notably in design and advance manufacture. They have calculated that indirect employment could bring that figure to over 8,000. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister commented on 6 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 343W, "Airbus Military is free to select its own suppliers on grounds of performance and cost". It is therefore impossible to estimate how many jobs might be generated in the North West.

European Directives

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the cost to business of the European Directive on Parental Leave. [45320]

Alan Johnson: The costs to business of the implementation of the Directive were assessed in a Regulatory Impact Assessment published in 1999 when the Maternity and Parental leave etc. Regulations 1999 were introduced in the UK. At this time, the total costs to business were estimated to be £42 million per year. A further Regulatory Impact Assessment was made when the parental leave regulations were extended in January 2002 to include parents of children aged under five on 15 December 1999. The costs to business of this extension were estimated to be between £7 million and £41 million. Copies of both Regulatory Impact Assessments were placed in the Libraries of the House on publication.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the cost to business of the European Directive on Working Time. [45318]

Alan Johnson: When the Working Time Directive was implemented in October 1998 the broad immediate cost to business was estimated at £1.9 billion. This was increased by £0.4 billion when the paid annual leave entitlement rose from three to four weeks in 1999, and by £30 million with the removal of the 13 week paid annual leave qualifying period in October 2001. The reduction in the record keeping requirements resulting from the 199 amendments to the Working Time Regulations reduced these costs by £13 million.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the cost to business of the European Directive on Pregnant Workers. [45322]

Alan Johnson: The Pregnant Workers Directive was adopted in October 1992, and included measures to encourage improvements in the health and safety at work of pregnant workers and workers who have recently given birth or who are breastfeeding. It included, in particular, provisions entitling workers to minimum periods of maternity leave and setting minimum standards for pay or allowances during maternity leave.

The UK already had in place various statutory provisions for maternity leave and pay prior to the Directive. Some changes were subsequently made as a result of the Directive, and other changes have been made, for unrelated reasons, in the intervening years. The Government has therefore made no recent assessment of the costs of the Directive on its own.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the cost to business of the European Directive on Part Time Workers. [45321]

Alan Johnson: An assessment of the costs of implementing this Directive was made in the Regulatory Impact Assessment which the Government published alongside the Part Time Workers (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations 2000. A copy was placed in the Libraries of the House on publication, and is available on the DTI website at www.dti.gov.uk/er/review.htm. The RIA estimated that direct costs to employers would be around £27.4 million a year.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the cost to business of the European Directive on European Works Councils. [45319]

Alan Johnson: The Department commissioned an independent report into the costs associated with introducing the European Works Council Directive based on a survey of companies with experience of operating such Councils. The results of this study were incorporated into a Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA), a copy of which is available in the Library and on the DTI website. The RIA identified a range of potential benefits from European Works Councils for employers, employees and the economy as a whole. The benefits in terms of improving industrial relations, boosting

productivity and facilitating change would be felt in the longer term and could not be separately quantified. The costs to individual firms of organising European Works Council meetings were expected to range from £47,000 per year to £175,000 depending on the size of the undertaking. This represents a very small proportion of their turnover, and a valuable investment in improved employer-employee relations.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the cost to business of the European Directive on Young Workers. [45323]

Alan Johnson: The Department for Trade and Industry implemented the rest periods and health assessment provisions of the European Directive on Young Workers in respect of those aged from minimum school leaving age to 18th birthday, through the Working Time Regulations 1998. Around 18,000 young workers were estimated to be affected by the implementation of health assessments for adolescent night workers; the costs are estimated to be minimal.

Implementation of the European Directive on Young Workers below minimum school leaving age is the responsibility of the Department of Health.

Radiocommunications Agency

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what targets she has set her Department's Radiocommunications Agency for 2002–03. [47159]

Mr. Alexander: I have set the Radiocommunications Agency the following quality of service targets for 2002–03 in respect of its licensing and enforcement activities, and correspondence. These are in addition to achieving an overall efficiency improvement of 3 per cent. over 2002–02.

Licensing Targets

Category A

Licences that involve no frequency assignment, site clearance or international co-ordination: 100 per cent. of applications for new or varied services to be awarded or rejected (with explanation) within five working days.

Category B

Licences that involve frequency assignment but no site clearance or international co-ordination: 90 per cent. of applications for new or varied services to be awarded or rejected (with explanation) within 15 working days; the remainder to be awarded or rejected within 25 working days or an explanation of the delay to be given.

Category C

Licences that require frequency assignment and site clearance and/or international co-ordination: 90 per cent. of applications for new or varied services to be awarded or rejected (with explanation) within 40 working days; the remainder to be awarded or rejected within 60 working days or an explanation of the delay to be given.

Enforcement

100 per cent. of safety of life services reports of interference to be investigated within 24 hours.

98 per cent. of business customers reports of interference to be investigated within five working days; the remainder within a further five days.

98 per cent. of domestic customers reports of interference to be investigated within one month; the remainder within a further month.

90 per cent. of complaints to be sent a formal case update within 10 working days after the start of an investigation, the remainder within a further 10 days.

Correspondence

I also expect all correspondence from hon. Members delegated to the Chief Executive by Ministers or otherwise for reply, and all written complaints addressed to him about Agency service, to be answered within 10 working days of receipt; the Agency's enquiry point to respond to 95 per cent. of calls within 30 second; and 100 per cent. of valid invoices to be paid within 30 days of receipt (or as agreed with the supplier).

Articles of Association

Mark Tami: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will give her consent as holder of the special share to changes in the Articles of Association of BAe Systems plc and Rolls-Royce plc. [47160]

Ms Hewitt: I have reviewed the provisions in place for BAE Systems and Rolls-Royce and have decided to agree to the following changes. In the case of BAE Systems, we have agreed to remove the provision allowing the appointment of a Government Director; to change the current requirements that all Executive Directors are British to a requirement that a simple majority of the Board, including the Chief Executive and any Executive Chairman, are British; and to remove the aggregate foreign shareholding limit. In the case of Rolls-Royce, we have agreed to change the current requirement that 75 per cent. of the Board are British to a requirement that a simple majority, including the Chief Executive and any Executive Chairman, are British; to allow the appointment of a non-British non-Executive Chairman; and to remove the aggregate foreign shareholding limit. There will be no change in the requirements that no individual foreign shareholder, or group of foreign shareholders acting in concert, can hold more than 15 per cent. of the shares in either company. These provisions ensure that neither company can fall under foreign control.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Advertising

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the expenditure was per campaign for the five most expensive media advertising campaigns his Department undertook in the past five parliamentary Sessions including the current parliamentary Session in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* England, *(c)* Wales and *(d)* Northern Ireland; and for the last two parliamentary Sessions and the current Session, when each advertising campaign (i) began and (ii) ended in (A) Scotland, (B) England, (C) Wales and (D) Northern Ireland. [37395]

Mr. MacShane: There has only been one media advertising campaign in the last five years in the UK.

Between March–May 1998, the FCO carried out a £1 million television and information campaign for British nationals travelling to France for the World Cup.

The campaign was run in Scotland and England, as they were the only two home teams to qualify.

Information on when elements of the advertising campaign began and ended in Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Civil Servants (Relocation)

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) how many civil servants in his Department have used the services of Cendent or its subsidiaries *(a)* to relocate in London and *(b)* to be housed in London since May 1997; what the name was of the company employed in each case; and what the dates were on each occasion; [42362]

(2) which relocation companies his Department has used when relocating civil servants since May 1997; which relocation companies hold contracts with his Department for the relocation of civil servants; when the contracts were last renewed; where the contracts were advertised; and what the *(a)* length and *(b)* value of each contract is. [42363]

Mr. Bradshaw *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* None.

Energy Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on energy costs incurred by his Department in each of the last 10 years. [42450]

Mr. Macshane: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State at the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on 19 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 268W.

Israel

Richard Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of Israel about overflights by the Israeli airforce in Lebanon. [43483]

Mr. Bradshaw: Embassy officials in Tel Aviv regularly raise overflights with the Israeli authorities, most recently on 26 February 2002. I did so when I visited Israel in July 2001. We remain concerned about continuing tension on the Israeli/Lebanese border. All breaches of the UN delineated "Blue Line", whether by land, sea or air are unacceptable.

Correspondence

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the target time will be in 2002–03 for *(a)* ministers to reply to letters from hon. Members and *(b)* officials in his Department to reply to letters received directly from members of the public. [44952]

Mr. Macshane: The FCO target in 2001–02 for ministers to reply to letters from hon. Members is to respond to 89 per cent of correspondence within 20 working days. The target for 2002–03 will be agreed shortly. The FCO target in 2001–02 for replies to letters received directly from members of the public is to respond to 90 per cent. of correspondence within 20 working days. The target for 2002–03 will also be agreed shortly.

Public Service Agreements

Mr Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which public service agreement targets scheduled to be met in 2002 will not be achieved by the due date. [44819]

Mr. MacShane: Information about progress on PSA targets will be published in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's 2002 Departmental Report.

Anti-personnel Mines

Mr. Frank Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what legal advice he has been given regarding the transit across UK territory of anti-personnel mines by non-states parties to the Ottawa Convention. [45193]

Mr. MacShane: Such transit would be contrary to the United Kingdom's obligations under the Ottawa Convention.

Brahimi Report

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent steps have been taken by the Government to encourage the UN to implement the Brahimi report. [44747]

Mr. MacShane: The UK Government support and work towards the implementation of the Secretary General's Report on Peace Operations (Brahimi Report). Many of its recommendations have now been implemented, including those designed to strengthen the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), improve pre-deployment inspection and training of contingents and enhance mechanisms for consultation with troop contributors.

Global Crossing

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place in the Library *(a)* the contingency plans that his Department has prepared for the contingency that Global Crossing fails, *(b)* the monitoring reports that his Department's posts in New York and Washington have drawn up of the financial performance of Global Crossing; and if he will make a statement. [44930]

Mr. MacShane: Contingency arrangements are contained in the FCO's contract with Global Crossing, which bars disclosure on the grounds of commercial confidentiality (Exemption 13 of the Code of Practice, on Access Government Information refers). The FCO has kept in touch with posts in Washington and New York, who have monitored local press and market reports on Global Crossing.

Falkland Islands

Mr. Frank Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans have been made for the feasibility study into demining the Falkland Islands; and if he will make a statement. [45192]

Mr. MacShane: In October 2001 a Memorandum of Understanding with the Argentines was concluded to enable a British-led feasibility study funded by the Argentines into demining the Falkland Islands to be carried out. The first Joint Working Party (JWP) meeting on the feasibility study was held in Buenos Aires on 3 and 4 December 2001.

South Africa

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of South Africa on the murder of farmers in that country; and if he will make a statement. [45497]

Mr. MacShane: Like the South African Government, we are concerned by the level of crime generally in the country, of which farm attacks are a worrying element. The South African government is working closely with rural communities to tackle the problem.

Macedonia

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with his EU counterparts on the issue of the official name of the FYR of Macedonia. [45245]

Mr. MacShane: We have had no recent formal discussions with EU partners on this subject. We continue to encourage the Greek and Macedonian Governments to agree a solution under UN mediation.

Secondments

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many BP employees are on secondment to his Department; for what purposes; on what terms; and how many BP employees have been on secondment to his Department since January 2000. [45886]

Mr. MacShane *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* None.

Botswana

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what have been the results of Government representations to the Government of Botswana to keep its assurances to maintain basic services for the Kalahari Bushmen and not forcibly remove the Bushmen from the Kalahari reserve; if the planned visit to the reserve by the High Commissioner has taken place; and if he will make a statement. [45882]

Mr. MacShane: The Government of Botswana stopped providing water and other essential supplies to those Bushmen remaining in the Central Kalahari Game Reserve (CKGR) at the end of February despite representations from HMG and others. The Government of Botswana has since said that those Bushmen who remain in the CKGR, estimated at around 60, can remain there if they wish to do so.

Our High Commission in Gaborone will visit the CKGR within the next three weeks to assess the latest situation.

Australia

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last had discussions with the Australian Government regarding Aboriginal affairs. [45972]

Mr. MacShane: In general, Aboriginal affairs are the sole responsibility of the Government of Australia and we do not therefore raise them. But we are in touch with the Australians about the repatriation of Aboriginal remains; my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister discussed this with the right hon. John Howard, the Australian Prime Minister on 4 July 2000 and we have established a working group under the Chairmanship of Professor Norman Palmer to consider the matter. My noble friend Baroness Blackstone, has had further discussions this year with the Australian Minister for Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs.

I myself attended the Aboriginal Yeperenyne Centenary Federation Festival in Alice Springs, Australia, in September 2001.

Thailand

Albert Owen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representation the British Government have made to the Government of Thailand to *(a)* ascertain the fate of Peter Lionel Sinnott who disappeared in Pattaya on 4 January and *(b)* encourage the Thai Government to urge the Thai Police to treat the matter with urgency. [45387]

Mr. Bradshaw *[holding reply of 25 March]:* On 14 February our Ambassador in Bangkok alerted the Director General for Europe at the Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the disappearance of Peter Sinnott.

Since Mr Sinnott's disappearance our Embassy has pressed the Thai police on a number of occasions for information on their progress in locating Peter. In addition, on 18 January and 13 February our consular agent in Pattaya checked with local police stations, hospitals and morgues for information about Mr. Sinnott. On 28 January our Embassy wrote to the Commander of the Tourist Police in Pattaya to register Mr. Sinnott as a missing person. They wrote again on 15 March to express our interest in the investigation into Mr. Sinnott's disappearance and to ask for a report on the action taken by the police to locate him. We will continue to press for this information.

St. Helena

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs who will be representing the Government at the 500th anniversary celebrations of the Island of St. Helena. [46189]

Mr. Bradshaw: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 20 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 389W.

United States

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with his United States counterpart in respect of the

implications for the future effectiveness of the Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty of the United States Nuclear Posture Review 2002. [46195]

Mr. Bradshaw: We have discussed the broad findings of the Nuclear Posture Review with the US Administration. We have also had several discussions with the US Administration on issues related to nuclear non-proliferation, including various meetings in view of the forthcoming First Preparatory Committee in the current cycle of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review process. The US continues to confirm the importance it attaches to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which is the cornerstone of non-proliferation.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many persons are employed by his Department to accompany visitors from abroad; and if he will list *(a)* their names and *(b)* their salary scales. [46225]

Mr. MacShane: The Conference and Visits Group of FCO Services draws from 46 fee-paid liaison officers who accompany official visitors and guests of Government.

Liaison Officers are remunerated on a daily basis in accordance with their duties for each visitor in accordance with good employer practice, and under Exemptions 8a and 12 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information it is not appropriate to release a list of such freelance employees into the public domain.

Overseas Visits

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list his overseas visits since 7 June 2001. [46223]

Mr. MacShane: Since 1997 the Government have published an annual list of all visits overseas undertaken by Cabinet Ministers costing £500 or more during each financial year. Details of travel undertaken since 1 April 2001 will be published as soon as possible after the end of the 2001–02 financial year. Copies of previous lists are available in the Libraries of the House.

Camp X-ray

Mr. Bailey: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent reports he has received on the situation relating to the British Taliban and al-Qaeda suspects held at Camp X-ray in Guantanamo Bay. [45808]

Mr. Bradshaw: We remain in touch with the US authorities about the position of the detainees at Guantanamo Bay, in particular that of the five UK detainees there. For details of the British detainees welfare, I refer my hon. Friend to my reply of 4 March to my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Anniesland (Mr. John Robertson), *Official Report*, columns 69–70W.

We welcome the publication of the Procedure for Trials by Military Commission of Certain Non-United States Citizens in the War against Terrorism by the US Government on 21 March.

Gujarat

Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the situation in the Gujarat state of India. [46021]

Mr. Bradshaw: We share the deep concern of Britain's Muslim and Hindu communities over the current religious tensions and violence in Gujarat. We welcome the efforts of the Indian Government in raising the security presence in these areas to restore law and order. We are also concerned by reports that the Gujarat police failed to take adequate steps to reduce the conflict once it became clear that the violence was escalating. Our High Commission in New Delhi will continue to monitor the situation closely.

India is a secular country in which the right to freedom of religion is enshrined in the constitution. However, we continue to raise our concerns over incidents of religious intolerance in India, including attacks against Muslims, Hindus and Christians. We will continue to urge the Indian authorities to ensure the right of freedom of religion is upheld, and that those responsible for attacks on religious minorities are brought to justice.

Vietnam

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made to the Government of Vietnam regarding the persecution of Christians. [46307]

Mr. Bradshaw: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Redcar (Vera Baird) of 26 February, *Official Report*, column 1159W. Since then the Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has raised our concerns about religious freedom with the Vietnamese Ambassador, and the EU Human Rights Working Group in Hanoi has raised our concerns with the Vietnamese government about their treatment of the Mennonite leader Pastor Quang.

Ministerial Visits (Yugoslavia)

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last visited Yugoslavia; and what plans he has to visit in the future. [45244]

Mr. MacShane: Although the Secretary of State has had a number of contacts with Yugoslav leaders, he has not visited the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia since taking up his duties in June 2001. There are no immediate plans for such a visit.

As the Minister responsible for relations with the FRY I have visited Belgrade twice, from 18–19 July 2001, and from 6–7 February 2002 as well as other visits to the former Yugoslavia.

Burma

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations she is making to the Burmese Government with regard to their treatment of internally

displaced Karen people and other minorities; and what resources are being provided to support the Karen refugees leaving Burma for Thailand. [45453]

Mr Bradshaw: The UK has been at the forefront of the international community's effort to press for national reconciliation, respect for human rights and democracy in Burma. The ethnic minority areas of Burma, including those of the Karen, suffer disproportionately as a result of the regime's rule. The EU has adopted a Common Position including an arms embargo, bans on high level visits, items which may be used for torture, non-humanitarian aid, and a visa ban and asset freeze on members of the regime. We are also active in the United Nations, annually co-sponsoring resolutions at the UN General Assembly and UN Commission on Human Rights.

In financial year 2001–02 we have increased funding for the International Committee of the Red Cross, the Burmese Border Consortium and the United Nations High Commission for Refugee's work with Burmese refugees and those internally displaced within Burma.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent meetings he has had with representatives from Burma; and what was discussed. [45483]

Mr. Bradshaw: Ministerial contact with the Burmese authorities is limited by the EU Common Position. However an FCO official visited Rangoon from 27 February–1 March where he met both Aung San Suu Kyi and members of the Burmese government. The Burmese government is aware of our views about the urgent need for national reconciliation, respect for human rights and the restitution of democracy in Burma.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the human rights situation in Burma and steps taken by the Government to help the Karen people. [45482]

Mr. Bradshaw: The overall human rights situation in Burma remains poor and a cause of grave concern. The ethnic minority areas, including those of the Karen, suffer disproportionately under the regime's rule. We are currently working with EU colleagues to prepare a resolution to be submitted at the UN Commission on Human Rights that will express our concerns and call upon the Burmese regime to take urgent action to improve the situation.

In 2001–02 we have increased funding for the International Committee of the Red Cross, the Burmese Border Consortium and the United Nations High Commission for Refugees' work with Burmese refugees and those internally displaced within Burma. Both these groups include large numbers of Karen.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plan he has to bring investment sanctions against Burma *(a)* unilaterally and *(b)* with the (i) UN, (ii) EU and (iii) Commonwealth. [45484]

Mr. Bradshaw: The EU has adopted a Common position including an arms embargo, bans on high level visits, items which may be used for torture, non-humanitarian aid, and a visa ban and asset freeze on members of the regime. The EC has also suspended Burma trading privileges in response to the use of forced labour in Burma. In addition, the UK does not encourage trade, investment or tourism with Burma. We do not offer assistance to any British company wishing to trade with Burma. There is hardly any new investment into the country.

There is no consensus at this point to implement a formal ban in any of the international forums listed. Against this background and in consideration of the evolving political situation in Burma, including the gradual release of political prisoners and the lessening of the pressure on opposition parties, there are no plans to pursue formal investment bans at this point. We will follow events closely and will respond proportionately to further developments, positive or negative.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Defence Grants

Mr. Pound: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will publish the *(a)* aggregate amount of civil defence grants to be made for the financial year 2002–03, *(b)* amount of grant to be paid in to each local authority and *(c)* criteria used to determine the allocation between authorities; and if he will make a statement. [46856]

Mr. Leslie: The aggregate amount is £18,968,850 of which £100,000 will be retained as discretionary grant for special projects and special events deemed of benefit to the wider emergency planning community in England and Wales.

The remaining £18,868,850 will be allocated to individual authorities as set out in the table below.

The following formula has been adopted to determine these allocations. First, each authority receives £53,000. Second, each county council receives £12,000 in respect of each shire district within the authority's boundaries. These flat-rate payments account for some 65 per cent. of the aggregate grant in recognition of the fact that every authority, regardless of size and population, must incur similar unavoidable costs in conducting the basic emergency planning function. The remainder of the total grant (approximately 35 per cent.) is then distributed according to the Bellwin threshold in recognition of the fact that population size provides a rough proxy for the scale of the emergency planning that authorities need to undertake.

A simple application of the formula would result in some authorities facing a significant decrease on the grant they had received during the current financial year, whilst others would receive a significant increase. Mindful of the importance of keeping such year-on-year changes within reasonable bounds, a damping has been added to the formula so that no authority loses more than 10 per cent. or gains more than 20 per cent. compared with the current year.

Before reaching decisions on this allocation method, consultations were held with Local Authority representatives on the basis of a draft formula. As a result of the representations made, that original formula was amended to give greater weight to the flat rate

element and lesser weight to the element distributed by reference to the Bellwin threshold. The damping was also changed to reduce the floor level for losses.

Local Authority	Grant allocation for 2002–03 (£)
Barking & Dagenham	75,583
Barnet	80,268
Barnsley	75,690
Bath and N.E. Somerset	89,625
Bedfordshire	136,125
Bexley	78,372
Birmingham	186,994
Blackburn with Darwen	70,272
Blackpool	66,276
Blaenau Gwent	62,697
Bolton	82,288
Bournemouth	69,736
Bracknell Forest	63,513
Bradford	125,370
Brent	86,206
Bridgend	67,937
Brighton & Hove	80,786
Bristol	98,100
Bromley	84,594
Buckinghamshire	200,171
Bury	70,809
Caerphilly	72,702
Calderdale	74,188
Cambridgeshire	162,671
Camden	83,789
Cardiff	86,936
Carmarthenshire	73,472
Ceredigion	63,757
Cheshire	189,583
City of London	59,759
Conwy	64,425
Cornwall	188,893
Coventry	77,390
Croydon	90,280
Cumbria	215,730
Darlington	63,513
Denbighshire	71,048
Derby	76,117
Derbyshire	220,073
Devon	216,908
Doncaster	85,130
Dorset	175,500
Dudley	82,522
Durham	213,215
Ealing	89,958
East Riding of Yorkshire	71,880
East Sussex	207,902
Enfield	87,812
Essex	314,726
Flintshire	77,355
Gateshead	78,754
Gloucestershire	189,574
Greater Manchester EP	63,674
Greenwich	86,096
Gwynedd	67,312
Hackney	87,759
Halton	67,751
Hammersmith & Fulham	76,333
Hampshire	298,610
Haringey	85,238
Harrow	65,340
Hartlepool	64,264
Havering	77,299
Herefordshire	69,843
Hertfordshire	310,500
Hillingdon	81,000
Hounslow	80,356
Hull (Kingston upon Hull)	71,879
Isle of Anglesey	60,956
Isle of Wight	71,844
Isles of Scilly	53,322
Islington	83,038
Kensington and Chelsea	74,402
Kent	339,200
Kingston upon Thames	67,268
Kirklees	95,045
Knowsley	73,973
Lambeth	87,403
Lancashire	314,847
Leeds	172,601
Leicester City	88,510
Leicestershire	192,571
Lewisham	83,592
Lincolnshire	212,407
Liverpool	97,262
London FEPA	151,439
Luton	59,508
Manchester	147,281
Medway	81,161
Merseyside	72,946
Merthyr Tydfil	60,612
Merton	71,667
Middlesbrough	70,969
Milton Keynes	81,018
Monmouthshire	61,768
Neath Port Talbot	69,873
Newcastle upon Tyne	102,437
Newham	87,840
Newport	68,230
Norfolk	276,427
North East Lincolnshire	71,238
North Lincolnshire	69,146
North Somerset	70,862
North Tyneside	73,705
North Yorkshire	244,137
Northamptonshire	238,874
Northumberland	187,736
Nottingham City	85,935
Nottinghamshire	210,541
Oldham	78,908
Oxfordshire	202,073
Pembrokeshire	66,349
Peterborough	71,828
Plymouth	81,322
Poole	66,249
Portsmouth	74,081
Powys	85,500
Reading	67,000
Redbridge	82,180
Redcar and Cleveland	69,307
Rhondda Cynon Taff	81,933
Richmond upon Thames	69,038
Rochdale	76,924
Rotherham	81,268
Rutland	56,057
Salford	72,000
Sandwell	88,027
Sefton	83,629
Sheffield	96,000
Shropshire	153,448
Slough Borough	68,180
Solihull	73,330
Somerset	163,973
South Tyneside	71,130
South Yorkshire EP	83,970
Southampton	77,084
Southend	71,580
Southwark	76,957
St Helens	72,947
Staffordshire	226,456
South Gloucestershire	75,797

Local Authority	Grant allocation for 2002–03 (£)
Stockport	79,606
Stockton-on-Tees	73,491
Stoke-on-Trent	74,027
Suffolk	221,400
Sunderland	100,721
Surrey	297,002
Sutton	72,740
Swansea	78,547
Swindon	70,969
Tameside	76,924
Telford and Wrekin	71,999
Thurrock	68,280
Torbay	67,054
Torfaen	64,490
Tower Hamlets	93,123
Trafford	75,368
Tyne & Wear	34,506
Vale of Glamorgan	71,999
Wakefield	86,281
Walsall	83,253
Waltham Forest	83,146
Wandsworth	78,769
Warrington	72,418
Warwickshire	181,336
West Berkshire	67,429
West Midlands EP	60,000
West Sussex	225,000
West Yorkshire EP	61,207
Westminster	86,418
Wigan	84,111
Wiltshire	194,400
Windsor & Maidenhead	66,410
Wirral	89,475
Wokingham	66,142
Wolverhampton	81,644
Worcestershire	186,449
Wrexham	72,540
York, City of	71,834

Public Appointments (Women)

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister which Government departments are expected to reach the target of equal representation for women in public appointments by 2005. [46501]

Mr. Leslie: *Public Bodies: Opening up Public Appointments 2002–05,* was published on 14 February. This publication provides the latest targets set by individual departments for increasing diversity on the boards of non-departmental public bodies and other public bodies, and describes the action that departments will take to achieve them. Copies have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Consultants

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the total cost to his Department was of the use of external consultants in each of the last four years. [35018]

Mr Leslie: The total cost to the Cabinet Office and the Central Office of Information for the use of consultants in each of the last four complete financial years is as follows:

1997–98	£5,531,000
1998–99	£8,098,000
1999–2000	£10,812,000
2000–01	£10,927,000.

The period 1997–98 included £501,049 on e-government IT consultants commissioned by the Central IT Unit (CITU). Expenditure on this topic was £3,138,437 in 1998–99, £5,046,618 in 1999–2000 and £3,543,147 in 2000–01. Expenditure in 1998–99 and 1999–2000 increased to include Y2K work and in 2000–01 a decrease in expenditure in those areas was offset by work on UK Online following an expansion of e-Government work in the 2000 Spending Review. Other Cabinet Office consultancy spend is on research and IT developments.

Mrs. May: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the total cost was of management consultants across all Government departments in the last available year. [43630]

Mr. Leslie: Information for all Government Departments is not held centrally, and could only be provided at disproportionate cost. Individual departments are responsible for their own consultancy arrangements.

For the information relating to my Department, I refer the hon. Member to the answer have given today to the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow).

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the total external spending by his Department was on public private partnership consultants in each of the last four years; how many full-time equivalent consultants were employed over this period; how many billed consultancy days there were per year; what the implied average cost of each PPP consultant was; how many consultancy firms were used by his Department over this period; and if he will make a statement. [43193]

Mr. Leslie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to him on 6 February 2002, *Official Report,* column 944W.

Permanent Secretaries

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what *(a)* number and *(b)* percentage of permanent secretaries attended (i) Oxford and Cambridge, (ii) independent schools and (iii) both; if he will provide these figures for each of the last 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [43858]

Mr. Leslie: For current holders of Permanent Secretary posts in the Home Civil Service, the figures are:

20 studied for their first degree at Oxford or Cambridge University (59 per cent.);

14 attended independent schools (41 per cent.); and

13 attended both (38 per cent.).

Historic data on the educational backgrounds of Permanent Secretary postholders are not held centrally and could only be collected at disproportionate cost.

Press Office

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many staff in his Department's press office have

(a) termination and *(b)* redundancy payments in each of the last four years. [41075]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: None.

Advertising

Hywel Williams: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how much the Government have spent on advertising in each year since 1993 in *(a)* English, *(b)* Welsh and *(c)* Welsh and English. [39518]

Mr. Leslie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Twickenham on 12 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 939W.

Figures for the financial year 1992–93 to 1994–95 are not held centrally, and could only be provide at disproportionate cost.

The only advertising undertaken by the COI is for recruitment. All recruitment advertising is in English.

Consultancy Services

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, what proportion of work commissioned by Government Departments has been undertaken by *(a)* Arthur Andersen, *(b)* Ernst & Young, *(c)* PricewaterhouseCoopers in each year since 1978. [32808]

Mr. Leslie: Pursuant to my reply of 14 February, columns 562–64, I regret that the information provided was incorrect. The table should have read:

Per cent.

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02 to date*[2]
Arthur Andersen	0	0	0	0.51	[2]2.09
Ernst & Young	1.55	10.45	2.05	0.04	[2]0
PricewaterhouseCoopers[1]	[1]0.35	2.19	2.16	5.15	[2]4.40

Notes:
[1] 1997–98 figure for Price Waterhouse and Coopers & Lybrand.
[2] 2001–02 figures for year to end January and subject to audit.

Car and Despatch Agency

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many vehicles in the Government's Car and Despatch Agency are run on *(a)* petrol, *(b)* diesel, *(c)* liquefied petroleum gas, *(d)* compressed natural gas and *(e)* other alternative fuels. [45945]

Mr. Leslie: I have been asked to reply.

Responsibility for the Government Car Service and the InterDespatch Service has been delegated under the terms of the Framework Document to the Government Car Despatch Agency. I have asked its chief executive, Mr. Nick Matheson, to write to the hon. Gentleman.

I have placed copies of the letter in the Library of the House.

Confidential Information

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what steps he has taken to co-ordinate a system across Departments by which members of the public can give confidential information. [38198]

Mr. Leslie: The Cabinet Office co-ordinates no such system across Departments.

External Contracts

Pete Wishart: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) which non-accounting and non-information technology external organisations have won new contracts with *(a)* his Department and *(b)* executive agencies in each of the past five years; [38762]

(2) which non-accounting and non-information technology external organisations which previously held contracts with his Department *(a)* won new contracts at the culmination of the existing contracts and *(b)* won new contracts after a period of inactivity with his Department in each of the past five years. [38763]

Mr. Leslie: The specific information requested is not held centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost. However for information on the top 10 largest suppliers to the Cabinet Office for the years since 1997, I refer the hon. Member to the answer which I gave earlier today (PQ 38764).

Pete Wishart: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, if he will list the 30 largest contracts awarded by his Department from *(a)* May 1997 to April 1998, *(b)* May 1998 to April 1999, *(c)* May 1999 to April 2000, *(d)* May 2000 to April 2001 and *(e)* May 2001 to the latest date, indicating in each case the values of the contracts and the companies with which the contracts were placed. [38764]

Mr. Leslie: Listed below are the 10 largest suppliers to the Cabinet Office for each financial year since 1997–98.

1997–98

Paymaster (1836)

The Stationery Office

Digital Equipment Company

Sutcliffe Catering (UK)

Chessington Computer Services

Haymills Contractors

Glasgows

Serco

E C Harris

Logica UK

1998–99
Paymaster (1836)
Compaq Computer
Sutcliffe Catering (UK)
The Stationery Office
Drivers Jonas
Chessington Computer Services
Serco
Glasgows
Computacenter
Claybrook Computing

1999–2000
Holloway White Allom
Paymaster (1836)
Serco
Compaq Computer
Balfour Beatty Refurbishment
Claybrook Computing
Sutcliffe Catering (UK)
Drivers Jonas
The Stationery Office
Computacenter

2000–01
Computacenter
Compaq Computer
Syntegra
Paymaster (1836)
Cable & Wireless Communication
Holloway White Allom
Serco
Berwin Leighton
Drivers Jonas
Sema Group UK

2001–02 to date
Balfour Beatty Refurbishment
Sema Group UK
Cable & Wireless Communication
Paymaster (1836)
Compaq Computer
Computacenter
PA Consulting Group
Capita Business Services
Serco
British Telecoms.

Further information of the sort requested is not held centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Special Advisers

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the number and expected cost to his Department of special advisers in *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03. [43276]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: At 21 March, there are two full time and two part time Special Advisers in my office.

On cost, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 20 March 2002, *Official Report, Hansard,* column 324W.

Departmental Contracts

Dr. Cable: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the 30 largest contracts awarded by his Department from *(a)* May 1997 to April 1998, *(b)* May 1998 to April 1999, *(c)* May 1999 to April 2000, *(d)* May 2000 to April 2001 and *(e)* May 2001 to the latest date for which figures are available, stating in each case the values of the contracts and the companies with which the contracts were placed. [43673]

Mr. Leslie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I have given today to the hon. Member for North Tayside, (Pete Wishart).

PFI/PPPs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the *(a)* private finance initiative and *(b)* public private partnership projects which have been delayed. [44878]

Mr. Leslie: The Sunningdale Park Property Project is this Department's only PFI project. It was originally envisaged that the contract would be awarded in 1999. Various complications mean that we are now working towards a start date next month.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the difference was between the price offered in reaching preferred bidder stage and the final contract price for the five largest PFI contracts let by his Department in each of the last four years; and if he will make a statement. [45594]

Mr. Leslie: The Sunningdale Park Project is this Department's only current PFI project and has not yet reached final contract stage. My Department has had no other PFI projects in the last four years.

Crèche Facilities

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what crèche facilities are provided by his Department; and at what cost. [44864]

Mr. Leslie: The Cabinet Office provides crèche facilities for staff at the Civil Service College in Sunningdale, which is run in partnership with the Edith Rose Day Nursery. This service is also available to parents on residential courses at the college.

Staff in London have access to the Westminster Holiday Playscheme, which is available during the school holidays.

Eligible staff in all locations are able to apply for childcare vouchers. These support parents to make their own choices about where and what type of childcare they want for their child. Vouchers are payable over 48 weeks per annum and are for £21 a week for staff who work full time and either have a partner who works full

time or are single parents; or pro-rata for staff who work or who have partners who work part-time. Staff using a subsidised nursery place at Sunningdale are not eligible for childcare vouchers.

The Department is conducting a review of childcare and will be taking account of the recommendations in due course.

The Regional Co-ordination Unit and the Government Offices for the Regions have not been included as the information is not held centrally, and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

A table showing the type of childcare provision in my department; the number of parents who used it; the cost to the department; and the cost per head is below:

Cabinet Office	*Type of childcare provision*	*Number of parents using childcare*	*Cost to the Department*	*Cost per head*
	Nursery	8	£9,732.97	£134 per week. Subsidy of £41.50 per week for people earning less than £19,000 and £26 per week for people earning less than £24,001.
	Westminster Holiday Playscheme	49	£4,291.59	£17.67 a day up until 30 September 2001. £26 a day from 1 October 2001. Subsidy of 50%.
	Childcare Vouchers	85	£63,384.02	£21 a week for full-time, pro-rata for part-time.
Central Office of Information	Westminster Holiday Playscheme	4	£237	£17.67 a day up until 30 September 2001. £26 a day from 1 October 2001. Subsidy of 50%.

Unpaid Advisers

Mr. Beith: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the names of the unpaid advisers appointed by him since June 1997, stating in each case *(a)* the date of their appointment, *(b)* the duration of their appointment and *(c)* the project or projects on which they have been engaged. [43374]

Mr. Leslie: No unpaid advisers have been appointed by the Deputy Prime Minister under the terms of paragraph 51 of the *Ministerial Code*.

For details of unpaid appointments made by this Department to task forces, review groups and other ad hoc advisory groups, I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda on 16 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 958W.

Access to Information

Tony Wright: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the administrative manuals and internal guidance which his Department has made public as required by Part 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information; and which of these were first made available after May 1997. [45338]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: The Cabinet Office's internet website contains numerous examples of guidance that have been made public. However, no central record is maintained of what has been made public by the Cabinet Office under the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Open Government

Llew Smith: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what requests have been received by the Cabinet Secretary for the release of documents assessing progress on the release of historic official files under the Open Government Initiative. [46200]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: No requests have been received personally by the Cabinet Secretary for the release of documents assessing progress on the release of historic files under the Open Government Initiative. There have, however, been a number of requests since 1997 to the Cabinet Office openness contact.

Saville Inquiry

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what costs have been incurred since 28 January by his Department in connection with the Saville Inquiry; and what his estimate is of the final cost to his Department. [46026]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: Cabinet Office does not employ staff full-time on Bloody Sunday Inquiry work. Since 28 January a few staff have spent a small amount of time dealing with issues relating to the Inquiry, but they absorb this task into their normal duties, so staff time costs are not separately calculated. It is not possible to forecast the final cost to the Cabinet Office because of the uncertainties.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Departmental Publications

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many publications were issued by her Department between 8 June and 26 October. [11837]

Mr. Morley: Our records show that we issued 130 publications, excluded are any reprints of previously published items, posters, official forms and stationery. We have also recorded 33 consultation documents as posted on the DEFRA Website during the period. Publication activity, not centrally managed has not been included, as recovery of this information would be at a disproportionate cost.

Newspaper Advertising

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what has been the expenditure of her *(a)* Department, *(b)* agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies on newspaper advertising by title for each year sine 1997. [26993]

Mr. Morley: Please find a list of the titles used for advertising DEFRA campaigns in national and regional printed media by DEFRA Communications Directorate as from 8 June 2001. The target audience and the information to be conveyed influences the choice of media used. The information for the period prior to 8 June 2001 for the merged bodies within DEFRA, as with the expenditure for the agencies and non-departmental public bodies is not held centrally and could only be supplied at disproportionate cost.

DEFRA press spend from 8 June 2001 to 15 January 2002 by publication

Prepared: 14 January 2002

Publication	*Spend (£)*
Daily Express	3,226.00
Daily Mail	8,885.00
Guardian	9,677.00
Times	6,241.00
The Scotsman	7,136.00
Birmingham Post	1,866.00
Yorkshire Post	1,484.00
Manchester Evening News	20,595.00
Newcastle Journal	9,045.00
Birmingham Evening Mail	5,308.00
Bradford Telegraph & Argus	7,869.00
Brighton Evening News	1,469.00
Bristol Evening Post	8,335.00
Bristol Western Daily Press	6,185.00
Darlington Northern Echo	4,336.00
Eastern Daily Press	3,901.00
Hull Daily Mail	1,471.00
Lancs Evening Telegraph	5,273.00
Leeds Yorkshire Evening Post	20,019.00
Leicester Mercury	9,332.00
Liverpool Daily Post	5,865.00
Nottingham Evening Post	10,979.00
Oxford Mail	1,048.00
Western Morning News	912.00
Sheffield Star	11,167.00
Stoke-on-Trent Evening Sentinel	7,107.00
London Standard	4,790.00
Western Mail	8,199.00
Wolverhampton Express & Star	22,892.00
Carlisle Evening News & Star	679.00
Birmingham Evening Mail	10,616.00
Southern Daily Echo	1,122.00
Chester Mail	634.00
Craven Herald & Pioneer	414.00
Harrogate Advertiser Series	2,315.00
Kent Messenger	1,546.00
Farmers Weekly	22,508.00
Farmers News	17,790.00
New Scientist	6,613.00
Farmers Guardian	5,040.00
Scottish Farmer	475.00
Commercial Motor	3,240.00
Motor Transport	3,881.00
Freight Magazine	1,066.00
Angling Times	1,449.00
Anglers Mail	1,882.00
Beef Farmer	1,987.00
South West Farmer	1,890.00
Total	299,759.00

Departmental Expenditure (Publications)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her estimate is of the expenditure of her Department on newspaper, magazines and periodicals in each of the last four years. [30091]

Mr. Morley: DEFRA was created on 8 June 2001, the estimated centralised DEFRA expenditure for newspapers, magazines and periodicals via the libraries supporting the Department is £140,000 for the current financial year. Expenditure incurred outside the management of the libraries for this type of expenditure cannot be provided without incurring disproportionate cost.

Departmental Communications

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the process used by her Department to issue circulars to farmers and growers; how often mailing lists are updated; and what system is in place to ensure that circulars are issued to farmers and growers in an enterprise-specific manner. [33376]

Mr. Morley: The print production, distribution and mailing of circulars to farmers and growers is provided by commercial firms appointed by DEFRA Communication Directorate. The Directorate is provided with mailing lists by relevant policy divisions. It is the responsibility of these divisions to establish and amend the material on such lists.

Fraud

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she is taking to prevent fraudulent claims for agricultural subsidies; and if she will make a statement. [38823]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* The Rural Payments Agency (RPA) takes rigorous action to prevent fraudulent claims by having in place stringent controls for each of the schemes that it administers. Control plans are set up using risk analysis techniques and are regularly reviewed. RPA Inspectorate carries out pre and post payments checks in accordance with the relevant Community regulations.

RPA Counter Fraud and Compliance Unit carries out an annual programme of scrutiny control audits in accordance with EC Regulation 4045/89 using a systematic approach in order to prevent and detect irregularities and fraud. The Unit's Investigation and Intelligence section makes enquiries into all referred allegations of suspected fraud and conducts a full investigation where appropriate.

Age Discrimination

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her Department's policy is towards age discrimination. [42567]

Mr. Morley: Age has been integrated into the Department's equal opportunities policy, including a commitment that there should be no unfair

discrimination on the basis of age. Departmental Diversity policies also make clear that all staff should be respected and valued.

Staff in administrative and support grades may continue working up to 65 (subject to continued efficiency) and short service concessions are available to those in other grades with less than 20 years' service at normal retirement age.

In line with the recommendation in the Policy and Innovation Unit report, "Winning the Generation Game", the Department is actively considering the case for allowing other staff the option of retirement at up to age 65.

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she intends to reply to the letter to her dated 25 January from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton, with regard to Cait Cawley. [42797]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 12 March 2002]:* I am sorry for the delay in replying. A response to my hon. Friend's letter was sent on 28 February 2002.

Pollution

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her reply of 5 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 220W, on pollution control; if she will list the key stakeholders referred to; how her Department uses the comments received from key stakeholders, since when these reports have been published, and if she will place in the Library copies of unpublished reports; if she will provide details of the process by which the reports are considered; if she will list the decisions made on what steps should be taken since these reports were first published; and what steps have been taken to reinforce to local authorities the importance of adopting such practice. [43481]

Mr. Meacher: The key Local Air Pollution Control stakeholders are the members of the Industrial Pollution Liaison Committee and the Industry Forum, which meet twice a year. The Committee and Forum comprise respectively, organisations representing local enforcing authority regulators and trade bodies representing regulated industries. A copy of the statistical report is also now sent to the Environmental Industries Commission, who I recently met to discuss Local Air pollution Control among other matters. Any comments made by these stakeholders are carefully considered.

Statistics have been produced from the annual LAPC statistical survey since it was first undertaken for the year 1991–92 and have from the outset been provided to members of the Committee and (from its establishment) the Forum. A copy of the statistics covering the period 1991–00 is being placed in the Library. The reports for 2000–01 is on the Department's website. In addition, "Local Air Pollution Control in England and Wales; Five Year Report 1991–96" was published in December 1996 and contained a statistical review. The reports are considered by officials and the key findings are reported to Ministers. The statistics have helped inform policy on LAPC throughout the lifetime of the regime.

Officials raised the importance of local authorities adopting cost accounting in discussion with the Local Government Association and, when the opportunity arose, in discussion with individual local authorities. The issue was discussed at the Industrial Pollution Liaison Committee.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 5 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 219W, on local air pollution control, what guidance has been given to local authorities in each case; and if she will *(a)* provide a definition of low inspection record, *(b)* state on what date all local authorities were written to, provide details of to whom within each local authority these letters were addressed and place a copy of the standard letter in the Library, *(c)* provide details of responses to these letters and *(d)* state what outcomes she expects from the letter to chief executives. [43534]

Mr. Meacher: Guidance on inspection under the Local Air Pollution Control (LAPC) system was issued by the Department of the Environment in 1995 in additional guidance note reference (AQ4(95)). In 2000 local authorities were publicly listed which undertook an average of less than 0.5 inspections per process in a year. In 2001 the threshold was raised to one inspection. Letters were sent on 8 November 2001 to the chief environmental health officer of most of the relevant local authorities; a further four authorities were written to on 28 February 2002. I am placing a copy in the Library of the House. All except two of the local authorities written to on 8 November have responded with improvements they intend to make to their inspection performance. My Department is in contact with the remaining two authorities over their responses. I expect the letter to local authority chief executives to focus the minds of local authorities on the importance of carrying out sufficient process inspection in undertaking their LAPC regulatory functions.

Beef

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she has received from the Scottish Executive concerning the French ban on UK beef since the Barcelona Summit. [45818]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* None. However, the Scottish Executive wrote to the Secretary of State on 13 March about remarks made by the new French Minister of Agriculture. The Secretary of State wrote to the French Minister and to the Commission on 15 March. The Commission wrote to the French Government on 20 March seeking observations on France's failure to comply with the ruling of the European Court of Justice (ECJ). This is the first state in a process which may lead to a further ECJ case against France.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures she is taking to promote the export of beef and beef products. [43035]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 14 March 2002]:* The promotion of exports of beef and beef products is primarily the responsibility of the Meat and Livestock

Commission (MLC), a non-Departmental Public Body sponsored by DEFRA. DEFRA's International Relations and Export Promotion division liaises closely with the MLC concerning the promotion of exports of British meat, livestock and genetics and the MLC is participating in a number of DEFRA's overseas trade fair stands, missions and other events this year. DEFRA chairs a Beef Exports Liaison Group which includes exporters and the MLC and which will be meeting on 16 April to discuss the best way of promoting beef exports once the trade resumes.

Bio-security

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what percentage of *(a)* food imports and *(b)* livestock imports were impounded or refused entry to the UK on the grounds of bio-security in each of the last five years. [43565]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 15 March 2002]:* The information below relates to consignments of products of animal origin correctly presented at border inspection posts from non-EU countries but rejected because they did not fully meet import requirements. The reason for rejection is not recorded. Information on other imported food and products of animal origin from other EU member States is not held centrally.

Year	*Percentage of imported food of animal origin rejected*
1997	1.7% (790 rejected out of 45,842)
1998	2.0% (994 rejected out of 49,152)
1999	2.3% (1,004 rejected out of 42,900)
2000	2.8% (1,274 rejected out of 44,616)
January to November 2001	3.9% (1,690 rejected out of 43,597)

In addition, since April 2001, we have been advised of 1,183 seizures of illegally imported products of animal origin. We do not hold figures for the last five years.

The information below relates to imports of livestock into the UK from all EU and non-EU countries which were rejected or detained because they did not fully comply with the import requirements. The information includes birds and poultry but excludes fish and bees since statistics can only be obtained at disproportionate cost. The reason for rejection or detention is not recorded.

Year	*Percentage of imported livestock rejected or detained*
1997	0.02% (852 rejected/detained out of 4,289,874)
1998	0.002% (301 rejected/detained out of 15,340,000)
1999	0.0005% (234 rejected/detained out of 40,450,000)
2000	0.007% (534 rejected/detained out of 7,796,332)
2001	0.005% (374 rejected/detained out of 8,391,686)

All figures are provisional and subject to change.

Transitional Derogations

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 12 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 276W, on Poland, if she will list the transitional derogations relating to agriculture and fisheries upon which Malta and Poland are negotiating with the European Union. [44100]

Mr. Morley: In the fisheries and agriculture negotiations Malta and Poland have put forward a range of requests relating to issues such as access to their waters by other EU vessels, marketing specifications for agricultural products, and to food processing establishments. These are set out in negotiating documents submitted to the Intergovernmental Conference on enlargement. Detailed disclosure is at the discretion of the candidate country.

Negotiations on agriculture are continuing, but fisheries negotiations with all candidates except Malta and Poland have been provisionally concluded. Details of the requests provisionally agreed are available on the Commission's website: http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/negotiations/chapters/index.htm.

Home Energy Efficiency Scheme

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment her Department has made of *(a)* the average effect on SAP ratings, *(b)* the average reduction in fuel bills and *(c)* the energy saving resulting from the measures taken to date of properties subject to the home energy efficiency scheme. [43571]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 18 March 2002]:* Information from the scheme managers indicates that:

(a) average improvements in SAP ratings for properties receiving grants under the Scheme range from 12–18 points;

(b) information is not collected on actual reductions in fuel bills. The maximum potential saving is estimated to be in excess of £200 with estimated actual savings, taking account that some of the benefit will be taken in the form of increased thermal comfort, ranging between £110–155;

(c) the estimated CO_2 reduction per property is estimated to be between 1.47–1.89 tonnes/pa.

Hemswell Cliff

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the total tonnage is that can be stored in the Hemswell Cliff Cold Stores; and what alternative storage facilities there are in the UK. [44625]

Mr. Morley: The refrigerated storage capacity of Hemswell Cliff Cold Store is 10,000 tonnes spread equally over two sheds. A Government owned cold storage facility at Locharbriggs near Dumfries, capable of holding 5,000 tonnes is also available to the Rural Payments Agency and further commercial storage can be acquired to supplement these facilities as necessary.

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the annual cost is of providing the refrigerated storage at the Intervention Board facility at Hemswell Cliff. [44627]

Mr. Morley: Hemswell Cliff is one of two Government owned cold stores which are in the process of being sold. The store is currently in care and maintenance mode with average monthly costs of £2,400.

Annual running costs before decommissioning of the refrigeration plant would have been in the order of £260,000. If product was being stored there would also be receipt, handling and discharge fees payable which would vary according to commodity being stored.

Recycling

Dr. Pugh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how the 2005–06 waste-recycling targets for local waste collection authorities set out in her Department's waste consultation document were arrived at. [44349]

Mr. Meacher: *Waste Strategy 200* sets out a commitment to recycle or compost at least 25 per cent. of household waste by 2005. Under the national Public Service Agreement we committed to targets of 17 per cent. household waste recycling/composting by 2003–04 and 25 per cent. by 2005–06.

Taking a baseline of 1998–99 performances, targets for 2003–04 and 2005–06 were calculated for each waste collection and disposal authority in England. 2005–06 targets were calculated as follows:

authorities with 1998–99 rates of under 6 per cent. should achieve at least 18 per cent. by 2005–06;

those with 1998–99 rates of between 6 per cent. and 12 per cent. should at least treble their recycling/composting rate by 2005–06;

the remainder should recycle or compost at least 40 per cent. of household waste by 2005–06.

These standards were proposed in the consultation document "Best Value and Audit Commission Performance Indicators for 2001–02" and were implemented in the Best Value Order 2001. Performance standards for individual authorities are detailed in the "Guidance on Municipal Waste Management Strategies" published in March 2001.

Flood Relief

Mr Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many and what type of waterborne craft were available to the Environment Agency for flood relief purposes in *(a)* 1998 and *(b)* 2000; and if she will make a statement. [44705]

Mr. Morley: The information requested is not held centrally by the Environment Agency and cannot be provided without incurring disproportionate costs. However, I understand the total number, by region, of waterborne craft currently operated by the Agency available for deployment in an emergency situation is as follows:

	Number
North East	70
Midlands	54
Southern	17
Thames	119
North West	22
Anglian	18
South West	49
EA Wales	50
Total	399

Additional craft are made available for use in an emergency by bodies such as the RNLI and the Maritime and Coastguard Agency.

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs which public service agreement targets that are scheduled to be met in 2002 will not be achieved by the due date. [44837]

Mr. Morley: Information about progress on PSA targets will be published in the Department's 2002 Departmental Report.

Registered Fishing Vessels

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many registered fishing vessels there were in the United Kingdom in each of the last five years. [45211]

Mr. Morley: The available information is set out below:

The Registered UK Fishing Fleet: 1996 to 2009—United Kingdom (including Channel Islands and Isle of Man)

	Number	*GT **	*Power (kW)*
1996	8,667	271,875	1,054,927
1997	8,458	269,726	1,026,542
1998	8,271	268,803	1,006,071
1999	8,039	262,777	978,644
2000	7,818	260,333	980,636

Source:
RSS and UK Fisheries Department
GT * represents a measure of fleet tonnage, based on International Tonnage Convention 1969, to which the Community fishing fleet is being progressively remeasured. The process should be completed by end 2003. The series gives figures on a consistent basis over the period shown.

Livestock

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans the Government have to remove the 20 day restriction on the movement of cattle. [45445]

Mr. Morley: The interim rules for livestock movements, which we announced on 5 February, allow greater flexibility for farmers to move their animals. The 20 day standstill rule has been waived for some types of movement, subject to conditions and we will continue to keep these arrangements under review. However, veterinary advice is that the 20 day standstill needs to remain in place for the time being as a disease control measure. A copy of a document explaining the Veterinary basis for the Interim movement rules has been placed in the Library of the House and is available on the DEFRA website.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to review the import regulations pertaining to livestock; and if she will make a statement. [45839]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* Movements of farmed livestock within the European Community are subject to harmonised animal health rules which are implemented into national legislation.

These rules set down the animal health conditions that must be met before such animals can be certified for export and they provide for checks to be made on the animals at their premises of destination. The Commission's Standing Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health keeps the rules under constant review and introduces safeguard measures as necessary to address animal health problems across the Community. Imports into Great Britain of animals susceptible to foot and mouth disease resumed in November 2001 and since then we have been carrying out 100 per cent. post import checks on all such consignments.

Imports of livestock from non-EU countries are also covered by EU rules. Imports are prohibited from countries where there is a known animal health risk. Imports from approved countries must enter the Community via an approved border inspection post where the consignments are subjected to physical, identity and documentary checks.

Parrett Catchment Project

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what salary is paid to the Chairman of the Parrett catchment project; and what his total package is. [45275]

Mr. Morley: I understand that the Steering Group for the Parrett Catchment Project agreed that the Chairman should receive payment up to £3,000 per annum from project funds. The major contributors are Somerset County Council and the Environment Agency.

Hunting with Dogs

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make it her policy to consult Lord Burns over interpretation of his report on hunting with dogs before drafting legislation on the subject, with particular reference to the issues of cruelty and utility. [46360]

Alun Michael: I have emphasised the importance of the Burns Report and met Lord Burns to discuss his report after taking up my present responsibilities. I shall welcome comments from all those who have constructive comments to make following my statement on 21 March.

Farm Tenancies

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the availability of farm tenancies for young farmers; and what plans she has to facilitate more opportunities for new entrants to farming. [45314]

Mr. Morley: A policy evaluation review of the Agricultural Tenancies Act 1995 is currently being carried out by the University of Plymouth. This includes an assessment of the impact the Act has had on the availability of tenancies to new entrants. The Policy Commission on Food and Farming has also made a number of recommendations which are intended to make farming more attractive and accessible to new entrants.

The University of Plymouth review is nearing completion and the final report is expected shortly. We will be considering the recommendations made by the research team in detail over the coming months and at the same time will consider the Policy Commission recommendations on tenancy and new entrant issues.

Incineration

Dr. Pugh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs with reference to the Government's Waste Strategy 2000 documents, how many tonnes of incineration capacity he estimates will be needed by *(a)* 2005–06, *(b)* 2010 and *(c)* 2015; and on what assumptions these figures are based. [44307]

Mr. Meacher: The Government's strategy, as set out in *Waste Strategy 2000,* is based on minimising the production of waste and maximising the levels of re-use, recycling and composting of the waste that is produced.

The Regulatory Impact Assessment in Annex C of Part 2 of *Waste Strategy 2000* (Cm 4693–2) outlines a wide variety of different waste management scenarios. Variables include different mixes of waste management facilities, different levels of participation in kerbside recycling schemes, and different projections for the increase in municipal waste arisings. There are therefore no single estimates for the level of incineration in these years.

UN Millennium Declaration

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps her Department *(a)* has taken and *(b)* plans to take to meet the commitments of the United Nations Millennium Declaration. [44351]

Clare Short: I have been asked to reply. The Millennium Declaration endorsed the Millennium Development Goals, a set of 2015 targets for poverty reduction. We worked hard to get UN agreement to these goals and all of the work of my Department is aimed at reaching these Goals. The Millennium Declaration also called on industrialised countries to reduce trade barriers for least developed countries, debt relief for heavily indebted poor countries, and increased development assistance, particularly for countries with large numbers of people in poverty and effective pro-poor policies.

My Department has also worked hard with others in the Government to achieve agreement at Doha to a trade round which creates significant opportunities for developing countries and poor people. The Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative has led to over $50 billion in debt relief being granted to qualifying countries. This Government has increased UK Official Development Assistance by a third in real terms since 1997. We are committed to making substantial further progress towards the UN 0.7 per cent. target in the next spending round. At the UN conference on Financing for Development in Mexico last week, the European Union announced a commitment to increase average Official Development Assistance as a proportion of gross national income to 0.39 per cent. by 2006, an increase of $7 billion.

My Department will continue to focus its efforts on achieving the Goals set out in the Millennium Declaration. Details of how we have contributed during 2001-02 to achieving the Millennium Development Goals will be published next month in our Departmental Report.

Waste Minimisation and Recycling Fund

Mr. Michael Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how she intends to distribute the waste minimisation and recycling fund. [47162]

Mr. Meacher: Following the recent consultation, we shall very shortly announce how we intend to distribute the Fund. Guidance will be sent to all local authorities and will be available on the DEFRA website. Copies of the guidance and results of the consultation will be placed in the Library of the House.

Scientific and Regulatory Agencies

Dr. Stoate: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to conduct a review of her Department's scientific and regulatory agencies. [47164]

Margaret Beckett: I am today announcing a Review of the three science laboratories; the Veterinary Laboratories Agency (VLA), the Central Science Laboratory (CSL) and the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Research (CEFAS); and the two regulatory agencies, the Pesticides Safety Directorate (PSD) and the Veterinary Medicines Agency (VMD).

The Review will be conducted by a team attached to DEFRA's Corporate and Service Delivery Directorate General, working in consultation with other Government Departments with an interest. The Review Team will be advised by a Steering Group of a majority of non-Departmental members.

The terms of reference for the Review are:

"To evaluate the effectiveness of the operation of DEFRA agencies, with regard to the Departmental aim and objectives and their relationship with the Department and the sectors they serve."

The Review is to be conducted in two parallel processes:

for those Executive Agencies due for quinquennial review in 2002 (VLA, CSL, CEFAS): to conduct an evaluation of their performance since the date of the last review and to examine their relationship with core-DEFRA, other Government Departments (OGDs) and the Devolved Administrations (DAs);

for the regulatory Executive Agencies (PSD and VMD): to take into account the conclusions of, and developments since the completion of their Quinquennial Reviews.

In so doing, the Review will:

analyse the requirements of Government, industry and society for core science facilities and key skills for the provision of R&D, scientific support services, surveillance, policy and regulatory functions, advice and emergency response capability;

analyse and identify the work required to support the core requirements;

examine the likely trend of DEFRA and other public funders' requirements, including developments in horizon scanning and contingency planning;

consider the possible options and evaluate the best models for delivery of the services and the organisation of the functions required, including policy advice and associated work;

assess the implications for DEFRA, OGDs, the DAs and the Agencies about the choice of those models;

assess the implications for non-core activities; and

assess the implications for commercial activity.

The Review Team will consult customers, stakeholders, scientific opinion and other interests and will take into account relevant reviews and studies, in particular the SR2002 Science and Research cross-cutting review and DEFRA's prioritisation of science programmes exercise; the work on the development of science in DEFRA, including a new Science and Innovation Strategy; and the Cabinet Office Review of Agency Policy.

In light of the findings of the consultation exercise, the Review will examine the most appropriate freedoms, controls, financial regimes, governance arrangements and performance management to ensure the optimum delivery of a high quality service, providing good value for money.

The Review Team will report with recommendations to Ministers through the Management Board by the end of October 2002.

Interested parties are invited to submit their views to the Review Team by 30 May 2002. Details of how to contact them are contained in DEFRA's news release, issued today.

Air Pollution Control

Mr. Salter: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the 2002–03 charging schemes for local air pollution control under Part I of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and Local Authority Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control under the Pollution Prevention and Control Act 1999. [47165]

Mr. Meacher: Charges to cover the costs of local enforcing authorities in regulating processes which are subject to Part I of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 were introduced in April 1991. Interim charges for processes which are subject to the Pollution Prevention and Control Act 1999 were introduced in August 2000.

With the approval of the Treasury, and following consultation with local authority associations and industry, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has made revised schemes for England in respect of Environmental Protection Act and England and Wales in respect of the Pollution Prevention and Control Act. The schemes specify the scale of fees and charges to take effect from 1 April 2002.

The fees and charges in both schemes have been increased by 1.8 per cent., broadly in line with inflation. However, my Department is writing to local authorities to advise them that if there is not much more widespread adoption of cost accounting practices for LAPC over the next six months this increase may be rescinded at the next review of the charging schemes later this year.

The schemes will be laid before both Houses and copies placed in the Libraries.

Policy Commission Report

Mr. Cawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the Government will respond to the Policy Commission's report. [47166]

Margaret Beckett: The Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs today held a seminar with leaders of the farming and food sectors and others with an interest in the environment and the rural economy and identified early actions to drive forward the Commission's report. A new strategy for sustainable farming and food, incorporating a definitive response to the Policy Commission's report will be published in the autumn. Actions to develop and deliver the strategy have been announced, including the publication today of *Sustainable Food and Farming—Working Together:* a document intended to focus discussion on key issues.

Copies of the document are available from the Libraries of the House. Details of the announcement and the document are also available in electronic form from the DEFRA website, www.defra.gov.uk.

Dangerous Substance Rules

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for what reason the dangerous substance rules were not updated by June 2001; and when she plans to update them. [40648]

Dr. Whitehead: I have been asked to reply.

Implementation in Great Britain of Commission Directive 2000/21/EC was through amendments to two existing regulations [Notification of New Substances Regs. and Chemicals (Hazards and Information Packaging for Supply Regs.]. The total package of amendments was completed by the implementation date of 13 April 2001.

A similar approach was taken in Northern Ireland where the package of amendments to regulations came into operation on 16 January 2002.

Rural Affairs

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the total cost is of the "Your countryside, You're welcome" *(a)* launch and *(b)* campaign. [43082]

Alun Micheal: *[pursuant to his reply, 20 March 2002, c. 380]:* In my reply to hon. Member on 20 March, I said that the cost of the PR activity to support "Your countryside, Your welcome" was £209,000. I have now received information about other public funds which supported the campaign.

In addition to the £209,000 spent directly by DEFRA referred to in my previous answer, the Countryside Agency has paid £371,000 for regional advertising, and £10,000 towards the development of www.yourcountryside.info—the website for "Your countryside, You're welcome" campaign. The English Tourism Council also spent £8,500 on consumer research and £18,000 on a special publication of "Hidden England". These figures do not include in-house staff costs, nor do they include any expenditure by the over 100 non-governmental organisations involved in the campaign. I am sorry that my original answer referred only to direct expenditure by DEFRA itself.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Census (1901)

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many transactions per second the Internet service provider responsible for the 1901 Census on-line service could provide at the time the service was suspended; and how many transactions per second it will be possible to provide once the programme of enhancements has been completed. [38538]

Ms Rosie Winterton: QinetiQ Ltd, who are responsible for the delivery of the system and service, designed and supplied a system which was to support 18,912,000 static page impressions and 4,800,000 dynamic page impressions for a peak of 1.2 million users per day. This equates to an average of approximately 274 page impressions per second. When the system is again available it is intended that it will be able to provide at least these levels of performance and be considerably more robust. Testing of the updated design and configuration is still continuing to confirm this, before the service is resumed.

Correspondence

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what targets his Department and the agencies it sponsors have for responding to correspondence *(a)* from hon. Members and *(b)* from members of the public; and what his Department's performance against such targets has been for each of the last 36 months in both categories. [31006]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Ministers at the Lord Chancellor's Department aim to respond to correspondence from hon. Members within 20 working days. Chief Executives of the Public Record Office and the Land Registry also aim to reply to hon. Members within 20 working days, whilst the Chief Executives of the Public Guardianship Office and the Court Service aim to do so within 15 working days. Statistics for correspondence with hon. Members for the Department and each agency for each of the last 36 months is not readily available and could only be provided at disproportionate cost, but statistics for each of the last three years are as follows:

Percentage of correspondence from MPs answered within target

Per cent.

	1998–99	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*1 April 2001 to 31 December 2001*
LCD Headquarters	88	76	73	75
Land Registry[1]	100	91	93	79
Public Trust Office[2]	99	83	78	—
Public Guardianship Office[2]	—	—	—	52
Public Record Office	100	100	96	100
Court Service HQ	99	93	94	94

[1] Figures for the Land Registry are for the calendar years 1998, 1999 and 2000.

[2] The Public Guardianship Office was created on 1 April 2001 when the Public Trust Office ceased to exist.

fbatistics for correspondence with members of the public for the Department and its agencies for each of the last 36 months is not readily available and could only be provided at disproportionate cost, but figures are available for each of the last three financial years, and I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by the Parliamentary Secretary at the Cabinet Office (column 453W) on 19 July 2001 for figures relating to Lord Chancellor's Department Headquarters, Court Service Headquarters and the Land Registry. Figures for the Public Trust Office, and since 1 April 2001 its successor the Public Guardianship Office, and the Public Record Office are set out in the following table.nb

Percentage of correspondence from members of the public answered within target

Per cent.

	Target	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001 to 31 December 2001*
Public Record Office	10	99	99	100	99
Public Trust Office	[1]—	96	92	89	—
Public Guardianship Office	[2]—	—	—	—	*(c)* 91.9 *(d)* 94.8

[1] The standard for dealing with correspondence in the Public Trust Office was to respond to all letters within 10 working days, or to acknowledge letters within three working days and respond fully within 20 working days.

[2] The standard for dealing with correspondence in the Public Guardianship Office is to: *(a)* respond to 85 per cent. of letters, faxes and e-mails within 15 working days of receipt; and *(b)* to respond to 95 per cent. of letters, faxes and e-mails within 20 working days of receipt.

Judiciary (Solicitors)

Mr. Cameron: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) how many acting members of the judiciary have been the subject of complaints for their work as solicitors in the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement; [44606]

(2) what powers he has to investigate the conduct of members of the judiciary when they are practising as solicitors. [44425]

Mr. Wills: As Head of the Judiciary, the Lord Chancellor investigates complaints about the personal conduct of both full-time and part-time judicial office holders. He does not, however, investigate complaints against solicitors who are part-time Judges when the complaints relate to their work as solicitors, as this is a matter for the Office for the Supervision of Solicitors and ultimately for the Law Society. The Lord Chancellor has no disciplinary powers in relation to solicitors. If a solicitor who is a part-time judicial office holder is subject to such a complaint, he or she is required to inform the Lord Chancellor's Department of the outcome. The Department is aware of four such complaints in the past 12 months.

Data Protection Act

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if his Department plans to amend the Data Protection Act 1998; and if he will make a statement. [45216]

Mr. Wills: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave to a similar Question from him on 19 March.

Child Abuse Cases

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) how many cases of child abuse by parents or guardians allowed unsupervised access by the Family Law Court there have been in each of the last five years; what guidelines are in place for judges to deal with such cases; and if he will make a statement; [45434]

(2) what plans there are to review the guidelines given to the Family Law Court in dealing with access cases for children deemed to be at risk of abuse; and if he will make a statement. [45435]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Information about the number of children abused by parents or guardians during court ordered contact is not available. The Ministerial Group on Domestic Violence is considering how to improve the inter-face between the family and criminal jurisdictions to track and record such instances. However, many instances of abuse may go unreported. The "Guidelines on Good Practice in Parental Contact in cases where there has been Domestic Violence", produced by the Children Act Sub-Committee of the Lord Chancellor's Advisory Board on Family Law, apply throughout the Family Justice System. The Guidelines, endorsed by the Government in March 2001, are being monitored and are also subject to research on the outcome of court orders for families.

An analysis of the first survey of the use and effectiveness of the Children Act Sub-Committee "Guidelines for Good Practice on Parental Contact in cases where there has been Domestic Violence" was, in answer to a question from the hon. Member for Enfield

North, placed in the Libraries of both Houses on 13 March 2002. A further survey on the operation of the Guidelines will be carried out this May.

Child Killings

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many children have been killed after the Family Law Court granted unsupervised access to the parent or guardian in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [46437]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Information about the number of child deaths during contact visits, where an application for contact or residence is outstanding, or where a residence or contact order is in force, is not available. The Ministerial Group on Domestic Violence is considering how to improve the inter-face between the family and criminal jurisdictions to track and record such instances. I have given an undertaking to the Women's Aid Federation of England to investigate cases in which they allege a child has been harmed during court ordered contact.

CAFCASS

Simon Hughes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many senior responsible owners there have been in charge of the CAFCASS Support Infrastructure Project since the preparation of the Project Initiation Document; who had this responsibility between July 2001 and January 2002; and if he will make a statement. [46010]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Support Infrastructure Project had three Senior Responsible Officers until the project was put on hold in July 2001.

CAFCASS is currently reviewing its IT strategy to assess its immediate and longer term needs.

Land Registry

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what key performance targets have been set for Her Majesty's Land Registry executive agency for 2002–03. [46793]

Mr. Wills: The following table sets out the key performance targets set by the Lord Chancellor for Her Majesty's Land Registry for 2002–03.

Key Performance Indicators and Targets 2002–03

Indicator	*Target 2002–03*
Speed	
Percentage of office copies and official search applications to be processed within two working days	98
Percentage of registrations to be processed within 20 working days	75
Accuracy	
Percentage of registrations processed free of any error	98.5
Overall Satisfaction	
Percentage of customers who, overall, are very satisfied/satisfied with the full range of services provided by the Land Registry	Better than 94
Financial	
Percentage return on average capital employed	6
Efficiency[1]	
Cost per unit in cash terms[2] *(real terms[3])*	£29.53 *(£23.10)*
Strategic	
Percentage electronic delivery capability of the Land Registry's key services	60
Percentage take up of electronic services	50
Critical Action Points	
Draft Rules under the Land Registration Act 2002 ready for consultation	By July 2002
Carry out a major public consultation on the possible system for e-conveyancing and prepare a final report for ministers	By February 2003

[1] This is a milestone towards the HM Treasury-agreed cost per unit target for 2004–05 of £28.78 in cash terms (£21.43 in real terms).
[2] Based on GDP deflator issued by HM Treasury on 20 December 2001 (base year 1992–93).
[3] The real term unit cost in the base year of 1992–93 was £30.65.

Further details of HM Land Registry's targets are published in its Business Plan.

Public Record Office

Mrs. Humble: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what key performance targets have been set for the Public Record Office executive agency for 2002–03. [47157]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The following list sets out the key performance targets that have been set for the Public Record Office for 2002–03.

Public Record Office

Key Performance Indicators 2002–03[1]

Efficiency

KPI 1—Unit Costs of Key Activities

KPI 1A—Selecting and preserving the public records per metre: To ensure that the unit cost does not rise above £107.00.

KPI 1B—Giving Access Onsite: To ensure that the unit cost per information transaction with customers onsite does not exceed £8.80.

KPI 1C—Giving Access Online: To ensure that the unit cost per information transaction with customers online does not exceed £0.15.

KPI 2—Backlog of records in departments reported as being over 30 years old and awaiting review: To reduce the backlog, assessed in January 2002 as 1987 metres, by 115 metres.

Quality of service

KPI 3—The achievement of Charter Standards as follows:

A (i) to make newly opened records and their catalogues available to users in accordance with specified time targets.

(ii) To answer 98.5 per cent. of written correspondence within 10 working days.

(iii) To deliver records to users for consultation in the reading rooms in accordance with specified time targets.

(iv) To supply 98.5 per cent. of copy orders in accordance with the specified targets and standards.

(v) To answer 80 per cent. of telephone calls within 20 seconds.

(vi) To keep 98.5 per cent. of appointments which visitors have made with us within 10 minutes.

B To carry out four onsite satisfaction surveys and to achieve assessments of "good" or "excellent" from 90 per cent. of those expressing a view; to carry out two online satisfaction surveys and to achieve assessments of "good" or "excellent" from 80 per cent. of those expressing a view.

Income generation

KPI 4—To increase revenue generated by commercial activity to £850,000.

Modernising Government

KPI 5—Electronic Records Management:

To support other government departments in achieving the government target for electronic records management by 2004 by:

(i) monitoring progress in departments against milestones and reporting to the Lord Chancellor, the e-Government sub-group and departments every six months and to others as appropriate to the level of action required;

(ii) targeting under-achieving departments and developing action plans to accelerate progress;

(iii) delivering a programme of workshops to support the action plans.

KPI 6—Electronic Service Delivery:

To develop digital access to popular records so that 20,000 digital record images are delivered to customers.

KPI 7—To raise an awareness of the PRO's holdings among under-represented groups in our user profile by means of a rigorous social inclusion programme, the chief components of which are:

(i) To make available 90,000 images online as part of the "Moving Here" project.

(ii) To conduct an evaluation exercise with users (remote, at Kew and at the FRC) of the usability of PROCAT, DORIS and PRO Online.

(iii) To organise an event as part of Black History month and to produce one other targeted event.

(iv) To organise an educational focus event as part of the London String of Pearls Golden Jubilee programme.

[1] More information on these and other key targets is published in the Corporate and Business Plans.

Law Commission

Mr. Borrow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when the Law Commission intends to publish its 36th annual report. [46794]

Mr. Wills: The Law Commission has today published its thirty-sixth Annual Report, and copies have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Personal Injury Awards

Chris McCafferty: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when his Department will publish the impact analysis of the discount rate change for personal injury awards from 3 per cent. and 2.5 per cent. [47158]

Mr. Wills: The Lord Chancellor has today placed in the Libraries of both Houses the analysis of the impact of the discount rate change.

Parliamentary Boundary Reviews

David Wright: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many parliamentary boundary reviews have been undertaken in Shropshire since 1972. [45134]

Dr. Whitehead: I have been asked to reply.

Three reviews have been undertaken by the Boundary Commission for England since 1972.

The third periodic review of all constituencies in England commenced in February 1976 and was completed in February 1983.

An interim review, commenced in December 1986 and completed April 1987 considered the boundaries of Ludlow County Constituency, Shrewsbury and Atcham County Constituency, and The Wrekin Borough Constituency.

The fourth review of all constituencies in England commenced in February 1991 and was completed in April 1995.

DEFENCE

Army Base Repair Organisations

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future of the Army Base Repair Organisation. [46925]

Mr. Ingram: Following approval by this House and the enactment of the requisite Statutory Instrument, ABRO will become a Trading Fund from 1 April 2002.

This marks a significant stage in the development of ABRO as a flexible organisation able to respond rapidly to the demands placed upon it and equipped to shape its own future in both the defence community and the commercial arenas.

Operating as a Trading Fund gives the Chief Executive additional financial and management freedoms to manage ABRO along commercial lines.

The current Chief Executive, Mr. Michael Hayle, will continue to fill that position after conversion.

Chemical Protection Programme

Jim Dobbin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish the information submitted to the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons about the UK's chemical protection programme. [46936]

Mr. Ingram: Under the terms of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) we are required to provide information annually to the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons on the UK's chemical protection programme. The programme is

designed to protect against the use of chemical weapons and is permitted by the CWC, with which the UK is fully compliant. In accordance with the Government's commitment to openness, I am placing in the Library of the House a copy of the summary that has been provided to the Organisation outlining the UK's chemical protection programme for 2002.

Analytical Services Agency

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what performance targets have been set for the Defence Analytical Services Agency for 2002–03.[46937]

Mr. Ingram: Key Targets have been set for the Chief Executive of the Defence Analytical Services Agency for Financial Year 2002–03. The targets build on the progress already made by the Agency since it formed in 1992 and are as follows:

Delivery of customer service:

Key Target 1. To meet at least 95 per cent. of the timeliness and quality targets in customer Service Level and Project Agreements, and for National Statistics releases.

Key Target 2. To have at least 90 per cent. of customers saying, in the annual Customer Satisfaction Survey, that they are satisfied with the overall service they receive from DASA.

Quality

Key Target 3. To implement the presentational developments identified in the 2001–02 review of United Kingdom Defence Statistics, and to develop a longer-term strategy for the publication of United Kingdom defence statistics.

Key Target 4. To comply with the National Statistics Protocol on Release Practices by 31 March 2003.

Key Target 5. To conduct a National Statistics quality review of DASA's financial and economic statistics, and recommend improvements in their quality and scope.

People

Key Target 6. To be accredited as achieving the DTI-sponsored Work-Life Balance Standard.

Efficiency

Key Target 7. To make efficiency gains of 3 per cent.

Environmental Sustainability

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to publish his Department's approach to environmental sustainability. [46938]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence is constantly striving to meet and maintain the highest standards, both for the environment and the wider challenges of sustainable development. To this end we are launching an "Appraisal Handbook for Sustainability and the Environment" on 26 March 2002. Copies will be placed in the Library of the House.

The handbook is an easy-to-follow guide on how to conduct an effective environmental and sustainability screening exercise in applying the Government's policy of sustainable development. It will help MOD planners identify the potential environmental, social and economic impact of proposed programmes, plans or projects.

Investment Approvals Board

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the role of his Department's Investment Approvals Board. [46939]

Mr. Hoon: The Investment Approvals Board (IAB) will have a broadly similar role to that of the Equipment Approvals Committee (EAC), which it will replace on 2 April. Its membership will consist of the Chief Scientific Advisor (Chair), the Vice Chief of Defence Staff, the Second Permanent Under Secretary of State, the Chief of Defence Procurement and the Chief of Defence Logistics. The IAB, like the EAC, will advise Ministers on major equipment and other investment projects. It will also have responsibility for the scrutiny and approvals processes for investment decisions on all non-equipment investment projects as well as equipment projects, including those considered by delegated approving authorities. It will be a major part of the IAB's task to ensure that proposals for Defence investment are soundly based and deliverable through robust project management and Smart Acquisition processes. There are no changes to the existing arrangements under which Ministers take and announce decisions on major projects.

Missile Defence Systems

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what financial provision has been made in *(a)* each of the last five years and *(b)* future years for investigating the possibility of deploying missile defence systems. [38953]

Mr. Hoon: It remains the case that we believe it is as yet premature to decide on acquiring ballistic missile defences to deploy either for defence of the UK or of deployed forces. But we have carried out a range of studies focused on assessing the threat and the feasibility of the technology available to counter it, and continue to do so. A Pre-Feasibility Study was completed in June 1996, and an extension to it was carried out during 1997 and 1998 at a cost of £300K. The Technology Readiness and Risk Assessment Programme (TRRAP) was carried out between 1998 and 2001 at a total cost of £12.5 million. A further programme of work beyond TRRAP to look further at the main technical risk areas it identified, and at the feasibility of defending against more complex and longer range threats, is underway. Studies are also assessing the significance of any capability gap in defence against theatre ballistic missiles, including the role that active theatre missile defence systems might play. The total cost of the current work in this financial year is £3.6 million. This work is due to continue until March 2003 with a similar level of financial provision.

Energy Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on energy costs incurred by his Department in each of the last 10 years. [42443]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence units report their energy consumption, not the cost of their energy usage. Therefore, the information requested is not held centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Non-proliferation Treaty

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made towards

implementing the 13 point programme agreed upon at the Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference in 2000; and if he will make a statement. [44651]

Mr. Hoon: The United Kingdom regards the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty as the cornerstone of the non-proliferation regime. We remain firmly committed to the Treaty and also to the Final Document agreed at the Non Proliferation Treaty Review Conference in 2000. We are recognised as the most forward-leaning of the Nuclear Weapon States.

This Government has taken a large number of actions to promote nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. Since 1997, we have reduced our operationally available stockpile to fewer than 200 warheads. We have reduced the readiness of our nuclear forces with only a single Trident submarine on deterrent patrol, carrying 48 warheads against a previously planned ceiling of 96 warheads per submarine. We have signed and ratified the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty and continue to promote its entry into force, and we are still pressing for negotiations to begin at the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva of a Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty.

In addition to the measures set out above, we have signed and ratified the relevant protocols to both the Treaty of Raratonga (South Pacific Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone) and the treaty of Pelindaba (African Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone). We have placed fissile material no longer required for defence purposes under international safeguards, have been more transparent about nuclear and fissile material stockpiles and begun a national accounting for fissile material produced. We have also begun a programme to develop UK expertise in verifying the reduction and elimination of nuclear weapons internationally.

Human Rights Act

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many cases have been brought against his Department under the Human Rights Act 1998; and what has been the cost in *(a)* legal fees to defend cases and *(b)* compensation payments. [45065]

Mr. Ingram: We do not collect central records of all cases in which the Human Rights Act 1998 is relied on. Human rights are now integrated in the general law and are rarely the sole basis for a challenge. We do monitor centrally those cases we consider may be of particular significance to this Department. We have recorded five cases to date.

We do not collect separate information centrally about the cost to public funds, legal fees or compensation payments in case which include a human rights issue. In most cases it will be difficult to single out associated costs relating to the human rights element.

PFI/PPPs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list (1) the *(a)* private finance initiative and *(b)* public private partnership projects which have been delayed; [44873]

(2) what the difference was between the price offered in reaching preferred bidder stage and the final contract price for PPP contracts let by his Department in each of the last four years; and if he will make a statement. [45604]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 25 March 2002]*: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what companies are involved in PFI housing projects; how much funding these companies have given so far to his Department's housing projects; who manages PFI housing; how much funding has been given by his Department; and if he will make a statement. [45092]

Dr. Moonie: The Defence Housing Executive (DHE) has contracted with six companies to provide new housing, under public private partnership arrangements. They are:

Covesea

Western Challenge Housing Association

Riverside Housing Association

Bannockburn Homes

Roselead Ltd

TRICOMM Housing Ltd.

Expenditure by the companies concerned is a matter for them. The Ministry of Defence pays them a unitary charge when the housing service contracted for is available. In total payments of £23 million have been made to the end of February 2002. The contractor is responsible for house design, construction, maintenance and life cycle upgrading. DHE is responsible for allocation and occupation management.

Apache

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment has been made of the need for air manoeuvre training for the WAH-64 Longbow Apache programme; and if he will make a statement. [44961]

Dr. Moonie: The requirement for Attack Helicopter units to train within an air manoeuvre environment was identified at an early stage in the Apache programme and a contract to purchase a Collective Training System was placed in late 2000.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps are being taken to deal with the capability gaps in the air manoeuvre of the WAH-64 Longbow Apache programme; and if he will make a statement. [44962]

Dr. Moonie: The WAH-64 Longbow Apache programme is a fundamental element of the evolving air manoeuvre capability. It represents a quantum leap in capability, in range of equipment and complexity of the weapon systems. To ensure that Apache contributes fully to air manoeuvre, the capability of this formidable weapon is kept under continuous review. Changes to the programme are recommended should any capability gaps be identified.

Computer Hackers

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what steps are being taken to prevent computer hackers gaining access to the Defence System through the shared working environment used with Future Offensive Air System staff; and if he will make a statement; [44965]

(2) what assessment has been made of the shortcomings of using the shared working environment for Future Offensive Air System staff; and if he will make a statement. [44966]

Dr. Moonie: The Future Offensive Air System Shared Working Environment enables the Ministry of Defence and industry to work more effectively together in line with the principles of Smart Acquisition. The system incorporates proven security technology that has been extensively tested, and has the necessary security accreditation for the data held. This accreditation included an assessment of the risks from computer hackers. Although the system connects MOD and industry users, security mechanisms prevent unauthorised access from the Shared Working Environment to other defence information systems.

MoD Housing

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much money has been spent on *(a)* building new MoD housing, *(b)* demolishing MoD housing, *(c)* rebuilding MoD housing and *(d)* PFI housing projects year by year since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [44969]

Dr. Moonie: The following tables give details of the amount spent by the Defence Housing Executive by project type and year:

Building new Ministry of Defence housing (adding to the existing stock)

Financial year	*£ million*
1996–97	Nil
1997–98	8.285
1998–99	6.398
1999–2000	4.123
2000–01	0.239
2001–02	0.540

Demolishing MoD housing (clearing sites and reducing stock)

Financial year	*£ million*
1996–97	Nil
1997–98	1.509
1998–99	Nil
1999–2000	Nil
2000–01	0.017
2001–02	0.081

Rebuilding MoD housing (demolition/rebuild)

Financial year	*£ million*
1996–97	2.244
1997–98	1.271
1998–99	1.369
1999–2000	11.960
2000–01	19.146
2001–02	24.166

Insufficient information is available to separate demolition costs from upgrade costs on demolition/rebuild projects.

Public private partnership housing projects

Financial year	*£ million*
1996–97	Nil
1997–98	Nil
1998–99	Nil
1999–2000	2.7
2000–01	9.7
2001–02	10.6
	(to end Feb. 2002)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many service personnel and their families were housed in private sector accommodation in each year between 1992 and 1997; and if he will make a statement. [45440]

Dr. Moonie: The information is not available. Prior to 1997 Service personnel who were required to live in private sector accommodation made their own arrangements and were paid an Excess Rent Allowance (ERA). No records are held of the numbers of Service personnel who were in receipt of ERA.

Shoeburyness

Mr. Ivan Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of the complaints relating to alleged damage as a result of the activities at the Shoeburyness ranges have been substantiated. [45115]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Ivan Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the total cost of the payments made in each of the five years to householders in the Tendring Peninsula relating to alleged damage to their properties as a result of the activities at the Shoeburyness ranges. [45114]

Dr. Moonie: The total cost of payments made to householders in the Tendering peninsula area in each of the last five years is listed in the following table. The figure for 2001 includes payments up to September 2001, the latest period for which information is currently available. When I have information for the remainder of 2001 I will write to my hon. Friend.

Year	*Amount £*
2001 (to September)	1,870.00
2000	2,930.08
1999	2,881.32
1998	12,290.73
1997	3,338.00

Munitions Exports

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of whether the export of munitions from the USA to the United Kingdom will be subject to the 2001 Security Assistance Act going through the US Congress. [45102]

Dr. Moonie: The contents of United States legislation are of course a matter for the United States Government. However, I understand that the primary purpose of the draft legislation is not the control of exports; in that respect it does not, in its current form, change the contents or the scope of the US Munitions List, though it does refer to it. It includes some policy recommendations relating to the administration of the United States' export control process but is more concerned with the funding of the United State security assistance programmes with various countries, including non-proliferation work.

FYR Macedonia

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what military aid is being given by the UK Government to the FYR Macedonia; and what plans his Department has to give military aid to the FYR Macedonia in the next six months. [45243]

Mr. Ingram: A small number of British military strategic planners are providing advice to the Macedonian Ministry of Defence. These planners are led by a United Kingdom Defence Adviser to the Macedonian government, whose role is to advise on Macedonia's NATO Membership Action Plan and on improvements in the Macedonian government's ability to carry out defence planning. The UK provides similar Defence Advisors to the Ministry of Defences of other NATO aspirant nations.

We have a well-established outreach programme of bilateral defence assistance with Macedonia, designed to help establish democratically accountable, cost-effective armed forces that are capable of contributing to national, regional and international security. The programme includes English language training in the UK and at the Military Academy in Skopje; multi-national seminars and courses; arms control training; and assistance with personnel and budgeting matters.

Recently a British Military Advisory and Training Team provided advice on how to conduct low-level counter-insurgency training for the Macedonian Rapid Reaction Brigade, so as to meet Western standards for such training. We expect this programme to continue over the next months and will investigate what military assistance we can best provide for the Macedonian for the longer term.

During 2001 the UK donated a range of non-lethal military equipment to the Macedonian Government. The equipment gifted was body armour, mine detectors, global positioning system devices, a remote control bomb disposal vehicle, and parachute flares.

RAF Lyneham

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when contracts will be issued for the construction of *(a)* the new gym and *(b)* the community centre on the NAAFI site at RAF Lyneham. [45458]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 25 March 2002]*: The construction of the Physical Training and Recreation Centre and the Community Centre has been postponed pending the outcome of the Strategic Review. The study will report in the summer and I will be in a position to answer this more fully at that time.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what infrastructure improvements are *(a)* in hand and *(b)* pending at RAF Lyneham. [45459]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 25 March 2002]*: All of the planned infrastructure improvements at RAF Lyneham have been completed for this Financial Year, and only emergency maintenance is currently being undertaken. The number of emergency improvements changes on a daily basis but on 20 March 2002, we estimate that there were some 60 such works being undertaken at the Station. The number of infrastructure improvements runs into many thousands over the year sine they are often very small-scale tasks. If there are specific improvements in which the hon. Member is interested, I will provide details of those.

Harrier Aircraft

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much the upgrade of the RAF's GR7s and Royal Navy's FA2 Sea Harriers to type GR9 Harriers will cost; and if he will make a statement. [46031]

Mr. Ingram: I refer to the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 13 March 2002, *Official Report*, columns 1166–1167W.

The Royal Navy's Sea Harrier fleet will be withdrawn from service by 2006 and are not part of the Harrier GR9 upgrade programme.

Sexism

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the measures introduced to combat sexism in the armed forces; and if he will make a statement. [46028]

Mr. Ingram: The Armed Forces strive to provide an environment in which every individual is respected and valued and given the opportunity to realise their potential without fear of harassment or unlawful discrimination. All three Services have in place complaints procedures, issue guidance on behaviour, undertake training, and appoint Equal Opportunities advisers in every unit. They monitor results through attitude surveys, focus groups, and longer-term studies. Although the number of complaints of sexual harassment and discrimination are small the Services see no room for complacency and aim to confront unacceptable behaviour at every opportunity.

Helicopter Crash (South Armagh)

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on *(a)* the casualties injured in the RAF Puma helicopter crash in South Armagh on 17 March and *(b)* the probable causes of the crash. [46369]

Mr. Ingram: Out of the three RAF crew and six passengers on board, seven were taken to hospital for treatment following the crash, four of whom were detained. As of Monday 25 March one of the casualties remains listed as seriously ill. Our thoughts are with all of the inured.

A Royal Air Force Board of Inquiry has been convened to determine the cause of the accident. However, in the interim, I can confirm that it was not terrorist related.

MoD Police

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the sites from which MoD police have been withdrawn from security duties since 1997, stating in each case the *(a)* reason for withdrawal, *(b)* company who have replaced MoD police duties, *(c)* terms of the contract for such companies, including cost to the MoD per year, *(d)* expected savings to his Department and *(e)* the contingency for armed cover; and if he will make a statement. [44721]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Chinook Crash

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what legal advice he has recently requested in relation to his Department's review of the handling of the investigation into the crash of the ZD 576 Chinook helicopter in June 1994; and if he will make a statement. [45861]

Mr. Ingram: The House of Lords Select Committee expressed the opinion that the applicable standard of proof of absolutely no doubt whatsoever was not met by the Board of Inquiry finding. In the light of these comments, I have asked for further opinion in order to satisfy myself as to whether or not the legal approach adopted at the time was fully justified.

Deployments

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of the armed forces are deployed in Northern Ireland, broken down by service; and what the equivalent figures were a year ago. [46306]

Mr. Ingram: The number of Armed Force personnel, broken down by service, under the command of the General Officer Commanding Northern Ireland (GOC NI) and stationed in Northern Ireland at the 28 February 2001 and 2002 is set out in the following table.

As at 28 February	*Army*	*RAF*	*Navy*
2001	12,271	1,084	176
2002	12,477	1,046	176

The level of Armed Force personnel in Northern Ireland fluctuates throughout the year depending on the security situation. The GOC NI also has under his command troops that are rear based in Great Britain that can be called forward to the Province as and when required. In addition other troops can be made available to the GOC NI from Land Command if required for example during the marching season.

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the strength of the armed forces deployed in *(a)* the Balkans, *(b)* Macedonia, *(c)* Kosovo and *(d)* Bosnia (i) is and (ii) was a year ago. [46304]

Mr. Ingram: Some 4,900 UK Armed Forces personnel are currently deployed to the Balkans region. Of these 3,000 are deployed for KFOR operations, and 1,900 are deployed for SFOR operations. These numbers are approximate only. Around a dozen Armed Forces personnel are deployed to Macedonia.

One year ago, some 4,800 UK Armed Forces personnel were deployed to the Balkans region. Of these 3,100 were deployed for KFOR operations and 1,700 were deployed for SFOR operations. These numbers are approximate only. In addition, a Defence Attache, a Defence Adviser and two staff assistants were deployed to Macedonia.

TREASURY

Reserve Expenditure

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will provide a breakdown for each financial year since April 1992 of *(a)* the proportion and *(b)* the amount in real terms spent from the reserves. [34141]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The level of the Reserve within the overall control limit on departmental spending (Departmental Expenditure Limits since 1998–99, Control Totals previous to that) is set out at the beginning of each financial year in the Financial Statement and Budget Report. Outturn against departments' individual control limits, including any additions made from the Reserve, is given each summer in the Public Expenditure Outturn White Paper.

Tax Credits (Fraud)

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the answer of 31 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 515W, how many of the 28 persons prosecuted for working families tax credit fraud were women; and how many of the eight persons receiving a custodial sentence were women. [35257]

Dawn Primarolo: Twenty two of the 28 people prosecuted for WFTC fraud are women. Seven people have received a custodial sentence, of whom five are women. Proportionally, these figures for women are lower in both cases than the proportion of tax credit claimants who are women.

PPP Consultants

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the total external spending by his Department was on public-private partnership consultants in each of the last four years; how many full-time equivalent consultants were employed over this period; how many billed consultancy days there were per year; what the implied average cost of each PPP consultant was; how many consultancy firms were used by the Department over this period; and if he will make a statement. [43195]

Mr. Andrew Smith: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 4 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 702W.

G-CAT/C-CAT

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the public bodies which have used *(a)* G-CAT and *(b)* C-CAT in the last two years; and if he will make a statement. [45444]

Mr. Andrew Smith: In the period of the last two years usage of the G-CAT and S-CAT has been as follows:

333 public sector organisations used the original G-Cat contract, which expired on 30 September 2001;

1,921 public sector organisations have used the new G-Cat contracts, which became live on 1 October 2001;

108 public sector organisations have used the S-CAT contracts.

A list of the organisations using each scheme is being placed in the Library of the House.

Inland Revenue

Bob Russell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which Minister has responsibility for dealing with complaints about the observation of the rules laid down by the Civil Service Code and Civil Service Management Code by the staff of the Board of the Inland Revenue. [46492]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave him on 12 March, *Official Report*, column 964W.

Valuation Office Agency

Barbara Follett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what targets for the Valuation Office Agency will be set for the year 2002–03. [46857]

Dawn Primarolo: I have set the following key performance indicators for the Valuation Office Agency:

Valuation Accuracy

Contain reductions in 2,000 local Rating Lists to less than 7.5 per cent. in respect of compiled list appeals settled in 2002–03, and to a maximum of 4.7 per cent. of the total compiled list rateable value over the entire life of the 2000 Rating Lists.

Programming

Make draft programmes available by the 30 July each year, publish final programmes by 1 October each year; and to adhere to the start date in 95 per cent. of cases.

Other major tasks

As a step on the path to more public acceptance of valuations in Revaluation 2005, implement by April 2003 the recommendations coming out of the evaluation of the local ratepayer panels pilots.

Customer satisfaction

Improve customer satisfaction, as indicated by annual customer surveys, year on year. In 2002–03, the target will be 85 per cent. satisfaction.

Value for money

Improve value for money by achieving annual productivity gains of at least 2.5 per cent. per year.

Land Services

Bring in fee income to cover its share of VOA costs and to increase income by 10 per cent. year on year. For 2002–03 the income target will be £14.8 million.

People satisfaction

Improve annual satisfaction ratings given by staff for working with VOA. In 2002–03 we will undertake a survey which will act as the baseline against which future performance will be assessed.

Financial "break even"

Recover full resource costs, including a return on capital of 6 per cent., from fees and charges.

Further details are contained in the Valuation Office Agency's Forward Plan, copies of which will be placed in the Library of the House on publication.

National Savings and Investments

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what action is being taken to reduce delays in repayments by National Savings and Investments. [45813]

Ruth Kelly: National Savings and Investments have experienced a higher volume of work across the board, which has caused Savings Certificates repayments to be slightly outside the timescale they aim to achieve. No other products are affected. They are taking this very seriously and have allocated additional staff to processing these payments to bring the back within normal timescales.

Seafarers (Income Tax)

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the case for extending seafarer income tax concessions. [46356]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government keeps all taxes under review and any changes will be made as part of the normal Budget process.

Share Incentive Schemes

Mr. Jack: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much was spent in *(a)* January, *(b)* February and *(c)* March on (i) national newspaper, (ii) regional newspaper and (iii) local newspaper advertisements to promote the use of share incentive schemes. [46366]

Dawn Primarolo: The press advertising campaign for the Share Incentive Plan (SIP) started on 2 March 2002 and is due to run until 4 April 2002. Hence no money was spent on press advertising in January and February.

The breakdown for the March/April expenditure is as follows:

	Cost £	VAT £	Total £
National Press	783,668.33	137,141.98	920,810.31
Regional Press	10,765.15	1,883.90	12,649.05
Specialist Press	29,494.27	5,161.50	34,655.77
National Press Production	18,667.45	952.25	21,933.94
Specialist Press Production	5,441.45	3,266.76	6,393.71

EU Budget

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which countries will be *(a)* gross and *(b)* net contributors to the European Union budget in 2002; how much they will each contribute in net terms; what the gross amount contributed to the European Union budget by each member state will be; and if he will make a statement. [46135]

Ruth Kelly: The Government's latest estimate of the United Kingdom's net contribution to the European Union budget in the financial year 2002–03 can be found in footnote two, table B13 (page 182) of the Pre-Budget Report (Cm5318). The Government does not forecast the contribution to the EU budget of other Member States. However, estimates of gross contributions by all Member States to the 2002 EU budget can be found at Table 7 (page 134) of the *Official Journal* (L29) of the European Communities (ISSN 0378-6978).

Heavily Indebted Poor Countries

Ms Drown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of the pledged UK contribution to the HIPC Trust Fund has been paid. [45187]

Clare Short: I have been asked to reply. The UK's pledge to the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Debt Initiative Trust Fund is US$221 million; in addition, our share of the EC contribution is a further US$85 million. So far, we have paid half of our contribution (US$110 million) into the Trust Fund to help the Regional Development Banks meet their share of HIPC costs. The UK contribution is paid on an as-needed basis, on request by the International Development Association (IDA), which is administering the Fund. As more countries complete the HIPC process in the coming year, we would expect to see further disbursement of our funds.

Customs (Newhaven)

Norman Baker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) on how many occasions since 1 January 2001 brigading teams have been sent to Newhaven; how many person-shifts were undertaken there by officers based elsewhere; and if he will make a statement;[45878]

(2) what percentage of ships arriving in Newhaven since 1 January 2001 have been subject to customs checks; and of those occasions, what percentage resulted in the discovery of *(a)* illicit tobacco, *(b)* illicit alcohol, *(c)* class A drugs, *(d)* wildlife products contrary to the terms of CITES and *(e)* illicit meat; and what has been the value of produce seized in each category; [45877]

(3) what plans there are to alter shift patterns amongst customs officers at Newhaven; and what the financial consequences of these changes will be; [45875]

(4) how many operational customs officers, excluding those undertaking purely office-based functions, are based at Newhaven. [45879]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answers 25 March 2002]*: It is not Customs law enforcement policy to disclose information on operational deployments of staff or the level or nature of checks at specific locations. However, the deployment, activities and working patterns of Customs staff at Newhaven and other locations are kept under constant review to ensure the most effective and efficient targeting of resources. Since January 2001, Customs officers operating at Newhaven have seized smuggled tobacco products with a total revenue value of around £215,500. Full details of Customs' seizures are published on a routine basis in their Departmental annual reports.

Aggregates Levy

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the European Commission has given state aids approval for the proposed phasing in of the Aggregates Levy in Northern Ireland. [46311]

Mr. Boateng: We are confident of getting state aid approval from the European Commission shortly for the phasing-in of the levy for aggregates used in processed products in Northern Ireland. The relief will be backdated to 1 April to ensure that no levy is paid on aggregate used to make these products in 2002–03.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the difference was between the price offered in reaching preferred bidder stage and the final contract price for the five largest PFI contracts let by his Department in each of the last four years; and if he will make a statement. [45595]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 25 March 2002]*: The difference between the price offered in reaching preferred bidder stage, and the final contract price for PFI contracts let in the last four years is £11 million per annum. The difference is primarily attributable to the Department's changing requirements between preferred bidder announcement and final contract award.

Money Laundering

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will assess the benefits of restricting the use of cash for payment for goods and services in excess of a determined figure as a means of tackling money laundering; and if he will make a statement. [46202]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 25 March 2002]*: HMT will shortly consult on proposals for revision of the 1993 Money Laundering Regulations, implementing the Second EC Money Laundering Directive and taking into account changes made in the Proceeds of Crime Bill. In this context we will be considering all options to tackle money laundering, in consultation with law enforcement agencies, industry stakeholders and consumers.

Public-Private Partnerships

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the difference was between the price offered in reaching preferred bidder stage and the final contract price for PPP contracts let by his Department in each of the last four years; and if he will make a statement. [45610]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 25 March 2002]*: The Department has not let any PPP contracts over the last four years.

Road Pricing (Lorries)

Chris Grayling: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects to make a statement on road pricing for lorries. [45300]

Mr. Boateng: The Government published a consultation document "Modernising the Taxation of Haulage" alongside Pre-Budget Report 2001. The consultation closed on 8 February. The Government is now considering all responses. Any changes to taxation policy would be a matter for the Budget.

Comprehensive Spending Review

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what action he *(a)* has taken and *(b)* plans to take to ensure that sustainable development concerns are integrated into the comprehensive spending review process; and if he will make a statement. [28296]

Mr. Andrew Smith: As part of their submission to the Spending Review, departments with a Public Service Agreement have been requested to produce a Sustainable Development Report identifying the sustainable development impacts of their policy priorities. Specific guidance on this aspect of the Spending Review has been circulated to departments and made publicly available. Departmental Sustainable Development Reports are one element of the Spending Review submissions that Ministers will consider and will contribute towards the wider evidence-base of the Spending Review.

Manufacturing Work Force

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list for each constituency in England the percentage of the work force engaged in manufacturing in *(a)* 1990, *(b)* 1997 and *(c)* at the most recent date for which figures are available. [46205]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Gordon Prentice, dated 25 March 2002:

Len Cook: As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent question about the percentage of the workforce engaged in manufacturing from 1990.

The available figures are for employee jobs and cover the years 1991, 1997 and 2000. I am placing an extraction from the Nomis database in the House of Commons Library. The Nomis database is available to Members and is accessible by Library staff.

Electoral Registers

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Harris) of 31 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 450W, on electoral registers, what guidance he has given to financial institutions needing to obtain electoral registers to carry out their obligations under the Money Laundering Regulations; and if he will make a statement. [46451]

Ruth Kelly: Guidance notes advising financial institutions how to fulfil their obligations under money laundering legislation are produced by industry associations such as the Joint Money Laundering Steering Group, rather than by the Government. HM Treasury is working closely with DTLR, which has lead responsibility for electoral matters, to ensure that institutions are able to meet their legal requirements under any new regulations on sale of the electoral register.

Parliamentary Questions

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will reply to the hon. member for Truro and St. Austell's question of 15 January concerning sustainable development and the 2002 spending review; and if he will make a statement. [46574]

Mr. Andrew Smith: I have done so today and I have also written to the hon. Gentleman concerning his earlier question.

SCOTLAND

Correspondence

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what the average response time was for responding to departmental correspondence; what percentage of letters took longer than one month for a response; and what percentage took longer than three months for a response in each of the last five years. [37450]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999.

The information is collected in such a format where calculating the average response time could only be obtained at disproportionate cost. However, information relating to our own 15 working day response target is as follows:

in 1999, out of 409 cases, 81.42 per cent. were replied to within the 15 day target;

in 2000, out of 616 cases, 75.49 per cent. were replied to within the 15 day target;

in 2001, out of 408 cases, 74.26 per cent. were replied to within the 15 day target.

in 1999, 0.73 per cent. of cases took longer than one month for a response; in 2000, no cases took longer than one month for a response; and in 2001 4.41 per cent. took longer than one month for a response.

in no cases has the department taken longer than three months to respond.

Capita

Mr. Boris Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many contracts the Department has with Capita; and how much they are worth. [38371]

Mrs. Liddell: My Department has no contracts with Capita Group.

Mr. Boris Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will list the contracts that have been awarded to the Capita Group by the Department. [39336]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999.

Since that date, no contracts have been awarded to the Capita Group by my Department.

Ministerial Meetings

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) when she plans to meet Railtrack; and how many times she has met them since becoming Secretary of State for Scotland; [39898]

(2) when she plans to meet the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council; and how many times she has met it since becoming Secretary of State for Scotland; [40346]

(3) when she plans to meet Comunn Nu Gaidhlig; and how many times she has met it since becoming Secretary of State for Scotland; [39886]

(4) when she plans to meet the management of BBC Scotland; and how many times she has met it since becoming Secretary of State for Scotland; [40347]

(5) when she plans to meet the Scottish CBI; and how many times she has met it since becoming Secretary of State for Scotland; [39877]

(6) when she plans to meet the National Air Traffic Services; and how many times she has met it since becoming Secretary of State for Scotland; [39879]

(7) when she plans to meet the Scottish Environment Protection Agency; and how many times she has met it since becoming Secretary of State for Scotland; [39880]

(8) when she plans to meet Highlands and Islands Enterprise; and how many times she has met it since becoming Secretary of State for Scotland; [40350]

(9) when she plans to meet The Wise Group; and how many times she has met it since becoming Secretary of State for Scotland; [39878]

(10) when she plans to meet Scottish National Heritage; and how many times she has met it since becoming Secretary of State for Scotland; [40345]

(11) when she plans to meet the British Council in Scotland; and how many times she has met them since becoming Secretary of State for Scotland; [39885]

(12) when she plans to meet Scottish Business in the Community; and how many times she has met them since becoming Secretary of State for Scotland; [39887]

(13) when she plans to meet the Law Society of Scotland; and how many times she has met them since becoming Secretary of State for Scotland; [39888]

(14) when she plans to meet the Gaelic Broadcasting Committee; and how many times she has met it since becoming Secretary of State for Scotland; [40348]

(15) when she plans to meet Scotrail; and how many times she has met it since becoming Secretary of State for Scotland; [39890]

(16) when she plans to meet the Scottish Police Federation; and how many times she has met it since becoming Secretary of State for Scotland; [39899]

(17) when she plans to meet Forest Enterprise; and how many times she has met it since becoming Secretary of State for Scotland; [39881]

(18) when she plans to meet Scottish Enterprise; and how many times she has met it since becoming Secretary of State for Scotland; [39883]

(19) when she plans to meet the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organisation; and how many times she has met it since becoming Secretary of State for Scotland; [39884]

(20) when she plans to meet British Energy plc; and how many times she has met it since becoming Secretary of State for Scotland; [39895]

(21) when she plans to meet The Planning Exchange; and how many times she has met it since becoming Secretary of State for Scotland; [39882]

(22) when she plans to meet the Institute of Directors in Scotland; and how many times she has met it since becoming Secretary of State for Scotland; [39876]

(23) when she plans to meet COSLA; and how many times she has met it since becoming Secretary of State for Scotland; [39889]

(24) when she plans to meet British Telecom in Scotland; and how many times she has met it since becoming Secretary of State for Scotland; [40344]

(25) when she plans to meet Scottish Engineering; and how many times she has met it since becoming Secretary of State for Scotland; [40349]

(26) when she plans to meet the Scottish Chambers of Commerce; and how many times she has met it since becoming Secretary of State for Scotland. [39875]

Mrs. Liddell: I refer the hon. Member to my answer of 25 March.

Winter Fuel Allowance

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps she is taking to maximise the take-up of the winter-fuel allowance in Scotland. [45341]

Mr. Foulkes: Most people who are eligible for the Winter Fuel Payment do not have to claim. For those people who do need to claim, or who have other queries about the Payments, the Department for Work and Pensions have set up a Winter Fuel Payment help-line; the number is 08459 15 15 15. The DWP have also placed advertisements in the press, issued leaflets and posters and placed information on the internet.

Euro 2008

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what support has been offered by her Department to the Scottish Executive in respect of its bid to host the Euro 2008 football championships. [45405]

Mr. Foulkes: My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State and I have regular contact with the Scottish Executive on a wide range of issues. The Scotland Office supports the decision to pursue a joint bid with the Republic of Ireland. Hosting Euro 2008 would be a tremendous boost for Scotland and the UK, and the Scotland Office will provide appropriate assistance and support.

Election Expenses

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will publish the returns of election expenses for the 1999 elections to the Scottish Parliament. [45294]

Mrs. Liddell: I have no plans to publish these returns. As required under the Scottish Parliament (Elections etc) Order 1999, the returns of election expenses for the elections to the Scottish Parliament in 1999 were made available for inspection for two years following their receipt. Notices giving details of the times and places at which returns could be inspected were also published as required.

Consultants

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much her Department has spent on external consultants in each of the past five years. [46036]

Mrs. Liddell: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Buckingham on 7 March, *Official Report*, column 511W.

Asbestos-related Diseases

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent representations she has received from the Iron Trades Management Services concerning the non-payment of insurance claims to victims of asbestos-related diseases; and what the planned time scale is for future progress on resolving the issue. [45965]

Mrs. Liddell: I made a full statement of the action I have taken to date on all aspects of this matter at the Westminster Hall adjournment debate on 19 March, initiated by my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Anniesland.

Policing

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what discussions she has had with the Scottish Police Federation concerning the pay and conditions proposed to police officers by the Home Secretary; [45960]

(2) what discussions she has had with the Scottish Executive concerning the pay and conditions proposed to police officers by the Home Secretary. [45961]

Mrs. Liddell: Police pay and conditions in Scotland are a matter for the Scottish Executive. I have had no discussions with either the Executive or the Scottish Police Federation.

Rail Links

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent representations she has made to the *(a)* Strategic Rail Authority and *(b)* Scottish Executive on developing rail links at (i) Glasgow and (ii) Edinburgh International Airports. [45964]

Mrs. Liddell: I have regular discussions with Scottish Executive Ministers on a wide range of issues.

In their recent strategic plan, the SRA highlighted as a medium term priority an investigation of the development of rail links to both Glasgow and Edinburgh Airports.

The Scottish Executive with others, including the Strategic Rail Authority and DTLR, have commissioned an economic and engineering study into rail links to Glasgow and Edinburgh airports. The final phase of the report is expected to be completed in the Autumn.

Scottish Airports

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent discussions she has had with the Scottish Executive concerning the number of flights from Scottish airports to those in the UK, Europe and North America. [45962]

Mrs. Liddell: I have regular discussions with Scottish Executive Ministers on a wide range of issues. I also held a "summit" last December with airlines and other interested parties to discuss the prospect of further direct flights from Scottish airports.

As part of a wider consultation on the future development of UK air services, the Government and the Scottish Executive will shortly issue a joint consultation document on air services in Scotland. The document will present the key information to allow an informed and structured debate about future air service and airport development in Scotland.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Gender Pay Gap

Mr. Bercow: To ask the President of the Council what assessment he has made of the extent of the gender pay gap amongst staff in his Department. [40994]

Mr. Robin Cook: My department uses the pay system operated by the Cabinet Office. Accordingly, I refer the hon. Member to the Answer given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary to the Cabinet Office on 12 March 2001, *Official Report*, column 956W.

New Deal

Mr. Bercow: To ask the President of the Council (1) how many people have been employed by his Department in each of the last three years under *(a)* the New Deal for Young People, *(b)* the New Deal for the Over 50s and *(c)* the New Deal for Lone Parents; and at what cost, listed by category, to public funds; [44923]

(2) how many people employed by his Department under the New Deal for Young People in each of the last four years have subsequently *(a)* found unsubsidised employment for more than 13 weeks and *(b)* returned to jobseeker's allowance or other benefits. [44904]

Mr. Robin Cook: My department has employed one person under the New Deal for Over 50's; who is now a permanent member of staff. This was at no additional cost to my Department. My Department has not yet employed a member of staff under the New Deal for Young People or the New Deal for Lone Parents.

School Visits

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the President of the Council if he will bring forward proposals to provide financial assistance to facilitate visits to Parliament by school and youth groups from constituencies located long distances from Westminster. [46274]

Mr. Robin Cook: I have no such proposals, nor could I realistically hold out hope that such substantial expenditure could be found within the present House vote.

PRIVY COUNCIL

Correspondence

Mr. Bercow: To ask the President of the Council what his target time will be in 2002–03 *(a)* to reply to letters from hon. Members and *(b)* for the officials in his office to reply to letters received directly from members of the public. [44953]

Robin Cook: I have no plans to change my Department's 15-day target in replying to Members' correspondence, and 20-day target for public correspondence.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

HIV/AIDS

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the Government have done since 1997 to assist countries with AIDS and HIV to gain access to care and treatment; what antiretroviral drugs have been provided to Third World countries; and if she will make a statement. [46168]

Clare Short: My Department has committed significant resources to support a range of HIV/AIDS programmes, including support for national strategic HIV programmes particularly in Africa and Asia. We are also supporting the development of health systems to effectively deliver care, including home-based and palliative care. In parallel, we are supporting work to build a solid evidence base to inform effective and responsible provision of ART in developing countries. Where functioning health systems do exist we are seeking to help governments to consider the issues surrounding the introduction of ART in the most cost effective and equitable way.

We have also pledged $200 million to the Global Fund to fight AIDS, TB and Malaria (GFATM). The aim of the fund is to support the purchase of essential commodities for tackling HIV/AIDS, TB and Malaria.

Our Working Group on Access to Medicines is bringing together Government, industry and others to find ways of getting medicines for HIV/AIDS and other diseases to the world's poorest at affordable prices. Better health systems are of course vital for getting drugs to the poor. We have committed over £1 billion to health systems strengthening in developing countries since 1997.

Burma

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the Government are doing *(a)* to help relocate Burmese people who have been internally displaced and *(b)* to restore democracy in Burma. [45075]

Clare Short: The UK contributes to the costs of providing safe refuge and assistance both for refugees and those internally displaced within Burma. In 2001–02 my Department increased funding to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (£805,000), the Burmese Border Consortium (£350,000) and the International Commission of the Red Cross (£800,000) to support their work with refugees on the Thai/Burma border and those internally displaced.

The UK has long been at the forefront of the international community's efforts to bring about national reconciliation, respect for human rights and democracy in Burma. With EU partners we have adopted a Common Position which includes an arms embargo, a ban on high level visits, on items that might be used for torture, and on non-humanitarian assistance, a visa ban and an asset freeze on members of the regime. The EC has also suspended Burma's trading privileges in response to the use of forced labour in Burma. We are also active in the United Nations, co-sponsoring resolutions at UNGA and UNHCR and actively supporting the UN Secretary General's Special Envoy to Burma's effort to facilitate political progress. An EU Troika visited Burma 19–22 March to gauge the latest political developments and press for progress to be made.

Afghanistan

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what her Department's latest estimate is of access to humanitarian food aid in Afghanistan; and if she will make a statement. [45369]

Clare Short: Since October 2001, the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) has delivered 370,000 metric tonnes of emergency food aid to the region; over 300,000 metric tonnes of which has been distributed within Afghanistan. WFP assistance is now successfully reaching 6.6 million people in Afghanistan. Needs have been met in most areas, but there remain pockets of unmet needs in places difficult to access due to poor weather and insecurity.

In response to this, WFP is deploying six helicopter-borne rapid assessment teams for assessment and delivery of emergency aid to remote areas in

Afghanistan. The teams are tasked with streamlining food aid operations, assessing health conditions, investigating non-food emergency needs, monitoring food distribution and verifying reports by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) on earlier food deliveries. If necessary, the helicopters will also allow WFP to airlift a limited amount of food aid on an emergency basis.

We have contributed £6 million towards WFP's operations inside Afghanistan—for both direct procurement and transportation of food, and for logistical support to help speed up the movement of food aid into the country. We have also supported a number of agencies—the UN, Red Cross and non-governmental organisations (NGOs)—for supplementary feeding and secondary distribution of food inside Afghanistan.

Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what financial aid the Government plans to give the FYR Macedonia in the next six months. [45239]

Clare Short: We are providing £3 million to the Government of Macedonia for bilateral balance of payments support. The EC has allocated euros 68 million financial aid of which the UK share is £7.93 million.

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) what economic aid has been given to the Government of FYR Macedonia by the UK Government in each of the last three years; [45246]

(2) what development aid has been given by the British Government to the FYR Macedonia in each of the last two years. [45240]

Clare Short: During the period 1998 to 2001 DFID has provided £15.041 million of aid of which £12.345 million was humanitarian support. During the same period the EC has provided £139.8 million of assistance of which the UK share is £26.72 million.

International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance

Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will affiliate the United Kingdom to the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance. [46295]

Clare Short: My Department is currently discussing with the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance the possibility of working together on specific topics. We are not at this stage considering affiliation.

Commonwealth Development Corporation

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development when she expects the public-private partnership of the Commonwealth Development Corporation to be completed. [44756]

Clare Short: The Government's objectives for CDC is to mobilise increased private investment in developing countries. This is a long-term project which will take many years to complete.

New Deal

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many people have been employed by her Department in each of the last three years under *(a)* the New Deal for Young People, *(b)* the New Deal for the Over 50s and *(c)* the New Deal for Lone Parents; and at what cost, listed by category, to public funds. [44909]

Clare Short: The information is as follows:

	1999	*2000*	*2001*
New Deal for Young People	Nil	2	2
New Deal for the Over 50s	Nil	2	Nil
New Deal for Lone Parents	Nil	1	Nil

The cost to public funds, excluding salary costs, was £1,950 in the over 50s category, and £1,080 in the young people category, all incurred in the year 2000.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many people employed by her Department under the New Deal for Young People in each of the last four years have subsequently *(a)* found unsubsidised employment for more than 13 weeks and *(b)* returned to jobseekers' allowance or other benefits. [45087]

Clare Short: The information is as follows:

(a) None in 1998 or 1999, one in 2000 and two in 2001;

(b) none in any of the last four years.

Commodity Dependence

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what help her Department is providing to people dependent on the sale of commodities in the developing world. [43667]

Clare Short: The production and sale of commodities is very important to the livelihoods of people in developing countries. For a significant number of the least developed countries commodities account for more than 50 per cent. of merchandise exports. Price volatility is a characteristic of many commodity markets (such as cocoa, coffee and tea) and reflects changing patterns of consumption and production.

DFID believes that better livelihoods for poor people must be at the centre of any strategy for poverty reduction. DFID is currently supporting a significant number of livelihood programmes and projects throughout the developing world. These seek to provide direct benefits to poor people, including those whose livelihoods are linked to commodities. The range of commodities involved is extensive and includes fish, cut flowers, horticultural products, cereals, beverages, oilseeds, as well as roots and tubers.

Improving developing country access to international and regional markets is very important to encourage more processing of commodities and more value added. DFID is working with developing countries to strengthen their capacity in trade. We are also working to tackle tariff and non-tariff barriers to developing country exports, especially those that exist in the

European Union. DFID provides support to initiatives that provide more timely market information, contributes to improvements in essential infrastructure (including energy and transport) and works to ensure appropriate legal and regulatory frameworks exist to promote investment.

Human Rights Act

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many cases have been brought against her Department under the Human Rights Act 1998; and what has been the cost in *(a)* legal fees to defend cases and *(b)* compensation payments. [45058]

Clare Short: There have been no such cases.

Aid Funding

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what aid funding was made available by her Department to countries during 2001. [43941]

Clare Short: In 2000–01, the last complete financial year, my Department spent £1.4 billion on bilateral development assistance in 167 countries and £1.3 billion through our donations to multilateral development agencies. In 2001–02 bilateral spending is estimated to rise to £1.65 billion in a similar number of countries while our contribution to multilateral development agencies is projected to increase to £1.4 billion.

Prison Labour

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the countries with which her Department had discussions in 1998 with regard to the use of prison labour for making goods imported into the United Kingdom; and if she will make a statement. [43925]

Clare Short: My Department has had no such discussions, in 1998 or since.

Third World

Mrs. Irene Adams: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what action the Government are taking to alleviate illiteracy in the Third World. [43931]

Clare Short: Helping developing countries achieve the millennium development goal of universal primary education by 2015 is DFID's major focus for tackling illiteracy. Increasing access to good quality primary education and ensuring that children are literate when they leave school is essential for development and poverty reduction. Since 1997 the Government has committed over £650 million to support sustainable education systems in developing countries able to provide high quality primary education for all children. We will do more.

We will also give increasing attention to helping developing countries tackle adult illiteracy and poverty reduction. Improving literacy practice for adults continues to be an integral part of many different sectoral programmes supported by DFID, such as transport, water, health, small business development, environment, livelihoods and governance. Our new Background Briefing paper, *"Improving livelihoods for the poor: the role of literacy"*, examines the way in which literacy features in such programmes and the key issues that have emerged as different parts of DFID have considered the ways in which literacy and poverty interrelate. It highlights principles of good practice (drawing on recent experience), examines potential entry points and identifies challenges for DFID in giving greater priority to literacy in our commitment to poverty reduction.

Zimbabwe

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on her development programme in Zimbabwe following the election results. [44754]

Clare Short: The election outcome is likely to accelerate poverty and hunger in Zimbabwe. The UK is continuing to work with others to urge policy changes on the part of the Zimbabwe Government to halt the catastrophic decline in agriculture, the economy, and social services. In parallel, we are providing humanitarian assistance through the UN and non-governmental channels, and helping to address the HIV/AIDS epidemic that affects 1 in 3 adults.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much money her Department has pledged to the World Food Programme to help deal with food shortages in Zimbabwe; and how much has been spent. [44894]

Clare Short: We have pledged £6 million to the UN Humanitarian Assistance Programme, of which £3.5 million is for food. Of the contribution for food £2.5 million has been spent. We have also contributed £86,000 toward the cost of the UN's Relief and Recovery Unit in Harare which is helping to appraise emergency needs, plan, negotiate and monitor emergency assistance on behalf of the UN and donors.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what difficulties her Department is facing in the delivery of humanitarian aid to Zimbabwe; and what action is being taken to overcome such difficulties. [46275]

Clare Short: DFID has provided £4 million to partner NGOs to feed 400,000 children and vulnerable adults for the past six months. The main difficulty has been in obtaining adequate supplies of maize. With growing national shortages suppliers have been unable to fulfil their contracts. However, the NGOs, working collectively, are generally managing to make alternative arrangements to import food directly.

DFID has worked closely with the UN's Humanitarian Assistance and Recovery Programme, providing £6 million for both food and medical supplies. The impact of this has been hampered by the lateness of the Zimbabwe Government appeal, the time taken to assemble the UN team, and the sparseness of donor responses.

As a wider national food emergency looms, DFID is keeping the situation under review, though what can be done will be greatly affected by the extent to which the Government of Zimbabwe allows a conducive policy environment.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development whether humanitarian aid provided to Zimbabwe has been seized by Government militia in the last 12 months. [46276]

Clare Short: We have had no reports of humanitarian aid being seized. There have been isolated incidents where militias have attempted to include themselves on the list of beneficiaries, though in all cases the non-governmental organisations implementing programmes have managed to have them removed peacefully.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what conclusions she has drawn from the recent elections in Zimbabwe in respect of the New Partnership for African Development. [44199]

Clare Short: The situation in Zimbabwe highlights the damage caused by abusive economic and political governance to economic development in Africa. The decision to suspend Zimbabwe from the Commonwealth demonstrates that the leaders involved in developing NEPAD understand the damage the Mugabe regime has done to the people of Zimbabwe and to African development.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what changes she will make to her development policy to countries in southern Africa following the election in Zimbabwe. [44755]

Clare Short: None at present. Our co-operation with southern African countries will continue to be based on our understanding of their needs and policies. We will continue to provide humanitarian and HIV/AIDS related assistance in Zimbabwe. A further decline in the Zimbabwe economy, and the food shortages there which are likely to persist into next year, will have an impact on the economies of its neighbours which all development agencies will take into account.

India

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) what assessment she has made of the impact of the Vision 2020 project in Andhra Pradesh in India on the local population as regards *(a)* displacement of population, *(b)* loss of homes and *(c)* loss of employment; [46280]

(2) what assessment she has made of the environmental impact of the Vision 2020 project in Andhra Pradesh in India as regards *(a)* GM crops and *(b)* use of pesticides; [46279]

(3) if she will make a statement on the sustainability of the Vision 2020 project in Andhra Pradesh, India. [46281]

Clare Short: I refer the hon. Member to my answer to Ms Joan Ruddock on the subject of Andhra Pradesh and Vision 2020, *Official Report*, column 477W, 20 July 2001. Vision 2020 is not a project, and it is not possible for an assessment to be made of its impact on the issues identified in the questions.

Monterrey Conference

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the United Kingdom's contribution to the Monterrey United Nations Conference on Financing for Development on 18 March. [46294]

Clare Short: The United Kingdom played a leading role in the preparatory process leading up to the Monterrey Conference in helping to formulate the EU position for the Conference. The EU worked hard during the negotiations of the text of the outcomes document: the "Monterrey Consensus". This is a good document, in which developing countries commit to set in place the pro-poor economic policies and good governance that is required to attract foreign direct investment and mobilise domestic resources; and donor countries commit to provide enhanced support to developing countries through providing more and better quality oda, through opening up markets to trade access in the context of the Doha process, and through ensuring that the HIPC process provides sustainable debt relief. The UK also played a leading role in developing the package of commitments announced by the EU at Monterrey, which includes a commitment to increase EU aid volume from an average of 0.33 per cent. to an average of 0.39 per cent. by 2006—which represents an additional 7 billion dollars per annum. Baroness Amos and I represented the UK at the Conference itself. I chaired a round table on financing sustainable development and participated in a round table on partnerships. Baroness Amos held a press conference to publicise the DFID/HTM paper on the case for aid and participated in a round table on coherence.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on her Department's policy in respect of sustainable development, with specific reference to the United Kingdom's participation in the Monterrey Conference on 18 March. [46293]

Clare Short: In the "Monterrey Consensus" document which was agreed at the Financing for Development Conference, the nations of the world agreed that developing countries need to set in place pro-poor economic policies and good governance in order to attract foreign direct investment and mobilise domestic resources. Donor countries need to provide more and better oda; provide better market access for developing country products through the Doha negotiations; ensure that the HIPC process provides heavily indebted poor countries with a sustainable exit from debt, and take concrete steps to give developing countries a stronger voice in the international financial architecture. The UK Government, throughout the Financing for Development process, has promoted the view that development assistance should be untied and should be targeted on poor countries with large numbers of poor people and good policies; and that donors should harmonise their procedures to reduce the burden on developing country governments; should move away from stand-alone projects towards direct support through government budgets where possible; should strengthen government accounting and audit capacity

so as to enable a greater use of budget support by donors; and should provide aid in support of country-owned poverty reduction strategies.

The Government believes that the Monterrey Consensus, alongside the WTO Doha Declaration, provides an excellent basis for a new global partnership to tackle poverty eradication and manage globalisation so that it works for all the world's people, including the poorest. We hope that the World Summit on Sustainable Development, at Johannesburg in September, will build on these outcomes, and help to identify means of implementation.

A full outline of how my department is contributing to the delivery of the Government's commitment to global sustainable development will be published in our Departmental Report next month. Priorities are set out in the two White Papers on International Development (which can be found on www.dfid.gov.uk or obtained from the DFID Public Enquiry Point). In addition, my department has considered the full sustainable development implications of its bid for resources as part of the Spending Review.

EU-funded Projects (Middle East)

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development which EU-funded projects in the *(a)* West Bank and *(b)* Gaza Strip have recently been damaged by Israeli retaliatory attacks; what the damage incurred was; and what the value of the damage sustained was. [46308]

Clare Short: The European Commission is currently assessing the damage caused to EU-funded projects by Israeli attacks. To date approximately 22 projects have been destroyed or seriously damaged, including basic infrastructure projects (schools, labs, tarmac, water supply). The most notable example is the destruction of the runway and buildings of Gaza airport. The latest estimate of damage is about €19 million.

I will write with details of the damaged or destroyed projects and place a copy in the Library of the House.

Lakshmi Mittal

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) how many loan applications her Department has received from *(a)* Mr. Lakshmi Mittal and *(b)* LNM Holdings, and referred to (i) the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and (ii) the Department for Trade and Industry; [43764]

(2) how many loan applications her Department has rejected from *(a)* Mr. Lakshmi Mittal and *(b)* LNM Holdings. [43763]

Clare Short: To the best of my knowledge, my Department has not received any direct applications for loans from *(a)* Mr. Lakshmi Mittal or *(b)* LNM Holdings.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) if she will support at the World Bank Mr. Lakshmi Mittal's expected application for a loan to make further payments to the Romanian Government for the SIDEX steel plant; [43768]

(2) what instructions she has received from the Office of the Prime Minister on support for Lakshmi Mittal's expected application for a loan from the World Bank to make further payments to the Romanian Government for the SIDEX steel plant. [43769]

Hilary Benn: To the best of my knowledge no such application has been made. If one is received Departmental officials will consider its merits in the usual way.

SIDEX

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what investigations into the conduct and financial stability of LNM/Ispat projects overseas were initiated by her Department before it decided to support the proposed loan by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development to assist the purchase of SIDEX in Romania. [44577]

Clare Short: Adherence to sound banking is one of EBRD's three core principles. The Bank routinely prepares rigorous financial analysis and integrity due diligence for all investments. We do not duplicate EBRD procedures.

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what conditions were attached to each of the loans given by the International Bank of Reconstruction and Development to LNM/Ispat for the acquisition of steel works with particular reference to those attached to the subsequent closure or sale of the steel works in question. [44482]

Clare Short: The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development has not made any loans to LNM/Ispat for the acquisition of steel works.

The International Finance Corporation made loans to Caribbean Ispat Ltd in Trinidad and Tobago in 1995 and to Ispat Karmet in Kazakhstan in 1997 for projects relating to steel works. The IFC negotiates appropriate financial and other conditions with individual clients.

Yugoslavia

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assistance her Department is providing to Yugoslavia to help that country deal with its refugee problem. [46267]

Clare Short: Humanitarian assistance in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, including assistance for refugees, is co-ordinated by the United Nations Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs, and the European Commission Humanitarian Affairs Office (ECHO). The UK provides funds for these agencies, including 19.7 per cent. of the ECHO budget.

We have already agreed with the FRY authorities that our bilateral programme will focus on providing technical assistance for institution and capacity building, and for economic and social reform, as described in our Country Strategy Paper. Within this strategy we are developing a £3.2 million social policy reform programme that will improve the delivery of social welfare, health, employment and education services. This programme pays particular attention to refugees and internally displaced persons. We are also

working closely with the World Bank in the design of a credit package aimed at improving social welfare, education and health services.

Zambia

Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development when she last visited Zambia; what assistance her Department is providing to Zambia; and if she will make a statement on her Department's assistance for Mechanics for Africa. [45833]

Clare Short: I last visited Zambia in November 2000.

In the current financial year we estimate that we will spend around £41 million in Zambia. We concentrate on four key areas: good governance and human rights, sustainable livelihoods, health and education, and HIV/AIDS. We are working closely with the World Bank on plans to mitigate the effects of Anglo-American's withdrawal from mining operations in Zambia.

My Department is not currently providing assistance to Mechanics for Africa, although we are aware of their work in Zambia. They have been given advice on applying to the British High Commission's Small Grants Scheme.

Disability

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assistance she offers to developing countries in dealing with disability issues. [46268]

Clare Short: The Department for International Development is currently supporting nearly 40 projects and programmes around the world with a focus on the rights and needs of people with disabilities. In the past year we have approved in excess of £154 million of new funding for work in this area (£136 million for the polio eradication programme). The global drive to reduce poverty will also bring many benefits, in reducing some of the key causes of disability and improving the quality of life and opportunities for people with disabilities.

DFID's strategy on disability is set out in an issues paper published in February 2000, called "Disability, poverty and development". We work closely with Governments, the voluntary and private sectors, and the bilateral and multilateral donor communities, to ensure that disability is addressed in the context of the fight against poverty and the realisation of human rights for all.

Commonwealth Aid

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the total financial value was of aid and assistance give by the United Kingdom to each member country of the Commonwealth in each of the last five years. [45675]

Clare Short: The information requested is set out in the following table.

UK assistance to Commonwealth countries

£ thousands

Country	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Botswana	4,246	4,171	3,275	3,045	2,469
Cameroon	2,205	2,140	3,589	7,005	5,629
Gambia, The	1,862	1,311	979	1,370	1,742
Ghana	28,475	30,428	62,907	52,032	75,200
Kenya	26,439	30,025	42,163	32,927	62,609
Lesotho	3,911	4,985	4,167	2,974	2,274
Malawi	44,876	30,651	52,629	49,377	56,942
Mauritius	1,273	1,704	1,195	570	1,656
Mozambique	26,610	48,311	28,902	70,630	43,304
Namibia	5,670	4,482	3,861	3,571	2,712
Nigeria	7,867	9,346	11,216	14,597	16,182
St. Helena & Dep	7,990	8,765	8,805	9,363	10,116
Seychelles	406	328	216	300	30
Sierra Leone	10,841	3,293	9,153	30,044	35,142
South Africa, Republic of	23,214	28,372	35,110	47,838	36,755
Swaziland	9,598	3,448	3,981	3,533	2,636
Tanzania	56,415	51,437	78,085	75,099	110,598
Uganda	49,207	59,325	64,261	90,286	93,111
Zambia	40,529	46,742	33,511	46,677	93,296
Zimbabwe	21,007	13,715	29,394	17,363	14,716
Anguilla	1,367	2,520	1,977	2,058	2,232
Antigua & Barbuda	235	900	629	1,650	1,332
Bahamas	99	5	−1	35	15
Barbados	323	250	533	1,049	197
Belize	7,360	2,331	9,357	14,876	8,132
Bermuda	57	30	0	13	4
British Virgin Islands	1,095	604	677	5,188	3,618
Cayman Islands	26	13	23	49	20
Dominica	5,011	14,711	2,531	2,481	1,174
Falkland Islands and Deps	4	2	0	0	0
Grenada	635	2,118	1,141	923	615
Guyana	7,041	92,487	22,962	16,233	31,069
Jamaica	9,687	3,165	10,142	9,041	8,426
Montserrat	14,441	37,867	31,096	22,640	20,811
St. Kitts-Nevis	628	805	609	99	1

UK assistance to Commonwealth countries

£ thousands

Country	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
St. Lucia	441	10,355	442	886	1,006
St. Vincent and Grenadines	587	1,736	681	311	215
Trinidad and Tobago	278	284	258	254	214
Turks and Caicos Islands	3,198	2,569	3,808	4,044	2,848
Bangladesh	44,330	39,078	67,361	71,794	76,921
Brunei	18	10	6	6	5
India	111,789	114,022	110,374	107,283	128,817
Malaysia	−1,307	−1,259	960	1,086	591
Maldives	348	292	310	292	286
Pakistan	59,365	32,704	27,654	23,477	16,342
Singapore	210	153	133	139	150
Sri Lanka	19,891	11,552	7,864	7,827	10,453
Cyprus	287	310	380	188	144
Gibraltar	163	192	103	23	27
Malta	120	1,934	146	99	122

DFID has a regional programme in the Pacific; figures on countries in the region that are members of the Commonwealth are not available separately.

Angola

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assistance her Department is providing to the peace process in Angola following the death of Jonas Savimbi. [44892]

Clare Short: Since the death of Jonas Savimbi we have made a contribution of £200,000 to help expand the services of Radio Ecclesia beyond Luanda to the Angolan provinces. Radio Ecclesia is the only fully independent radio broadcaster in Angola able to operate nationwide. It is well known as a key source of objective news reporting and political analysis within Angola, essential to the building of a lasting peace settlement. I plan to visit Angola next week to discuss with the Government the opportunities to achieve peace in Angola and the wider region. I had a very useful preliminary meeting with the Angolan Foreign Minister on these issues last week.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assistance her Department is providing to the peace process in the Democratic Republic of the Congo; and if she will make a statement on the talks taking place in South Africa. [44891]

Clare Short: To date DFID has provided £525,000 in support of the direct costs of the Inter-Congolese Dialogue. This is supplemented by a contribution of £650,000 to the Radio Okapi project which is disseminating information on the peace process to the Congolese people, and £160,000 to assist peace and reconciliation in the Kivus. We continue to press all signatories to the Lusaka Peace Agreement to honour their commitments and work constructively towards a full peace settlement in the region. It is paramount that the delegates currently engaged in the Sun City talks avoid further prevarication and commit themselves to the critical task of reaching agreement on arrangements for a transitional government and timetable for free elections. Much time has already been lost in the Dialogue and it is crucial that real progress is now seen, for the sake of all of the people of the region.

Rwanda

Mr. Ivan Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much aid the Government have sent to Rwanda from 1997 to 2001; and what plans the Government have to send aid in the futu[illegible] [45112]

C[illegible]e Short: Between 1997 to 2001 the UK provided £89[illegible]illion in development assistance to Rwanda. In 199[illegible] the UK made a 10-year commitment with the Go[illegible]rnment of Rwanda to help their post-conflict rec[illegible]very and enable them to meet the International D[illegible]elopment Targets. We have provided around £[illegible] million in development assistance this financial year a[illegible] expect our support to continue at least at this level ov[illegible] the next few years.

Gaza Strip

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the results of the midwifery training project funded by her Department to improve standards of midwifery in the Gaza Strip; and how many midwives it has trained. [43872]

Clare Short: The Gaza Midwifery project was established in 1999 to improve safe motherhood by developing the capacity of the midwifery profession in Gaza. The project will have trained 27 midwives by June 2002, and plans to train a total of 89 by June 2004. The current crisis has adversely affected the implementation of training, but enrolment and graduate numbers remain over 80 per cent. of that originally envisaged.

Turkey

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry regarding Amec's application to the Export Credits Guarantee Department to cover its work in Turkey. [44200]

Clare Short: I have not had any involvement in this case. My department worked closely with ECGD to agree a new set of business principles, including the incorporation of sustainable development criteria. My department is involved in the productive expenditure screening process for applications relating to those countries receiving International Development Association (IDA) funding. We do not get involved in individual export credit applications in non-IDA countries such as Turkey.

Occupied Territories

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the results have been of her Department's funded water and sanitation projects in *(a)* Jabalia and *(b)* Anabta in improving water supplies to the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories. [43875]

Clare Short: The project in Jabalia has led to improvements in both the quality and quantity of water for household consumption. Sanitary standards have also increased as the majority of households are now connected to a new sewage network. To ensure these gains are sustained a programme of hygiene and sanitary education is being implemented.

The quality of the water network in Anabta has improved by 90 per cent. At least 75 per cent. of households are connected to the new sewage network. However, the current crisis is affecting the implementation of the project with equipment embargoed by the Israeli Port Authorities, and access for project staff becoming increasingly difficult.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what effect the aid given to the Palestinian Authority's Minister for Education by her Department has had on her Department's capacity to manage *(a)* planning of teacher training, *(b)* school development and *(c)* the teaching of English in that region. [43874]

Clare Short: The Palestinian Authority is responsible for planning teacher training, school development and teaching English. Between 1995–2000 we have provided technical assistance in these areas. Nearly all schools in the Palestinian Authority have benefited in some way from this.

(a) all primary school head teachers, and most secondary school heads, have participated in a School Review and Development Planning programme, and over 12,000 teachers have received support for their personal development;

(b) we piloted in a limited number of schools the development of management expertise focused on the preparation of guidelines and operating procedures. The final assessment of the project found that institutional capacity within the targeted schools had greatly increased;

(c) English language training was not a component of this assistance.

The work of United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) includes an education programme for Palestinian refugees. The UK supports UNRWA's work, providing £25 million in 2001.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans she has to address unemployment in the occupied territories. [43873]

Clare Short: We are supporting the World Bank's Employment Generation and NGO Capacity Building Programmes, both of which are designed to tackle rising unemployment in the Palestinian Territories. We have also contributed to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency's (UNRWA) Emergency Appeal, which includes employment creation schemes for Palestinian refugees.

Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers

Ms Drown: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will amend poverty reduction strategy papers—PRSPs—so that at decision point there is scope for greater financial flexibility to take into account changing factors and amendments to the plan can be made before completion point. [45191]

Clare Short: Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) are country-owned documents produced by Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC), setting out how they intend to use the resources available to them—including from debt relief—to tackle poverty more effectively. We place great importance on this process, which involves consultation with civil society and the international donor community.

Under the HIPC Debt Initiative, countries receive interim debt relief once they reach Decision Point, at which stage they are required to produce an interim PRSP—a road map setting out what action needs to be taken to produce a full PRSP by Completion Point. Clearly, their circumstances may have changed by the time they reach Completion Point when the relief becomes irrevocable. The UK has worked to encourage agreement that the debt sustainability of countries will be reviewed at Completion Point, and that additional relief will be provided, in exceptional cases, where there has been fundamental changes in a country's circumstances due to external adverse factors.

Ms Drown: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what action she is taking to address the difference between the growth rate built into Malawi's PRSP and its actual growth rate. [45190]

Clare Short: We and other donors are advising the Malawi Government on the necessary conditions for higher growth. Prerequisites are restoration of macroeconomic stability, and improved economic and financial management. The Government has recently declared its intention to proceed with key reform measures. If successful, these should lead to higher private sector led growth.

Conflict Resolution

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what support her Department is giving to non-governmental organisations *(a)* in the UK and *(b)* elsewhere to enable them to undertake peacemaking, peacebuilding and conflict resolution activities. [44731]

Clare Short: My Department provides support to both UK-based and overseas non-governmental organisations through a number of sources, including through the Civil Society Challenge Fund and through our geographical programmes. We also have Partnership Programme Agreements (PPAs) with 11 UK-based

NGOs and PPAs with a further four NGOs are under discussion. Expenditure under these PPAs in the 2002–03 financial year is expected to total £56,300,000. A substantial proportion of these agencies are working in localities which are either in conflict or have recently experienced conflict: peacemaking, peacebuilding and conflict resolution activities are therefore a key part of the challenge of promoting sustainable development and reducing violent conflict.

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps she is taking to develop her Department's work in the field of conflict and humanitarian affairs. [44733]

Clare Short: Violent conflict remains one of the most important obstacles to reducing poverty. My Department is developing its work in the field of conflict prevention and peacebuilding both directly through our work in developing countries and with two conflict prevention pools jointly managed by DFID, the Ministry of Defence and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

More than 20 countries in sub-Saharan Africa are currently devastated by or are recovering from violent conflict and 20 per cent. of the continent's population live in countries affected by armed conflicts. Through the Africa Pool, an inter-Departmental strategy has been developed for conflict prevention and peacekeeping in Africa, which focuses on geographic and thematic priorities. The Strategy involves working with international partners to support African Governments and institutions to prevent and resolve conflict at country and regional level.

We have focused particular attention on securing peace and stability in Sierra Leone and contributing to the establishment of durable and lasting solutions to the conflicts in the Great Lakes and Sudan. More broadly, my Department will continue to work on building inclusive and accountable governance structures, including security sector reform, strengthening state institutions and improving people's livelihoods, all of which contribute directly to conflict prevention and peacebuilding in Africa. With regard to Security Sector Reform, working with other donors and with international organisations and institutions, my Department has been active in developing policy as well as in implementing practical reform measures.

We also continue to address the issues raised by the Report of the Panel on UN Peace Operations, better known as the Brahimi Report, to help improve the ability of the UN to deal with complex peace operations. Activities have to date focussed on developing the resources for information gathering and analysis in and around the United Nations, and we are now discussing further activities with the UN Department of Peace Keeping Operations to further strengthen their operational capabilities.

Under the Global Conflict Prevention Pool, my Department, in close co-operation with FCO and MOD, is implementing a £19.5 million programme that seeks to reduce the uncontrolled proliferation of small arms and light weapons. We will continue to clarify and address the relationship between the uncontrolled proliferation of small arms and light weapons, insecurity and underdevelopment.

We have also developed a methodology to help development agencies assess possible development interventions in countries at risk of violent conflict. This methodology has been endorsed and picked up by other donor agencies in their conflict prevention work.

DFID is also active in its support of conflict prevention work at regional and international levels and through contributions to multilateral agencies, including the United Nations and the EU. We provide core support for the strengthening of the key humanitarian agencies—UNHCR, OCHA, WFP and the Red Cross family, as well as UNDP, UNICEF and the OHCHR—in addition to contributing to specific appeals during emergencies. We continue to be heavily involved with humanitarian mine action, primarily through the UN Mine Action Service. This includes mine clearance, developing indigenous capacity and the development, testing and trailing of suitable technologies.

My Department will continue to focus on improving and strengthening the disaster response mechanism that exists under the co-ordination of the United Nations at both local and global level to respond to disasters around the world. Following a disaster, most lives are saved in the first few hours by immediate local effort. We are therefore working to build local, national and regional capacities for effective response.

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what contribution her Department is making to the training of UN personnel engaged in peacemaking, peacebuilding and conflict resolution. [44730]

Clare Short: In the Report of the Panel on UN Peace Operations published in August 2000 (better known as the Brahimi Report), emphasis was placed on the importance of equipping UN personnel with the necessary skills in peacebuilding and conflict prevention.

We have been supporting a number of training initiatives for UN personnel (and others), notably, the UN Staff College training course in Early Warning and Preventive Measures, which provides UN field and Headquarters staff with basic skills in conflict analysis, as well as a comprehensive guide to the UN prevention process through the use of case studies. We have been supporting this course since its development in 1998 and over 720 UN staff have been trained to date.

In addition to this, we support the Fellowship Programme in Peacemaking and Preventive Diplomacy at the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR). This training in conflict analysis, with a particular focus on negotiation and mediation, is designed for mid-level UN officials and National Government Civil Servants.

My Department also provides capacity building support to the Office of Emergency Programmes in UNICEF and the Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery in UNDP.

This supports a range of institutional development activities, from policy development to monitoring and evaluation. It also supports in-house training activities with a particular focus on conflict and other

humanitarian emergencies. The training programmes not only benefit the staff in these specialised units, but also other Headquarters staff, and of course, field staff.

In conjunction with the Canadian government we have sponsored the development, production and implementation of gender training materials for personnel involved in peace support operations. They emphasise women's role in conflict-reduction and peacebuilding activities.

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much has been spent by her Department on conflict resolution activities in the 2001–02 financial year. [44748]

Clare Short: During the financial year 2001–02 my Department expects to spend £4,500,000 on activities whose primary purpose was conflict prevention. We are also jointly responsible for expenditure on conflict prevention initiatives under the Africa Conflict Prevention Pool and the Global Conflict Prevention Pool, together with the Ministry of Defence and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Excluding peacekeeping costs, expenditure under the Africa Conflict Prevention Pool this financial year is expected to total £12,220,000 and expenditure for conflict prevention programmes under the Global Conflict Prevention Pool is expected to total £26,100,000.

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what support her Department is giving to courses furnishing civilians with the necessary skills to participate in peacemaking, peacebuilding and conflict resolution. [44732]

Clare Short: My Department supports a number of organisations providing formal and informal training opportunities to civilians in peacemaking, peacebuilding and conflict resolution activities. Civil society in developing countries has a key role to play in preventing and resolving conflicts, and organisations such as religious groups, the media, business and non-governmental organisations are often effective in promoting dialogue and reconciliation, as part of wider efforts to address the sources of tension and grievance which give rise to conflict.

Correspondence

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the target time will be in 2002–03 for *(a)* Ministers to reply to letters from hon. Members and *(b)* officials in her Department to reply to letters received directly from members of the public. [44941]

Clare Short: The target time for reply to all correspondence received by DFID from Members of parliament and the public remains unchanged at 15 working days; in line with the target time prescribed by the Cabinet Office. In 2001, DFID replied to 87 per cent. of MPs letters and 90 per cent. of letters/e-mails sent direct to our Public Enquiry Point, within the 15 day target. The correspondence figures for all Government departments are published annually by the Cabinet Office.

Crèche Facilities

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what crèche facilities are provided by her Department; and at what cost. [44856]

Clare Short: There are no crèche facilities provided by my Department. We do provide holiday playschemes at both our Headquarters sites.

Our site in East Kilbride operates under a three-way partnership made up of DFID, Inland Revenue and Scottish Nuclear. Our site in London is part of the Whitehall Holiday Playscheme, run by the Cabinet Office at three sites in central London and open to a large proportion of Government Departments.

Secondments

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many members of staff were employed by her Department on secondment from non-governmental organisations in *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* 2001. [45232]

Clare Short: The information is as follows:

1999: 2

2000: 4

2001: 4.

Access to Information

Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the administrative manuals and internal guidance which her Department has made public as required by Part 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information; and which of these were first made available after May 1997. [45401]

Clare Short: Since November 2001, the Department for International Development has made available the following administrative manuals and internal guidance under its Freedom of Information Pilot Publication Scheme: Office Instructions; Evaluation Guidelines and Records Management Guidance.

Such guidance was not made available proactively under the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Public Service Agreement

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development which public service agreement targets scheduled to be met in 2002 will not be achieved by the due date. [44810]

Clare Short: The information on Public Service Agreement targets set by my Department between April 1999 and April 2002 will appear in DFID's Departmental Report which will be published in April.

PFI/PPPs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the *(a)* private finance initiative and *(b)* public private partnership projects which have been delayed. [44884]

Clare Short: DFID have no Private Finance Initiatives or Public-Private Partnerships which have been delayed.

Criminal Damage

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the cost has been of criminal damage to her Department's buildings in each of the last four years. [44836]

Clare Short: There have been no costs attributable to criminal damage to my department's buildings over the specified period.

Celebrations

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what arrangements her Department has made to celebrate *(a)* St. Patrick's Day, *(b)* St. George's Day, *(c)* St. Andrew's Day and *(d)* Her Majesty the Queen's Golden Jubilee; and how her Department celebrated St. David's Day. [42295]

Clare Short: No arrangements have been made to celebrate any of these dates.

PRIME MINISTER

Public Bodies (Chairmen)

Mr. Forth: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the appointments made by his Department since 1 May 1997 of chairmen of *(a)* non-departmental public bodies, *(b)* commissions, *(c)* inquiries, *(d)* agencies and *(e)* task forces; and if he will list their (i) term of office, (ii) salary and (iii) known political affiliation (A) past and (B) present. [33896]

The Prime Minister: I refer the right hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend, the Deputy Prime Minister, on Monday 25 March, *Official Report*, columns 586–9W.

Lord Birt

Norman Baker: To ask the Prime Minister if he was informed of Lord Birt's financial connections when he appointed him to his present transport role; and if he will make a statement. [34144]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 7 February 2002]*: Lord Birt was appointed in accordance with the rules set out in paragraph 51 of the Ministerial Code. I am satisfied that there is no conflict of interest.

Consultants

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Prime Minister what the total cost to his Office was of the use of external consultants in each of the last four years. [35017]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my hon. Friend, the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office today.

Publicity Expenditure

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the publicity and advertising campaigns run by his Office in each of the last four years, specifying the *(a)* purpose, *(b)* cost to public funds, *(c)* number of staff involved and *(d)* method of evaluation in each case. [39100]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my hon. Friend, the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office on Monday 25 March, *Official Report*, column 589W.

Press Office

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Prime Minister how many staff in his press office have received *(a)* termination and *(b)* redundancy payments in each of the last four years. [40944]

The Prime Minister: None.

Peers (Salaried Appointments)

Mr. Mudie: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list those peers appointed since May 1997 who have been given salaried posts by Government Departments, indicating the salary involved in each case. [40870]

The Prime Minister: The information requested is not held centrally and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost. In respect of my office, I have appointed Baroness Morgan as a special adviser. In accordance with Exemption 12 of Part II of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, details of individual salaries are not disclosed in order to protect the privacy of the individuals concerned.

Information on the membership of the boards of public bodies, and their remuneration, is set out in the annual publication Public Bodies. Similar information in respect of membership of Task Forces, Ad Hoc Advisory Groups and reviews is set out in the annual report on Task Forces, Ad hoc Advisory Groups and Reviews. Ministerial appointments are set out in the List of Ministerial Responsibilities. All three documents are published and copies are available in the Library of the House.

Human Rights Act

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Prime Minister how many cases have been brought against his Office under the Human Rights Act 1998; and what has been the cost in *(a)* legal fees to defend cases and *(b)* compensation payments. [45066]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my hon. Friend, the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office on Monday 25 March, *Official Report*, column 585W.

LNM Holdings

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) of 4 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 690W, whether he assesses the allegations made relating to *(a)* Mr. Mittal and *(b)* representatives of LNM to be unsubstantiated and unjustified; and if he will make a statement. [46447]

The Prime Minister: I have nothing further to add.

Disabled People

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Prime Minister what recent representations he has had further to his welcome on 5 July 2000 for Rehabilitation International's Charter for the Third Millennium, with particular reference to developments in relation to the Charter's call for a UN Convention on the Rights of Disabled People; and what reply has been sent. [45829]

The Prime Minister: I refer my right hon. Friend to the answer I gave my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), on 25 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 620–1W.

Petition (Isle of Wight)

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Prime Minister what his response is to the petition of residents of the Isle of Wight delivered to No. 10 Downing Street on 19 March. [46309]

The Prime Minister: I have asked my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to reply on my behalf.

Gavin Martin Taylor

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Prime Minister when he expects to respond to the letter from the hon. Member for the Isle of Wight concerning the death of Gavin Martin Taylor. [46310]

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health will be replying to the letter this week.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Solicitor-General how many overseas visits she has made since 7 June 2001. [46172]

The Solicitor-General: Since 7 June 2001, I have made one visit overseas to the Pontignano conference in Italy from 21–23 September 2001.

Counsel (Ethnic Monitoring)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Solicitor-General what ethnic monitoring she has initiated concerning use of counsel by her Department. [46170]

The Solicitor-General: As to civil work, since the introduction of a competitive appointments system in 1998 all applicants to be included in panels of junior counsel maintained by the Attorney General and as standing counsel have been asked to complete an equal opportunities monitoring form which asks them to indicate their ethnic origin. Completion of the form is voluntary. The method of selection for the panels and the operation of the panel system is being reviewed.

As to criminal work apart from the Crown Prosecution Service and the Serious Fraud Office, a panel of junior counsel conducting cases on behalf of HM Customs and Excise, the Inland Revenue, the Department of Work and Pensions/Health, the Department of Trade and Industry, DEFRA, the Health and Safety Executive and the Environment Agency is being set up.

All applicants to be considered for the panel and, in the recently concluded appointments exercise for the Customs and Excise and the Department of Trade and Industry, as standing counsel, have been invited to complete an equal opportunities monitoring form, completion of which is voluntary.

As to the Crown Prosecution Service, all applicants to be considered for lists of junior counsel maintained by the CPS are invited to complete an ethnic monitoring form on a voluntary basis. The CPS maintains a national database with details of the ethnicity and gender of all counsel on its lists. Since July 2001 the CPS has been monitoring its distribution of work to counsel by ethnicity and gender. A computer program has been developed to facilitate data collection which will be made available in all CPS areas within the next few months. The information currently being gathered is shared with the Bar and the distribution of work is discussed at regular liaison meetings, which take place on all circuits.

The Serious Fraud Office is in the process of establishing a new counsel "pool" containing the names of counsel considered suitable for SFO work, who have been referred by their Heads of Chambers. When accepted by the Director for inclusion in the SFO "pool", counsel are invited to complete an individual ethnic monitoring form on a voluntary basis. When the new pool has been in operation for a year, the results of this monitoring will be reviewed.

The Law Officers are committed to promoting diversity and equal opportunity. Advertisements for all recruitment exercises state that members of ethnic minorities are particularly encouraged to apply.

Auld Report

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Solicitor-General what representations she has received concerning the Auld Report; and if she will make a statement. [46232]

The Solicitor-General: I have discussed issues raised by Sir Robin Auld's Report of his Review of the criminal courts with many individuals, including Crown Prosecutors, defence practitioners and hon. Members, and I have also taken part in three of the Ministerial "roadshows", in Newcastle, Birmingham and Cambridge, where the Report was discussed with a wide range of interested parties.

Formal representations on the Report, of which there have been over 400, have been received on behalf of the Government by the Lord Chancellor's Department.

Customs and Excise

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Solicitor-General what progress has been made in implementing the recommendations made by his Honour John Gower QC and Sir Anthony Hammond KCB QC in their report on prosecutions conducted by the Solicitor's Office of HM Customs and Excise. [46855]

The Solicitor-General: In the Parliamentary Answer given by the then Attorney General on 12 March 2001, *Official Report*, column WA68, he announced that the Government had accepted all the recommendations in principle, but had opted for a phased approach to implementation.

Since that announcement, the Prosecutions Group of the Solicitor's Office has forged ahead with a rapid programme of change, to enable it to deliver legal services of a high quality in a responsive and flexible way. New managers and staff have been recruited, the organisation has been restructured, and working practices are being reformed.

The Parliamentary Answer also referred to accountability for the prosecutions function moving from the Commissioners to the Attorney General on 1 April 2002.

Final agreement has not yet been reached on the implementation of Recommendation 4 of the Gower/ Hammond Recommendations, which recommended that in relation to the prosecution function the Solicitor for the Customs and Excise should not be funded by the Commissioners, but should have his own ring fenced budget and be accountable for his own expenditure.

This Recommendation is accepted in principle by the Government, but there are technical issues relating to the establishment of a separate vote which require further time to resolve. The Government is committed to the full implementation of Recommendation 4 no later than 1 April 2003, but in the meantime the Prosecutions Group budget will remain as part of the Customs and Excise vote, though it will be separately identified and managed by the Solicitor for the Customs and Excise, and financial Accounts/Reports will be produced as if that budget has been established as a separate vote.

As a consequence of these revised arrangements, the Attorney General will not assume full accountability for the prosecutions function from 1 April. Instead, from that date the following arrangements will apply:

(1) The Commissioners (and Treasury Ministers) will be responsible for, and accountable to Parliament for:

anything done in the course of an investigation;

enforcement policy, including the resources to be deployed;

prosecution policy ie the seriousness with which offences should in general be treated and wider issues of Departmental policy such as the disclosure of informants;

decisions on alternatives to prosecution such as compounding, civil evasion action etc.

(2) The Law Officers will be responsible for, and accountable to Parliament for:

the quality of legal advice given by Investigation Legal Advisers;

the quality of the Prosecutions Group casework decision making in relation to cases referred to that Group for prosecution;

the application (the Prosecutions Group having consulted with Customs Administrators, as appropriate) of prosecutions policy and public interest factors to individual defendants in cases referred to the Prosecutions Group for prosecution.

Inspection of the Prosecutions Group by the CPS Inspectorate will commence on 1 April 2002, and the Prosecution Group will proceed with the trials referred to in the previous Parliamentary Answer.

The Government is satisfied that the arrangements that will apply from 1 April strengthen the involvement of the Attorney General with the difficult and complex criminal casework conducted by the Solicitor's Office, maintain the momentum of change that has been established and preserve an appropriate position on Parliamentary accountability.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Immigration

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to replace the application forms for foreign nationals wishing to apply for leave to remain in the United Kingdom. [46682]

Angela Eagle: The current application forms are valid for use only until 14 April 2002. Revised forms will be prescribed before then. They will be available shortly. From the time they are issued until 14 April 2002, applications may be made on either the new forms or the present versions. Only the new forms may be used for applications made on or after 15 April 2002. Copies will be placed in the Library when they are available.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the reasons are for the delay in forwarding immigration status letters in Case Ref. No. Z1010863/4; and if he will make a statement. [43084]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 14 March 2002]:* I wrote to my hon. Friend about this case on 25 March 2002.

Police Performance Indicators

Lawrie Quinn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will announce the *(a)* ministerial priorities and *(b)* Best Value performance indicators for the police for 2002–03. [46683]

Mr. Denham: I am pleased to announce that the statutory instruments have now been laid before the House. The Ministerial Priorities, which will come into effect on 1 April 2002, are:

to help create safe communities by reducing crime, anti-social behaviour and disorder through effective partnership working, including reducing the availability and use of Class A drugs;

to reduce the fear of crime in all sections of the community and in particular to increase the trust and confidence in policing amongst minority ethnic communities; and

to increase the number of offences for which offenders, and particularly persistent offenders, are caught and brought to justice, in partnership with other criminal justice agencies.

Subject to the approval of both Houses, the Best Value Performance Indicators will also come into effect on 1 April 2002. My right hon. Friend, the Home Secretary, has honoured his undertaking to the police that he would make a significant reduction to the number of indicators to focus police effort where it is most needed. The full list will be placed in the Library in the next few days.

The Home Secretary will, by the summer, introduce a performance indicator on tackling persistent offenders. Persistent offenders must be caught and dealt with to protect the public from their activities. An indicator to measure police success in driving up performance will be introduced as soon as data collection systems are in place.

Office Accommodation

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made on his plans for new office accommodation for the Home Office and Her Majesty's Prison Service staff working in Central London. [46684]

Mr. Blunkett: A contract has been awarded to Annes Gate Property plc, for a new development on the site of the former Department of Environment offices at Marsham Street. The contract is for a period of 29 years and involves the construction of new office accommodation, its long-term maintenance, and provision of facility management and business support services. The net present cost of the contract is around £311 million at current prices. The demolition of the existing building at Marsham Street will start as soon as possible. On current plans, completion of the new development is expected to be Spring 2005. Westminster City Council have already given planning consent for the re-development of the site which includes mixed office, residential and commercial development. The Department plans to vacate five of its existing office buildings in central London after the move to Marsham Street.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what written representations have been made to him in the last three months concerning staffing levels and staff training at Yarl's Wood; and if he will place copies to the Library. [38669]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* Oral representations were made to my right hon. Friend, the Home Secretary during his visit to Yarl's Wood removal centre on 18 March 2002. The issues of staff levels and staff training at Yarl's Wood will naturally be amongst those covered by the Immigration and Nationality Directorate inquiry into the incident.

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if the Asylum Seeker Accommodation Centre proposed for Hemswell Cliff will require a staff of between 200 and 300; from where they will be recruited; and what training they will receive; [44648]

(2) what training employees of accommodation centres will receive and at what estimated annual cost; [44645]

(3) what assessment has been made of the need for additional public transport if the Hemswell Cliff development proceeds; [44647]

(4) what consultation with the local health authorities takes place before an accommodation centre is established; [44646]

(5) what the estimated annual running cost of the proposed Asylum Seekers Accommodation Centre at Hemswell Cliff is; [44649]

(6) what steps he is taking to ensure that all member states of the European Union meet the provisions of the Geneva Convention relating to asylum seekers; [44599]

(7) if additional funding will be given to Lincolnshire Police if an Accommodation Centre for Asylum Seekers is built at Hemswell Cliff; [44644]

(8) what the annual budget of the National Asylum Support Service in the last financial year was; and the estimated budget for the current financial year; [44641]

(9) what consultations have taken place to ensure that no further strains will be put on the provision of dental services in Lincolnshire if an asylum seekers' accommodation centre is built at Hemswell Cliff. [44598]

Angela Eagle: It is estimated that an accommodation centre with around 750 residents would require between 200 and 300 staff. These are likely to include a mixture of locally recruited staff, together with some who transfer from elsewhere in the country. Staff training, and its cost, will be a matter for the contractors selected to run the sites.

Transport implications will form a part of the planning process for the trial Accommodation Centres. We will provide for transport for residents where necessary.

We will consult local service providers as part of the planning process. Department of Health officials will act as the initial conduit between the Home Office and the National Health Service (NHS) in respect of accommodation centres once the sites have been selected.

This is a matter for contractors who will run the centres. Bids to operate Accommodation Centres have not yet been invited.

I am satisfied that in most respects our European partners are already meeting the quite broadly defined provision of the Geneva Convention. However, it is true that there are differences in the way the Geneva Convention is interpreted and there are variations in asylum practice among Member States. This is why the United Kingdom (UK) government has committed itself to helping establish a common European asylum system, which can respond effectively to the challenge that global movements of people present and help limit unwarranted secondary movement of asylum seekers between European Union (EU) states.

The Government has opted in to all the European asylum proposals to date and in doing so continues to exert maximum influence during negotiations. Of particular significance in reaching consensus on a common application of the Geneva Convention is the proposal for a Council Directive on minimum standards for the qualification and status of refugees, presented by the European Commission in November 2001. One of the key aims of this draft directive is to establish a common interpretation of Article 1A of the Geneva Convention, the grounds for refugee status. The definition of prosecution adopted by the Commission reflects the current UK position.

Hemswell Cliff is just one of a number of places that are being considered as a possible suitable site for an Accommodation Centre for Asylum Seekers. A final decision has not yet been taken. We have no plans to vary police grant in areas where asylum facilities may be located.

The budget for National Asylum Support Services (NASS) in 2000–01 was £38* million. This figure includes grants totalling £22 million* to the voluntary sector for the provision of services to asylum seekers and refugees.

Total spending on asylum support in the year 1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001 was £751 million*. This includes grant payments of £580 million* to local authorities and the Scottish Executive for provision of accommodation and support for asylum seeking adults and families under the Interim Regulations and for unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC). A further £12 million* was paid to local authorities and the Scottish Executive directly by NASS under contracts to provide accommodation and related services for dispersed asylum seekers.

£46 million* was paid directly by NASS to private sector accommodation providers for the provision of accommodation and related services to dispersed asylum seekers.

The budget for the current financial year, 2001–02, is £36 million*. This figure includes grants totalling £18.1 million* to the voluntary sector for the provision of services to asylum seekers and refugees.

The budget for asylum support for 2001–02 is £1,094 million*.

No consultations have taken place on the provision of dental services in Lincolnshire in relation to the potential site at Hemswell Cliff. Health care will be provided at Accommodation Centres and we will consider how best dental services can be provided in consultation with the Department of Health.

* All figures rounded to nearest £ million.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what guidelines he has issued on the establishment of centres housing asylum seekers in remote rural areas; [45163]

(2) if he will make a statement on the security criteria for centres housing asylum seekers in remote rural areas. [45166]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* No guidelines have been issued. Home Office officials are currently looking at a number of potential sites, but no decisions have yet been taken. A wide range of factors, including transport, environmental, and health and safety issues, will be taken into account before the final site selection is made.

In making final decisions on preferred sites, we will take all the relevant factors into account including security, to which the hon. Member refers. These assessments have not yet been made.

Leave to Remain

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications to remain in this country have been *(a)* granted and *(b)* refused under the domestic violence concession; and if he will make a statement. [44441]

Angela Eagle: Up to the end of 2000, the latest available data from case records, show that 93 applications were made under the terms of the concession, of which 63 have been granted settlement and 30 have been refused.

Public Appointments

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many appointments to public bodies have been made through his Department *(a)* from April 2000 to March 2001 and *(b)* since 31 March 2001; and how many of these were (i) men and (ii) women. [42164]

Angela Eagle: The number of men and women appointed, or re-appointed, by Ministers in this Department to bodies sponsored by this Department during the periods in question is as follows:

Period	*Men appointed*	*Women appointed*
1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001	296	176
1 April 2001 to 28 February 2002	204	142

Summary information contained in 'Public Bodies 2001', which was published on 14 February 2002, shows that as at 31 March 2001, women held 34 per cent. of appointments made to the boards of public bodies, and people from ethnic minority backgrounds held 4.8 per cent. of appointments. This is an increase of 1 per cent. and 0.4 per cent. respectively on the previous year. The position in the Home Office was better than the average: on 31 March 2001 women held 40 per cent. of all appointments to Home Office sponsored NDPBs, and people from ethnic minority backgrounds held 9.1 per cent.

The Home Office has included the following in its objectives to be achieved by March 2005:

1. "To increase the number of women applicants for appointments to public bodies so as to achieve an interim target of 45 per cent. women appointees by 31 March 2005."
2. "To ensure that women, people from ethnic minority backgrounds and disabled people are each represented in line with these targets on the different types of bodies, and in responsibility, including the Chair and Vice-Chair."

To achieve these objectives the Department will, amongst other measures:

1. Employ targeted advertising to encourage under-represented groups to apply.
2. Seek possible candidates using candidate lists held by other government departments.
3. Continue to monitor the composition of the different types of bodies sponsored by the Home Office and the proportion of women, people from ethnic minority backgrounds and disabled people in positions of Chair and Vice-Chair.

Anti-Drugs Co-ordinator

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many times the United

Kingdom Anti-Drugs Co-ordinator held meetings with members and officials of the United States Government between 18 February 2000 and 3 August 2001; when and where each of these meetings took place; and which *(a)* United States Government departments and *(b)* members and officials of the United States Government were involved in each meeting; [43447]

(2) how many times the United Kingdom Anti-Drugs Co-ordinator has held meetings with members and officials of the United States Government since 3 August 2001; when and where each of these meetings took place; and which *(a)* United States Government departments and *(b)* members and officials of the United States Government were involved in each meeting. [43446]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Between 18 February 2000 and 3 August 2001 the former United Kingdom Anti-Drugs Co-ordinator held meetings in his office with members and officials of the United States (US) Government on three occasions as follows:

On 18 February 2000 he met Wendy Chamberlain, Principal Deputy Assistant for International Narcotics Law Enforcement Affairs in the US together with Mike McManamon, Drugs Enforcement Agency (DEA) Attaché and George Dragnich, Counsellor for Labor and Social Affairs from the US Embassy in London;

on 23 August 2000 he met Congressman John Mica, together with Mike McManamon and Sharon Pinkerton, Mr Mica's assistant;

on 6 March 2001 he met George Dragnich and Su Zann Lamb, Justice and Home Affairs Liaison Officer at the US Embassy London.

Following the election last year, responsibility for delivering the National Drugs Strategy transferred to the Home Secretary. Since 3 August 2001, my right hon. Friend, the Home Secretary has met with John Ashcroft, United States (US) Attorney General (11–12 December 2001) and James Sensenbrenner, Chair of the House of Representatives Judiciary Committee (17–18 January 2002). Both meetings took place in London.

Keith Hellawell, who is now employed part time as the Home Secretary's expert adviser on drugs, has met only one official from the United States Government since 3 August 2001. The official was Keith Eddins who is employed as the US First Secretary covering Justice and Home Affairs issues at the US Embassy in the Czech Republic. The meeting took place at the British Embassy in Prague on Wednesday 20 February 2002.

Court Attendance

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many days are lost annually by professional health staff required to attend court to give evidence of injury incurred by pensioners who have been subjected to physical assault; and what the estimated cost of this is to the public service in each of the last three years. [38768]

Mr. Hutton: I have been asked to reply. The information requested is not collected centrally.

WALES

Human Rights Act

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many cases have been brought against his Department under the Human Rights Act 1998; and what has been the cost in *(a)* legal fees to defend cases and *(b)* compensation payments. [45073]

Mr. Paul Murphy: None.

Creche Facilities

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what creche facilities are provided by his Department; and at what cost. [44863]

Mr. Paul Murphy: None.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Publicity Expenditure

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment she has made of the total real terms expenditure of her Department, its agencies and non-departmental public bodies on publicity in each of the years *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000, *(d)* 2000–01 and *(e)* 2001–02, (i) to date and (ii) as estimated for the whole of the present year; and if she will break these figures down to indicate expenditure on (A) advertising and (B) press and public relations. [36159]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Expenditure from the Department's central advertising and publicity budget is as follows (in real terms):

	£ million
1997–98	11.9
1998–99	14.3
1999–2000	10.3
2000–01	15.0
2001–02 (to end January)	6.0
2001–02 (estimated)	11.7

In addition to expenditure from this central budget, expenditure from budgets allocated to individual programmes will also include spend on publicity related activity. It is not possible, except at disproportionate cost, to separately identify all such publicity related expenditure. It is possible to identify expenditure on advertising and on public relations drawn from all budgets and this is as follows (in real terms):

	Advertising (£m)	*Public relations (£m)*
1997–98	11.0	0
1998–99	16.8	0.6
1999–2000	12.4	0.1
2000–01	29.7	0.8
2001–02 (to end January)	17.7	0.6
2001–02 (estimated)	17.7	0.6

Information on expenditure by agencies and non-departmental public bodies is not held centrally.

Celebrations

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what arrangements her Department has made to celebrate *(a)* St. Patrick's Day, *(b)* St. George's Day, *(c)* St. Andrew's Day and *(d)* Her Majesty the Queen's Golden Jubilee; and how her Department celebrated St. David's Day. [42300]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport gave to the hon. Member for Suffolk South on 11 February, *Official Report*, columns 58–59W.

The Department has made no specific arrangements to celebrate St. Patrick's Day, St. George's Day, St. Andrew's Day or St. David's Day.

Examination Results

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) how many, and what proportion of pupils achieved five or more GCSEs at A* to C grades in each year between 1997 and 2001; [45335]

(2) how many and what proportion of pupils achieved five or more GCSEs at A* to C grades, where those grades included an A* to C grade in each of English, maths and science, in each year between 1997 and 2001. [45333]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The number and proportion of 15-year-old pupils that achieved five or more GCSEs at A* to C grades, including English, mathematics and science in England are in the table:

	Number	*As percentage of 15-year-old pupils*
1996–97	194,708	33.2
1997–98	197,179	34.3
1998–99	207,272	35.7
1999–2000	214,181	36.9
2000–01	226,879	37.6

The number and proportion of 15-year-old pupils that achieved five or more GCSEs at A* to C grades in England are in the table:

	Number	*As percentage of 15-year-old pupils*
1996–97	264,892	45.1
1997–98	266,431	46.3
1998–99	278,560	47.9
1999–2000	285,727	49.2
2000–01	301,521	50.0

Consultants

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will estimate the number of former teachers and headteachers working for firms of consultants providing services for her Department, local education authorities and schools. [45710]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* The Department for Education and Skills does not collect this information. The former occupation of consultants is a matter for individual consultancy companies as employers.

Connexions

Phil Hope: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how the Connexions service will be evaluated. [46325]

Mr Ivan Lewis: The evaluation of the Connexions Service will build on the experience of the pilot studies using a combination of opinion surveys, impact studies and a programme identifying effective practice.

Opinion surveys. These will cover the views of young people including non-users of the Connexions Service and the opinions of the key stakeholders involved with each Connexions Partnership. Run annually, using a standard set of questions, these surveys will make it possible to monitor changes in views towards the Service over time as Connexions is rolled out nationally.

Impact studies. This component of the evaluation strategy will look in detail at Partnership activity to assess how effective the service has been in helping young people. The focus will be on the range of interventions made by a personal adviser and the intention is to track a selected cohort of young people over time to assess outcomes.

Identifying effective practice. The third component of the strategy is to secure prompt feedback about what works operationally and what constitutes effective practice. A rolling programme of studies will be commissioned covering specific issues relevant to the key delivery areas of the Service.

Faith Schools

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the faith schools which receive public funding, specifying the amount in each case. [45760]

Mr. Timms: There are approximately 5,000 voluntary schools maintained by Local Education Authorities (LEAs) in England with either a religious or church-related character. LEAs' Section 52 budget statements do not identify these schools separately; it is therefore not possible to provide the information requested without incurring disproportionate costs. All LEA maintained schools are funded on a similar basis, via a local formula methodology, which is based predominately on pupil numbers, along with other specific factors which relate to individual schools' needs.

NVQs (Grants)

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what *(a)* the number of grants paid out and *(b)* the average grant allocation given to individuals to obtain National Vocational Qualification level II was in each of the last five years. [45626]

Margaret Hodge: There is a range of support payments available to eligible students and trainees studying towards National Vocational Qualification Level 2, including: Education Maintenance Allowances paid to young people who stay on at school or college and available on a pilot basis in 30 per cent. of England; Access Funds paid to students in cases of hardship and also used to fund residential support for certain specified courses for which a young person needs to live away from home; Training Allowances for 16–24 year

olds in unwaged work based learning; and help with the childcare costs of those in learning. In addition, the Department provides significant funding to cover the tuition costs of the education and training provided to individuals.

It is not possible, however, to identify either the total number of NVQ Level 2 students helped or the average value of financial assistance received by individuals. Information held by the Department does not differentiate between those individuals studying towards NVQ Level 2 and those aiming for other types and levels of qualification.

Schools

David Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what her policy is on surplus places in schools; and if she will publish the numbers and percentages of surplus places for each local education authority in England [46933]

Mr. Timms: Our policies are focused on raising educational standards. It is wasteful for resources to be locked into maintaining surplus places in schools. Wherever possible these should be freed up and directed towards improving standards. In planning school provision, local education authorities should look for opportunities for removing surplus capacity, with a view to bringing supply and demand for school places into better balance. Their initial focus should be on those schools with 25 per cent. or more of their places unfilled, having particular regard to standards at those schools. The overall aim should be to maximise parental preference and to provide good quality education in the most cost-effective way. The Department's annual survey of surplus places allows us to monitor how local education authorities are meeting this challenge. The Audit Commission has again drawn attention to this issue and, with District Auditors, is promoting good practice.

Local education authorities have again made progress in the removal of surplus places. The survey returns indicate that there were 699,770 surplus school places in January 2001, representing 9 per cent. of the total capacity of 7.8 million places. This is an overall reduction of 10,219 places on the 2000 figures. Since 1998 a total of 74,050 surplus places have been removed. This reduction means that more money will be spent raising school standards rather than maintaining empty buildings.

The following tables are based on the returns made by the local education authorities in respect of all maintained primary and secondary schools in their area. They set out the numbers of surplus places as at January 2001 for each local authority area, listing primary and secondary separately, together with the proportion that these represent of total capacity. They also highlight the numbers of schools which at that date had surplus of 25 per cent. or more, and at least 30 surplus places, together with the proportion that these represent of the total number of schools.

The number of schools with 25 per cent. or more surplus places has again risen for the second successive year, to 2,441 compared with 2,406 in 2000. As with the 2000 survey, the number of primary schools in this category has risen (2,139 in 2001 which represents 12 per cent. of all primary schools, compared to 2,013 (11 per cent.) in 2000) while the number of secondary schools has declined (302 in 2001, which represents 9 per cent. of all secondary schools, compared with 393 (11 per cent.) in 2000).

The returns also provide the Department with details of the action authorities propose to take on schools with 25 per cent. or more surplus. The returns indicate that in many cases action is being taken, or is planned. Where planning strategies are unclear in areas with particularly high levels of surplus, the Department will be following up with the authorities concerned.

Surplus places by local authority area at January 2001

		Primary[1]				*Secondary*			
		Actual surplus[2]		*Schools with surplus of 25 per cent. or more*[3]		*Actual surplus*		*Schools with surplus of 25 per cent. or more*[3]	
LEA	*Name*	*Number of places*	*Surplus as a percentage of total places*	*Number*	*Per cent.*	*Number of places*	*Surplus as a percentage of total places*	*Number*	*Per cent.*
301	Barking and Dagenham	1,260	7	2	4	467	4	0	0
302	Barnet	768	3	0	0	639	3	0	0
370	Barnsley	1,754	8	8	9	1,223	9	1	7
800	Bath and NE Somerset	1,197	9	8	12	721	6	1	8
820	Bedfordshire	4,161	15	28	19	4,121	10	11	19
303	Bexley	1,274	6	5	8	2,195	11	0	0
330	Birmingham	7,531	7	31	10	4,195	6	6	8
889	Blackburn	780	5	3	5	610	6	1	11
890	Blackpool	561	5	2	6	286	4	0	0
350	Bolton	1,816	7	7	7	487	3	0	0
837	Bournemouth	422	4	0	0	1,026	10	1	10
867	Bracknell Forest	1,073	11	4	12	801	12	1	17
380	Bradford	7,419	15	36	23	2,775	8	3	11
304	Brent	1,600	8	4	7	1,317	9	1	8
846	Brighton and Hove	1,860	10	6	10	1,167	9	2	20
801	Bristol	3,370	11	15	13	1,568	8	0	0
305	Bromley	533	2	2	3	442	2	0	0
825	Buckinghamshire	6,036	13	34	18	901	3	1	3
351	Bury	1,155	7	4	6	220	2	1	7
381	Calderdale	1,757	9	8	9	789	5	0	0
873	Cambridgeshire	4,287	9	20	10	1,364	4	1	3
202	Camden	899	8	5	12	909	8	2	20
875	Cheshire	7,972	13	50	17	3,149	7	4	9
908	Cornwall	3,974	9	27	11	200	1	0	0

Surplus places by local authority area at January 2001

		Primary[1]				Secondary			
		Actual surplus[2]		Schools with surplus of 25 per cent. or more[3]		Actual surplus		Schools with surplus of 25 per cent. or more[3]	
LEA	Name	Number of places	Surplus as a percentage of total places	Number	Per cent.	Number of places	Surplus as a percentage of total places	Number	Per cent.
201	Corporation of London	6	3	—	—	—	—	—	—
331	Coventry	2,730	9	11	12	1,645	7	2	11
306	Croydon	1,533	5	3	3	1,277	7	1	5
909	Cumbria	5,711	13	35	12	4,016	11	8	19
841	Darlington	855	9	5	14	421	7	0	0
831	Derby, City of	1,888	8	8	10	2,158	13	2	14
830	Derbyshire	6,492	10	44	12	3,918	8	7	15
878	Devon	5,333	9	25	8	1,519	4	0	0
371	Doncaster	5,459	17	25	22	1,205	5	1	6
835	Dorset	2,496	9	16	12	2,248	7	1	3
332	Dudley	2,831	10	8	10	724	4	1	5
840	Durham	6,687	14	57	23	2,916	8	3	8
307	Ealing	2,508	10	7	11	242	2	0	0
811	East Riding of Yorkshire	3,339	11	20	15	1,026	5	1	6
845	East Sussex	2,568	7	11	7	1,036	4	0	0
308	Enfield	825	3	3	5	2,873	12	1	6
881	Essex	11,414	9	49	10	6,616	7	4	5
390	Gateshead	1,747	10	4	5	551	5	0	0
916	Gloucestershire	5,896	12	31	12	2,043	5	2	5
203	Greenwich	2,569	12	10	15	1,323	9	2	14
204	Hackney	1,898	11	7	12	858	10	1	11
876	Halton	2,276	11	15	28	1,162	12	2	22
205	Hammersmith and Fulham	990	11	4	11	488	7	0	0
850	Hampshire	10,968	10	51	12	5,200	7	5	7
309	Haringey	1,103	6	3	4	1,471	11	1	9
310	Harrow	2,256	11	5	9	851	9	1	10
805	Hartlepool	882	9	2	7	709	10	1	17
311	Havering	2,440	11	8	12	931	6	0	0
884	Herefordshire	2,234	14	15	18	1,085	10	2	14
919	Hertfordshire	9,153	9	41	10	9,632	12	13	15
312	Hillingdon	1,442	7	3	4	1,188	7	3	18
313	Hounslow	1,854	10	6	9	545	3	0	0
921	Isle of Wight	640	8	2	4	775	6	0	0
420	Isles of Scilly	102	42	2	50	36	23	0	0
206	Islington	1,963	12	9	18	793	10	1	11
207	Kensington and Chelsea	942	13	4	15	583	14	0	0
886	Kent	6,552	6	18	4	7,623	8	5	5
810	Kingston upon Hull City of	4,629	17	15	19	1,915	11	2	13
314	Kingston upon Thames	294	3	1	3	631	7	1	10
382	Kirklees	3,483	9	14	9	2,279	8	3	9
340	Knowsley	2,632	15	15	25	1,395	12	1	9
208	Lambeth	2,228	11	6	9	1,656	19	3	30
888	Lancashire	12,653	12	87	17	5,773	7	8	9
383	Leeds	9,478	14	41	17	3,545	7	5	12
856	Leicester City	3,916	13	18	21	943	5	0	0
855	Leicestershire	3,603	7	16	7	3,157	7	4	7
209	Lewisham	1,173	6	2	3	1,826	14	2	15
925	Lincolnshire	6,025	10	37	13	4,197	9	9	14
341	Liverpool	6,766	15	33	21	3,112	9	3	9
821	Luton	2,139	10	6	10	426	4	0	0
352	Manchester	4,490	11	24	16	1,943	8	3	13
887	Medway Towns	1,641	7	12	13	2,928	13	1	5
315	Merton	1,231	9	8	16	1,312	15	2	18
806	Middlesbrough	2,012	13	7	15	787	8	2	18
826	Milton Keynes	3,509	14	17	20	1,728	13	3	27
391	Newcastle upon Tyne	2,039	10	11	15	2,004	10	5	24
316	Newham	1,572	6	4	6	1,323	7	0	0
926	Norfolk	6,876	10	38	10	3,020	7	4	8
812	North East Lincolnshire	2,256	14	13	22	838	7	1	8
813	North Lincolnshire	1,575	10	1	1	1,027	9	1	7
802	North Somerset	872	6	2	3	691	5	0	0
392	North Tyneside	1,861	11	7	13	1,770	12	3	15
815	North Yorkshire	6,438	13	49	15	1,675	4	1	2
928	Northamptonshire	5,605	10	25	9	3,501	7	6	10
929	Northumberland	3,874	18	34	24	3,254	10	11	19
892	Nottingham City of	2,544	10	14	14	3,529	21	6	30
891	Nottinghamshire	6,350	9	33	11	7,984	13	15	26
353	Oldham	2,222	10	8	8	1,134	7	2	13
931	Oxfordshire	4,104	8	22	9	4,749	11	3	7
874	Peterborough	1,825	11	6	10	1,238	9	3	23
879	Plymouth City of	2,026	9	3	4	795	4	1	6
836	Poole	569	5	1	3	676	8	1	11
851	Portsmouth	1,414	9	5	9	179	2	0	0
870	Reading	525	5	1	3	1,235	16	3	38
317	Redbridge	926	4	0	0	649	3	0	0
807	Redcar and Cleveland	1,517	10	6	12	1,430	12	3	23

Surplus places by local authority area at January 2001

		Primary[1]				Secondary			
		Actual surplus[2]		Schools with surplus of 25 per cent. or more[3]		Actual surplus		Schools with surplus of 25 per cent. or more[3]	
LEA	Name	Number of places	Surplus as a percentage of total places	Number	Per cent.	Number of places	Surplus as a percentage of total places	Number	Per cent.
318	Richmond upon Thames	438	4	1	3	569	7	1	13
354	Rochdale	1,786	8	8	11	1,434	9	2	14
372	Rotherham	2,561	10	10	9	1,383	7	1	6
857	Rutland	679	21	4	22	234	10	1	33
355	Salford	3,119	14	13	15	2,234	15	3	19
333	Sandwell	2,248	8	10	10	2,551	12	3	15
343	Sefton	3,560	13	15	16	1,280	6	2	9
373	Sheffield	4,647	10	20	14	1,102	4	0	0
893	Shropshire	3,099	12	24	17	588	3	1	5
871	Slough	1,026	9	3	10	333	4	0	0
334	Solihull	1,533	8	6	9	277	2	0	0
933	Somerset	3,159	8	12	5	2,864	9	4	10
803	South Gloucestershire	2,404	10	10	10	1,285	7	1	7
393	South Tyneside	1,251	9	3	5	1,161	10	1	9
852	Southampton	2,036	11	10	15	658	5	0	0
882	Southend	774	5	1	2	695	6	0	0
210	Southwark	1,806	8	4	6	1,148	11	1	8
342	St. Helens	1,672	10	6	10	1,000	8	0	0
860	Staffordshire	7,441	10	42	13	899	2	2	3
356	Stockport	2,964	11	15	15	1,171	7	0	0
808	Stockton on Tees	1,633	9	3	5	668	5	0	0
861	Stoke on Trent	4,835	19	21	24	934	6	1	6
935	Suffolk	6,114	12	32	13	4,610	8	5	6
394	Sunderland	4,700	16	25	26	983	5	2	12
936	Surrey	10,967	13	62	19	3,737	7	4	8
319	Sutton	902	6	2	5	670	5	1	7
866	Swindon	2,588	13	8	12	352	3	0	0
357	Tameside	1,399	7	5	6	1,064	7	2	11
894	Telford and the Wrekin	1,319	8	1	2	789	8	2	15
883	Thurrock	2,079	14	5	11	957	11	1	10
880	Torbay	430	4	3	9	238	3	0	0
211	Tower Hamlets	2,784	13	10	14	1,028	7	1	7
358	Trafford	1,557	8	9	12	1,053	6	1	6
384	Wakefield	3,141	10	15	12	1,096	5	0	0
335	Walsall	2,243	9	6	6	1,504	7	1	5
320	Waltham Forest	1,789	8	7	11	884	7	2	13
212	Wandsworth	1,485	9	6	11	465	5	1	11
877	Warrington	2,573	13	13	18	492	4	0	0
937	Warwickshire	4,754	11	20	10	2,712	8	4	11
869	West Berkshire	1,567	12	8	12	331	3	0	0
938	West Sussex	6,451	10	28	11	4,374	9	3	8
213	Westminster	395	4	1	3	697	9	0	0
359	Wigan	2,590	9	13	12	1,161	6	2	10
865	Wiltshire	4,928	12	34	16	2,643	9	6	18
868	Windsor and Maidenhead	382	5	3	7	314	3	0	0
344	Wirral	3,765	12	16	16	2,325	9	1	4
872	Wokingham	777	6	3	6	38	0	0	0
336	Wolverhampton	3,049	12	15	17	1,171	7	1	6
885	Worcestershire	5,068	12	27	14	4,285	10	9	15
816	York	1,637	11	5	8	779	7	0	0
	Total	449,037	10	2,139	12	250,733	7	302	9

[1] Primary figures show surplus after taking account of summer entry.
[2] Actual surplus is defined as the difference between capacity and number on roll for all schools where capacity exceeds number on roll.
[3] Schools with less than 30 surplus places are not included.

Schools Private Finance Initiative Projects

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what new schools private finance initiative projects she will support for signature in 2003–04; and if she will make a statement. [46932]

John Healey: Fifty-three Local Education Authorities have recently submitted proposals to the Department, seeking funding support through PFI credits for school based projects aiming to sign in 2003–04. These proposals represent a PFI credit requirement of over £3 billion. Following a rigorous appraisal of the bids by the Department's officials, we are today announcing that 21 projects, representing more than £900 million PFI credits in total, have been approved in principle and will be invited to prepare outline business cases for further consideration. Proposals representing around £750 million are expected to sign in 2003–04, and the remainder in 2004–05.

This is a very substantial package of investment. It will support the Government's drive to improve the learning environments in schools, and will also help to further raise standards for children, the school workforce and the wider community.

Details of the projects to be supported are being published today in a Departmental Press Notice and I have arranged for copies to be placed in the Libraries of the House.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) if the public service agreement target for the transfer of responsibility for underwater archaeology was achieved on time; [46093]

(2) which public service agreement targets scheduled to be met in 2002 will not be achieved by the due date. [44814]

Dr. Howells: The transfer of responsibilities in respect of underwater archaeology to English Heritage is dependent on legislation to extend English Heritage's remit out to the limit of the territorial waters of the UK adjacent to England. Provision for this was included in the Government's Culture and Recreation Bill which fell before the last election, thus preventing us meeting this element of the PSA target. Similar provisions are included in Baroness Anelay's National Heritage Bill which is currently before Parliament and is receiving Government support. We are hopeful that the transfer will take place in the near future.

Information about progress on PSA targets will be published in the Department's 2002 Departmental Report.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if the PSA target that 80 per cent. of public libraries should have Internet connections by 2002 will be met on time. [46095]

Dr. Howells: The £100 million lottery funded programme to connect all public libraries to the Internet is proceeding well with 71 per cent. of libraries in England now online and is expected to meet the year end deadline by which time all libraries will be online.

British Tourist Authority

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the recent activities of the British Tourist Authority in attracting foreign visitors to Scotland. [44794]

Dr. Howells: The British Tourist Authority's recent activities to attract visitors to Britain have all featured Scotland prominently, for example, the new Britain's Royal Heritage map features Scottish locations such as Glamis and The Queen's View. The Hidden Britain campaign, launched last year, highlights 14 routes through less well-known parts of Britain, including Blair Atholl and Pitlochry. In addition, the BTA's Bollywood Movie Map identifies locations throughout Britain, including Scone Palace and Brechin, which have been used in over 20 Indian films.

Items in Lieu of Tax

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the cost was of *(a)* the storage and *(b)* the upkeep and maintenance of items accepted in lieu of tax by the Inland Revenue in the last 12 months; and which Department is responsible for these costs. [45219]

Dr. Howells: Items which are accepted in lieu of tax by the Inland Revenue are allocated to nominated institutions which will display them to the public. Therefore any costs for their storage, upkeep and maintenance are borne by these institutions in the same way that they will bear the costs of any other item kept by them.

Tourism Statistics

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to change the collection of tourism statistics; and if she will publish these statistics on the departmental website. [45218]

Dr. Howells: We are currently examining what cost efficient changes to the current system of collection of tourism statistics might be made.

Tourism statistics are already available on the STAR UK website (www.staruk.org.uk) which was established jointly by the National Tourist Boards and DCMS.

Odsal Stadium

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions her Department has had with interested parties on the redevelopment of Odsal Stadium, Bradford. [45578]

Mr. Caborn: My Department has had no such discussions with the interested parties involved in the redevelopment of the Odsal Stadium, but my officials are aware of the proposed scheme. I visited Odsal Stadium on one of my regional visits.

Pub Opening Hours

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what measures she has taken to allow pubs to open at later hours; [45481]

(2) what assessment she has made of the impact of pub opening hours on the binge drinking culture; [45479]

(3) what statutory restrictions there are on pubs opening at late hours; and if she will introduce legislation to allow pubs to open at any time. [45480]

Dr. Howells: The White Paper "Time for Reform: Proposals for the Modernisation of Our Licensing Laws (Cm 4696)", published on 10 April 2000, set out our views on the problem of binge drinking and our plans for reforming the alcohol and public entertainment licensing laws in England and Wales, including the hours during which alcohol may be sold or supplied to the public at public houses and other premises. The existing law establishes permitted licensing hours outside of which licensed premises may not sell or serve alcohol without the special permission of licensing justices; and their consent may only be granted in particular circumstances.

The existing fixed closing times are artificially early. They actively contribute to binge drinking at the end of normal opening time, and result in significant numbers of intoxicated people on our streets simultaneously. This in turn leads to peaks of disorder around closing times. To counter and minimise public disorder resulting from fixed closing times, we intend to introduce flexible opening hours as a condition of the

licences of each venue, with the potential for some to operate up to 24 hour opening on each day of the week, subject to consideration of the impact on local residents. These changes require the amendment of primary legislation and we intend to introduce a Bill to that end as soon as Parliamentary time permits.

Free Television Licences

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many pensioners in Portsmouth have benefited from free television licences; and if she will make a statement. [46441]

Dr. Howells: TV Licensing, which administers the free television licence scheme for the BBC as Licensing Authority, is not able to provide geographical breakdowns of the number of free licences issued. However, estimates based on the 1991 Census indicate that there were approximately 14,600 people aged 75 or over in the Portsmouth, North and Portsmouth, South constituencies.

Educational and Sports Facilities

Laura Moffatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement regarding her assessment of the benefits of combining community sports facilities with educational facilities on a single site. [46460]

Mr. Caborn: Enhancing facilities is an integral part of the Government's PE and school sport strategy, being delivered jointly by the Department for Education and Skills and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. The Space for Sport and Arts programme is providing £130 million, and the New Opportunities £541 million within England alone, to ensure schools have the facilities they need to deliver PE and school sport whilst also opening up schools so the wider community can also benefit from the new facilities.

Gambling Review Body

Mr. Ivan Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when she will publish her conclusions on the report of the Gambling Review Body. [46680]

Tessa Jowell: We have today laid before both Houses a document setting out the Government's detailed response to the report of the Gambling Review Body. This paper, A Safe Bet for Success, sets out the Government's vision for a modern system of regulation for gambling in Great Britain. We shall bring forward a Bill to give effect to our proposals when Parliamentary time permits.

Media Ownership Rules

David Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when she will publish the results of the recent consultation on media ownership rules. [46681]

Tessa Jowell: I am today publishing a summary of the responses to the Consultation on Media Ownership Rules published by my Department in November 2001. This will be available on the Department's website (www.culture.gov.uk). The summary is intended to help all interested parties understand the issues and the arguments that have been put forward on this complex and important area. The Government's decisions on these issues will be announced alongside the draft Communications Bill which we hope to publish around the end of April.

I am arranging for copies of the summary to be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Lottery Grants (Distribution)

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) if she will take steps to improve the levels of Lottery grants to *(a)* Barrow-in-Furness and *(b)* Wear Valley; [46422]

(2) what appraisal she has made of Lottery funding levels for *(a)* Barrow-in-Furness and *(b)* Wear Valley; [46420]

(3) if she will discuss with Lottery distributing bodies the level of grants to *(a)* Barrow-in-Furness and *(b)* Wear Valley. [46421]

Mr. Caborn: According to the information supplied to us by the distributing bodies for the national lottery awards database, Lottery funding per capita made to date in the Barrow-in-Furness and Wear Valley local authority areas is £144.03 and £89.77 respectively. This compares to a median value of £91.76 per capita for UK local authorities. The Government is committed to ensuring that all areas in the UK benefit from Lottery funding and is working with distributors to achieve this.

PFI/PPPs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what the difference was between the price offered in reaching preferred bidder stage and the final contract price for PPP contracts let by her Department in each of the last four years; and if she will make a statement; [45611]

(2) what the difference was between the price offered in reaching preferred bidder stage and the final contract price for the five largest PFI contracts let by her Department in each of the last four years; and if she will make a statement. [45596]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* The Department for Culture, Media and Sport, has had no involvement with Private Finance Initiative contracts in any of the last four years.

Correspondence

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when she will reply to the letter of 19 December 2001 from the hon. Member for Fareham, concerning his constituent Mrs. Miolk. [45804]

Dr. Howells: I replied to the hon. Member on 25 March 2002 and I apologise for the delay in replying.

HEALTH

MRSA

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the extent of MRSA in NHS hospitals. [43728]

Yvette Cooper: Early data on Methicillin Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus rates for every acute trust in England were published on 8 February 2002 in the Public Health Laboratory Service Communicable Diseases Report. This is the first phase of a comprehensive and mandatory surveillance system for healthcare associated infection.

Barnsley Primary Care Trust

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to reduce the shortfall in the 2002–03 budget of the Barnsley primary care trust. [43729]

Ms Blears: South Yorkshire Strategic Health Authority and the Northern Directorate of Health and Social Care are currently working with the Barnsley health community to tackle the financial situation.

NHS Beds (North-West)

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what change there has been in the number of NHS beds in hospitals in the north-west since 1997. [43732]

Jacqui Smith: There has been a marked increase in the number of acute hospital beds.

In 1996–97, there were 16,792 acute beds in hospitals in the North West of England (excluding North Cumbria Health Authority) and by 2000–01, this had increased to 17,224. This represents an increase of 432 (2.6 per cent.).

The figures for total beds, given in the following table, show a more appropriate provision of care outside the hospital environment.

Staffed beds in wards open overnight—Average daily total for the financial year

	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Acute	16,792	17,006	17,082	17,094	17,224
Geriatric	4,251	3,748	3,462	3,466	3,565
Maternity	5,171	5,030	4,748	4,636	4,499
Learning disability	925	644	572	492	414
Mental health	1,667	1,616	1,496	1,463	1,399
Total beds	28,806	28,044	27,360	27,150	27,101
Total general/ acute beds	21,043	20,751	20,544	20,560	20,790

Note:
Excludes North Cumbria HA

Nursing Home Charges

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the average level of nursing home charges. [43733]

Jacqui Smith: The level of nursing home fees will vary from area to area and will reflect local market conditions. According to Laing & Buisson, consultants in health and community care, the average weekly nursing home fee in private homes for older people in the United Kingdom in March 2001 was £393 per week.

Health Service Accountability

Roger Casale: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to promote public accountability in the health service; and if he will make a statement. [43734]

Ms Blears: We are giving members of the public the chance to monitor review and make reports and recommendations on the local health service through Patients' Forums; setting up the Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health to ensure everyone gets the opportunity to be involved; and giving locally elected councillors the role of scrutinising local health services.

Hospital Mergers

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to analyse the impact of hospital mergers on health outcomes for patients. [43735]

Mr. Hutton: Achieving good health outcomes for patients must be the most important consideration in any service change.

New arrangements following the Health and Social Care Act 2001 mean that local authority Overview and Scrutiny Committees (OSCs) will have power to scrutinise local services.

Where a proposed service change is contested by the OSC, I am establishing an Independent Reconfiguration Panel, to provide independent advice on the suitability of the proposed service changes. Its recommendations will assess proposed changes against clear criteria, including quality of care, community health needs, accessibility and resourcing.

Cancer Treatment

Mr. Francois: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to visit Southend Hospital to discuss the provision of cancer treatment for people in South East Essex. [43737]

Jacqui Smith: A meeting has been arranged for 28 March by Eastern Regional Office to which local hon. Members, councillors and officials from Essex Strategic Health Authority designate have been invited to allow fuller discussion of the provision of cancer treatment for people in South East Essex.

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will announce whether the targets of *(a)* a maximum one month wait for breast cancer treatment and *(b)* a maximum one month wait for urgent GP referral to treatment for children's and testicular cancers and acute leukaemia have been met in England. [42498]

Yvette Cooper: The standards of a maximum wait of one month from diagnosis to first definitive treatment for breast cancer and one month from urgent general practitioner referral to treatment for children's and testicular cancers and acute leukaemia came into effect

at the end of December 2001. Central monitoring began on 1 January 2002 and data will be published on a quarterly basis.

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on his policy on waiting times for cancer treatment. [43747]

Yvette Cooper: The NHS Cancer Plan sets out our strategy to reduce waiting times for cancer patients. The ultimate goal is that no one should wait longer than one month from an urgent referral for suspected cancer to the beginning of treatment except for a good clinical reason or through patient choice. There is a series of staged milestones towards this goal: new targets introduced for 2001 were a maximum one month from diagnosis to treatment for breast cancer and a maximum one month from urgent GP referral to treatment for acute leukaemia and children's and testicular cancer. By 2005 there will be a maximum one month wait from diagnosis to treatment and a maximum two month wait from urgent GP referral to treatment for all cancers. Achievement of these targets will be supported by investment in workforce and equipment, and by service redesign through the Cancer Services Collaborative.

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of progress towards the reduction of waiting times for cancer treatment. [43753]

Yvette Cooper: The NHS Cancer Plan sets out a series of staged milestones towards the goal that no one should wait longer than one month from an urgent referral for suspected cancer to the beginning of treatment except for a good clinical reason or through patient choice. A two week outpatient waiting time standard was introduced in December 2000 and in the last quarter 95.1 per cent. of urgent referrals for suspected cancer were seen within two weeks. Standards of a maximum wait of one month from diagnosis to first definitive treatment for breast cancer and a maximum one month from urgent GP referral to treatment for children's and testicular cancers and acute leukaemia came into effect at the end of 2001. Central monitoring of these standards began on 1 January 2002 and data will be published on a quarterly basis.

Health Inequalities

Mr. Neil Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on progress to address health inequalities by changes to the funding formulae for health authorities/primary care trusts. [43738]

Yvette Cooper: The Government have made good progress. An interim health inequalities adjustment of £130 million was introduced for 2001–02 allocations. This has been extended to £148 million for 2002–03, to be shared between 54 Health Authorities. The Government are also reviewing the existing weighted capitation formula used to distribute NHS funding. By 2003 reducing inequalities will be a key criterion for allocating NHS resources to different parts of the country.

Ambulance Service

Mr. Heath: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average response time was for the attendance of an emergency ambulance over the last 12 months in each English region. [43739]

Ms Blears: Latest provisional management information indicates that, at the end of February 2002, 28 out of the 32 ambulance trusts in England were achieving the Government's key target of responding to 75 per cent. of immediately life threatening 999 calls within eight minutes.

All ambulance trusts are expected to achieve the 75 per cent. target during 2002.

Booked Hospital Admissions

Mr. Rammell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on progress in achieving booked admissions across the NHS. [43740]

Mr. Hutton: The National Booked Admissions Programme began in 1998. Every acute NHS trust is now booking patients in at least two specialties or high volume procedures. By the end of March 2002 more than five million patients will have benefited from the programme.

A fourth wave of the programme, "Moving to Mainstream", began in September 2001 and will shift booked admissions to mainstream NHS activity.

Nurse Recruitment (London)

Ann Keen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the latest figures for nurse recruitment in London were in the last 12 months. [43741]

Mr. Hutton: As at September 2001, there were 58,000 qualified nurses, midwives and health visitors working within the London Region—an increase of 3,400 compared to September the previous year. In London over 660 qualified nurses midwives and health visitors have returned to the NHS since April 2001. There are currently a further 124 nurses and midwives undertaking special training, who will return to the NHS shortly.

School Free Fruit Scheme

Joyce Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the free fruit scheme in schools. [43742]

Yvette Cooper: The National School Fruit Scheme will entitle every four to six year old with a free piece of fruit each school day from 2004. £42 million from the New Opportunities Fund is enabling the rapid expansion of the Scheme across England. This starts in West Midlands next term reaching 250,000 children in over 2,000 schools.

Dentistry

David Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the access to NHS dental treatment for the residents of north-west Leicestershire; and if he will make a statement. [43745]

Yvette Cooper: Figures are not collected by constituency but as of 31 January 2002, General Dental Service registration rates for Leicestershire were: adults—45 per cent. (England 43 per cent.); children—63 per cent. (England 60 per cent.).

NHS dentistry registrations were 463,074—up 3,666 on the previous year. Ninety eight per cent. of the population was within a five mile (urban) or 10 mile (rural) radius of dentists accepting new patients. Everyone was within 15 miles of an NHS dentist.

The number of GDS dentists in Leicestershire as of 31 December 2001 was 284 compared with 282 the previous year.

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assistance he is giving to support NHS dentistry in Dorset. [43752]

Ms Blears: In 2000–01, Dorset Health Authority (HA) was awarded £110,000 from the Dental Care Development Fund. In 2001–02, the HA allocation for the Modernisation Fund was £458,900. The HA has also been allocated £37,000 from the Dentistry Action Plan Fund.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what percentage of dentists on health authority lists practise full time in the NHS; [44410]

(2) what percentage of dentists on the Government Dental Council register *(a)* practise in the General Dental Service full time in the UK and *(b)* practise in the General Dental Service full time for the NHS in the UK. [44412]

(3) what percentage of dentists on the General Dental Council who qualified outside the United Kingdom and who have been on the Health Authority General Dental Service lists within the last 10 years are no longer on the Health Authority lists; [44405]

(4) what percentage of dentists on the General Dental Council Register who qualified outside the United Kingdom and who are on the Health Authority General Dental Service lists have been on these lists for over five years; [44406]

(5) what the ratio is of new dentists who have qualified from UK dental schools to dentists who are drawing their NHS pension; and if he will list this ratio for each of the previous 20 years; [44408]

(6) what percentage of dentists on the General Dental Council Register qualified outside the United Kingdom; and of this number, what percentage are on the Health Authority General Dental Service lists; [44407]

(7) what the ratio was of male to female new dental graduates from UK dental schools *(a)* last year and *(b)* for each of the previous 20 years. [44411]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 21 March 2002]:* Dentists on health authority lists are self-employed principal dentists. They do not have a standard working week and can vary their working hours.

The Office of Manpower Economics carried out a survey of principal dentists in Great Britain in March 2000. They reported that 81 per cent. of dentists describe themselves as full-time and 19 per cent. are part-time. Twenty per cent. of all principal dentists are both full-time and also work fully in the NHS. A further 5 per cent. are part-time and work fully in the NHS.

Dentists who work as assistants and vocational dental practitioners are not covered by this result because Health Authorities are not required to hold lists for them.

Dentists on health authority lists are self-employed principal dentists. They do not have a standard working week and can vary their working hours.

In March 2000 the Office of Manpower Economics (OME) carried out a survey into the hours of work and workload of principal dentists taking any part in the General Dental Service (GDS) in Great Britain.

The survey found that 81 per cent of principals in the GDS considered themselves as carrying out dental work full-time. This would be equivalent to about 16,158 of the 19,948 principals in the GDS in the UK at 31 December 2001. The survey found that one quarter of full-time principals spent 100 per cent. of their time on GDS work. This would be equivalent to 4,040 principals at December 2001.

Thirty one thousand five hundred and seventy seven dentists were on the General Dental Council (GDC) Register at 1 January 2002. Sixteen thousand one hundred and fifty eight principals estimated to be doing dental work full-time are equivalent to 51 per cent. of the GDC total. The 4,040 principals estimated to be doing dental work full-time and spending 100 per cent. of their time in the GDS are equivalent to 13 per cent. of the GDC total.

These percentages will exclude dentists working part-time or as assistants or vocational dental practitioners or dentists working in other dental services and dentists not working.

Forty four per cent. of principal dentists who qualified outside the United Kingdom and have worked in the General Dental Service (GDS) in England within the last 10 years were not on a health authority list at 31 December 2001.

Dentists who work as assistants and vocational dental practitioners are not covered by this result because health authorities are not required to hold lists for them.

Ninety one per cent. of principal dentists on a Health Authority list who qualified outside the United Kingdom have worked in the General Dental Service (GDS) in England for more than five years as at 31 December 2001.

Dentists who work as assistants and vocational dental practitioners are not covered by this result because Health Authorities are not required to hold lists for them.

The ratio of students obtaining their first registrable dental qualification from UK dental schools to the number of dentists retiring from the General Dental Service for each of the years 1983 to 2000 is shown in the table.

The retirement information is from Pension Agency records. The date of retirement may be the actual date of retirement or the date a pension was awarded or the last date on the Agency's computer systems. Some

retiring dentists may not have held a General Dental Service (GDS) post on retirement e.g. they may have retired from a consultant post.

Ratio of students obtaining their first registerable dental qualification to the number of retirements from the General Dental Service, 1983 to 2000

United Kingdom

Year	Number of qualifiers[1]	Number of retirements	Ratio of qualifiers to retirements
1983	811	103	7.9
1984	887	127	7.0
1985	845	286	3.0
1986	748	332	2.3
1987	729	385	1.9
1988	807	345	2.3
1989	771	376	2.1
1990	759	348	2.2
1991	795	399	2.0
1992	744	433	1.7
1993	783	532	1.5
1994	730	360	2.0
1995	649	366	1.8
1996	650	329	2.0
1997	722	358	2.0
1998	768	327	2.3
1999	782	321	2.4
2000	808	306	2.6

Notes:
[1] The number of qualifiers between 1983 and 1989 were recorded on a slightly different basis to later data.
Sources:
Higher Education Funding Council for England and Pensions Agency.

Fifteen per cent. or 4,643 of the 31,577 dentists registered with the General Dental Council (GDC) at 1 January 2002 qualified from dental schools outside the United Kingdom.

At 31 December 2001 2,094 dentists who had qualified outside the UK were on health authority lists in the General Dental Service (GDS) in England. This represents 45 per cent. of the 4,643 dentists who had qualified outside the UK who were registered with the GDC as of 1 January 2002. Health authority lists cover principal dentists only and exclude assistant dentists and vocational dental practitioners working in the GDS.

Information on the number of dentists who had qualified outside the UK and are practising in the GDS in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland can be obtained from the relevant devolved administrations.

The number of male and female students who have obtained their first registrable dental qualification from UK dental schools is shown in the table for each of the academic years 1989–90 to 2000–01. Also shown is the ratio of male to female graduates.

The information is not available for the years before 1989–90.

Number and ratio of male and female dental qualifiers, 1989–90 to 2000–01

United Kingdom

Academic year	Number of dental qualifiers		Ratio of male to female dental qualifiers
	Male	Female	
1989–90	429	330	1.3
1990–91	440	355	1.2
1991–92	437	307	1.4
1992–93	437	346	1.3
1993–94	396	334	1.2
1994–95	328	321	1.0
1995–96	348	302	1.2
1996–97	356	366	1.0
1997–98	385	383	1.0
1998–99	394	388	1.0
1999–2000	364	444	0.8
2000–01	384	431	0.9

Source:
Higher Education Funding Council for England

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of dentists registered on the General Dental Council are *(a)* resident in the UK and *(b)* registered at an address in the UK. [44413]

Ms Blears *[holding 21 March 2002]:* No information is available on the place of residence of dentists registered with the General Dental Council (GDC).

The country of the registered address of dentists on the GDC register at 1 January 2002 is shown in the table.

Dentists registered with the General Dental Council as of 1 January 2002: Country of registered address

Country	Number of dentists	Percentage of registered dentists
England[1]	24,523	78
Scotland	2,761	9
Wales	1,301	4
Northern Ireland	1,058	3
UK total	29,643	94
Overseas	1,934	6
Total	31,577	100

[1] England figures include dentists registered at addresses in the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands

European Traditional Medicines Directive

Mr. Tredinnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what categories of products that are currently on sale in the UK will be left outside of the scope of the proposed European directive on traditional medicines; and if he will make a statement. [43746]

Ms Blears: There are many categories of products currently on sale in the UK which the European Commission's proposals for a Directive on Traditional Herbal Medicinal Products are not intended to cover. However, specifically in relation to products which are currently sold legally as unlicensed herbal remedies under Section 12(2) of the Medicines Act, 1968, there are a number of reasons why a proportion of existing products might not satisfy the terms of the proposed Directive. The most likely reasons might be: failure to meet safety or quality standards, or failure to demonstrate that the remedy or corresponding products (that is, comparable herbal medicines) had traditional use. In many such cases in should be possible for companies to make changes—for example improving

quality standards or making adjustments to the ingredients or strength of specific products—in order to comply with the terms of the Directive.

Subject to a successful outcome to European negotiations, the introduction of a systematic regulatory framework for traditional herbal medicines should result in improved public health protection, enhanced public confidence in herbal medicine and the continuing availability of a very wide range of remedies.

Perinatal Morality

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures he is taking to reduce perinatal mortality. [43748]

Yvette Cooper: We are continuing to support the work of the Confidential Enquiry into Stillbirths and Deaths in Infancy, to improve understanding of how these deaths can be reduced. The tragedy of perinatal mortality has links with poverty, deprivation and exclusion. We are addressing these underlying causes through the "Sure Start" initiative, including pilot programmes to provide personal co-ordinated support for pregnant teenagers, and parents under the age of 18. We are also investing more in the provision of maternity and neonatal intensive care and seeking to ensure the most effective configuration of these essential services.

NHS Pensions

James Purnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he plans to equalise the calculations for NHS widows' and widowers' pension provision by including women doctors' pension contributions prior to 1988. [43749]

Mr. Hutton: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to the former Member for North Norfolk (Mr. Prior) on 13 January 1999, *Official Report*, column 212.

Rehabilitation Services

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the Government are doing to improve rehabilitation services for people of working age. [43750]

Jacqui Smith: We are working with the Department for Work and Pensions and the Health and Safety Executive on job retention and rehabilitation pilots to test different health and employment strategies to help people with long term sickness or disability to remain in their jobs.

We have commissioned guidance for health and social services on promoting employment opportunities for people with mental health problems to meet the requirement of Standard One of the National Service Framework (NSF) for Mental Health.

The NSF on Long Term Conditions will have a particular focus on the needs of people with neurological disease, brain and spinal injury, as well as some of the common issues faced by people with a long-term condition such as rehabilitation.

Primary Care

Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the impact of the transfer of responsibilities from health authorities to PCTs on community initiatives and preventive care. [43751]

Mr. Hutton: As part of the transfer of responsibilities from health authorities to primary care trusts all local communities are required to ensure that community initiatives and preventive care are incorporated into Health Improvement Plans and local strategic development plans.

Hospital Consultants

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of hospital consultants are contracted *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time to the NHS. [43754]

Mr. Hutton: The table shows the number of hospital medical consultants by contract in England as at 30 September 2001. The table gives a break down of contract holders on national terms and conditions of service by *(a)* whole time, *(b)* maximum part time and *(c)* part time. The number of honorary contract holders is also provided.

Hospital medical consultants by nature of contract

England at 30 September 2001 — *Numbers*

	All contracts	*Whole time*	*Maximum Part-time*	*Part-time*	*Honorary*
Consultant	24,400	13,810 (56.6%)	5,520 (22.6%)	3,530 (14.5%)	1,550 (6.3%)

Source:
Department of Health 2001 medical and dental workforce census

Notes:
Figures are rounded to nearest 10. Due to rounding figures may not equal the sum of component parts. Percentages were calculated using unrounded figures.

Hearing Services (High Street Opticians)

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received regarding the delivery of digital hearing aids and other hearing services via high street opticians. [43727]

Jacqui Smith: My hon. Friend raised this issue in the House on 7 November 2001, *Official Report* column 131WH and on several occasions since. My hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) has also raised this issue and I will be meeting her in April.

Digital Hearing Aids

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will allow Stepping Hill Hospital in Stockport to be one of the next group of sites to provide digital hearing aids. [41941]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* We have received expressions of interest from several Health communities not yet involved in the modernising hearing aid services project. Decisions will be made shortly, based on a number of criteria including geographical distribution, preparedness, and the support of the whole local health community.

Communications Aids

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement on the use to which the funding announced on 27 March 2001 to provide communications aids to children with hearing difficulties has been put; [42657]

(2) what guidance has been given to *(a)* health authorities, *(b)* primary care groups and *(c)* social services departments about the provision of communication aids for those who are hard of hearing; and if he will make a statement; [42684]

(3) if he will publish the guidelines given on 27 March 2001 about the provision of communication aids to those with hearing difficulties. [42683]

Jacqui Smith: The "Guide to Integrating Community Equipment Service", published on 27 March 2001, set out the vision for the scope of services that users should expect to receive, and indicated the steps that organisations will need to take to achieve the vision.

Our intention, as stated in a circular to local authorities and health authorities in March 2001, is that the services should look to use some of the additional funding for community equipment services on communication aids for people with impaired speech. No specific guidance on communication aids for children or adults with hearing difficulties has been issued. It is for local services to determine the equipment they will provide.

Overseas Treatment

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if it is his policy to include Southampton University Hospitals NHS Trust in the pilot scheme to allow NHS patients to be treated abroad. [43736]

Mr. Hutton: Southampton University Hospitals NHS Trust does not fall within any of the three Health Authority areas involved in the overseas pilot. However, if the Trust needs to have patients treated overseas the pilot sites would be willing and able to assist, using their existing contracts with French and German providers.

Delayed Hospital Discharges

Richard Younger-Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress he is making in tackling the problem of delayed discharge in the national health service. [43744]

Jacqui Smith: The latest published figures for December 2001 of people aged over 75 whose discharge was delayed was 5,117. This represents around a 12 per cent. reduction compared to the same period in 2000.

Unlicensed Medicines

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of websites based in the UK that are offering for sale *(a)* licensed, *(b)* unlicensed and *(c)* both licensed and unlicensed medicines; if he will list those sites his Department has identified; and if he will make a statement. [38820]

Ms Blears: An accurate figure for the number of websites based in the United Kingdom offering medicines for sale is not known because websites are opened and closed often with very short timespans, which makes quantification extremely difficult. Furthermore sites are often routed through many Internet Service Providers to disguise their origins. Therefore it would be disproportionate to investigate the origin of all sites.

The Medicines Control Agency takes appropriate action against any website of which it is aware that is operating within the UK in breach of UK law and regulations.

Ministerial Private Offices

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the running costs were of *(a)* his Ministers' private offices, separately identifying expenditure on staff and *(b)* his Department in each year from May 1997 to the nearest date for which the information is available. [40985]

Ms Blears: Information is available for the financial years 1997–98 to 2000–01. The running costs for Ministers' private offices and the Department for each of these years is shown in the table.

(a) Ministers' Private Offices

£ thousands

	Total	*Staff*	*Non staff*
1997–98	1,849	1,385	464
1998–99	2,144	1,564	580
1999–2000	2,653	1,983	670
2000–01	2,947	2,323	624

(b) Departmental administration expenditure (including agencies)

	£ million
1997–98	249
1998–99	257
1999–2000	273
2000–01	300

Health Service Organisations (Costs)

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the annual costs of *(a)* the Commission for Health Improvement, *(b)* the National Care Standards Commission, *(c)* the National Clinical Assessment Authority, *(d)* the National Patient Safety Agency and *(e)* the National Institute for Clinical Excellence will be for 2002–03, and the following three years. [40884]

Ms Blears: The central Departmental revenue funding which has been reserved for 2002–03 is set out in the following table:

Organisation	*Funding for 2002–03 in £ millions*
Commission for Health Improvement	34.0
National Care Standards Commission	88.1
National Clinical Assessment Authority	13.3
National Patient Safety Agency	15.0
National Institute for Clinical Excellence	14.8

Decisions on the level of funding for 2003–04 to 2005–06 will be made in the light of the work on the 2002 Spending Review.

ME

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will *(a)* collate, *(b)* evaluate and *(c)* disseminate best practice found in NHS trusts offering services for ME sufferers. [41816]

Jacqui Smith: The Chief Medical Officer commissioned a report from the CFS/ME independent working group, which was published on the 11 January. Copies of the report and its annexes are available at the following website: www.doh.gov.uk/cmo/publications.htm. The report recommended the development of service networks to increase knowledge and understanding of the condition, and this is something we would support.

Although there are currently no specific plans to collate, evaluate and disseminate best practice in NHS trusts offering services for ME sufferers, we are committed to take other action which will help spread best practice. A referral to the National Institute of Clinical Excellence (NICE) to provide guidance on management and treatment is something we will consider.

We are also ensuring that the External Reference Groups who will be developing the two National Service Frameworks (NSF) for both children's services and adults with long term conditions, consider this report and its recommendations for improving treatment and care.

Social Workers

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to raise the status of social workers; and if he will make a statement. [42243]

Jacqui Smith: We have established the General Social Care Council (GSCC) to raise the standard of social care and increase the protection of the public. The GSCC will do this by promoting high standards in the training of social workers and other social care staff, publishing codes of practice, setting out the standard of conduct expected of social care workers and by registering the workforce, starting with qualified social workers in 2003. In order to maintain registration with the GSCC individuals will be expected to keep their practice and training up to date. We have also announced a change to the social work qualification from a two-year diploma in social work to a three-year degree level qualification.

The term *Social Worker* is often used by people working in social care who do not hold a social work qualification. When sufficient numbers of qualified social workers have been registered by the GSCC we shall take steps to protect the use of the title social worker to those who have a social work qualification and who are registered as such with the GSCC. It will be an offence under the Care Standards Act 2000 for anyone to misrepresent his/her self with the intention of deceiving.

Last year we started a three year recruitment and retention campaign. One of the objectives of the campaign is to raise awareness of social work and to improve the image of social workers.

Care Homes

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many care home beds there were, broken down by local authority in England in each year since 1997. [42237]

Jacqui Smith: Information on the total number of residential care places by Local Authority for the years 1997 to 2001 is shown in Table 1. Information on nursing care beds by Health Authority is shown in Table 2.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many care homes have closed in *(a)* Shropshire and *(b)* the West Midlands since 1997. [44677]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 21 March 2002]:* The information on the number of residential and nursing care homes in Shropshire and West Midlands is shown in the table at 31 March each year. A copy has been placed in the Library.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment his Department has made of the extent to which people are inappropriately placed in *(a)* residential care homes and *(b)* nursing homes; and what steps he is taking to ensure appropriate placements. [45627]

Jacqui Smith: The Audit Commission's report "The coming of age", published in 1997 and subsequent work by the Department of Health, confirmed that better assessment and the development of preventative and rehabilitative services, could lead to more appropriate and effective permanent placements of state-funded individuals in residential care and nursing homes.

Since then through the NHS Plan and the National Service Framework for Older People, the Department has introduced a single assessment process to ensure that individual's needs are assessed in the round, and funded the development of a range of preventive and intermediate care services. These developments will help to ensure that older people and other adults, wherever possible, are only admitted to residential accommodation when necessary.

Strategic Health Authorities

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what ceiling he has put on start up costs for the new strategic health authorities; and whether this is in ratio to the size of the population served. [42172]

Mr. Hutton: New Strategic Health Authorities will have a cap on their staffing numbers of 75 staff and £4 million running costs but the exact amount per authority will be determined by their franchise plan. The functions of the strategic health authorities are substantially the same across all 28 irrespective of size of the population they serve.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his estimate is of the costs of establishing the North Yorkshire and Humberside Strategic Health

Authority *(a)* in new purpose-built health premises on the York Science Park and *(b)* by converting the existing NHS property at Willeby. [42094]

Jacqui Smith: The only cost incurred in provisionally locating and establishing the Strategic Health Authority (StHA) HQ for North and East Yorkshire and Northern Lincolnshire is for the rent of two offices in the York Science Park for February and March 2002. This will be approximately £3,500. This is the Project Office for the Strategic Health Authority pending a discussion about its permanent location.

On 20 March 2002, the StHA shadow Board discussed the option appraisal and work in progress to produce an outline business case. It was unanimously agreed that appropriate criteria had been used to inform the option appraisal on the location of the StHA and that the decision made by the Chairman and Chief Executive (Designate) to accept the recommendation of the York Science Park was supported. Formal consideration of the outline business case will be part of the first StHA Board Meeting on 18 April 2002.

All the existing NHS accommodation, including the accommodation currently occupied by the East Riding and Hull Health Authority at Willerby, is proposed for future use in each locality and will largely accommodate primary care trust staff including shared services to support these organisations. For this reason, no estimate was made of the cost of establishing the North and East Yorkshire and Northern Lincolnshire StHA HQ at Willberby.

Folic Acid

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans he has to introduce folic acid supplements into flour; [42086]

(2) what assessment he has made of the costs and benefits of the introduction of folic acid into flour. [42085]

Yvette Cooper: A consultation document on whether or not to fortify wheat flour with folic acid was issued in July 2000 jointly by the Department and the Food Standards Agency (FSA). This was based on the Committee on Medical Aspects of Food and Nutrition Policy (2000) conclusion that fortification of wheat flour with folic acid would help reduce the number of births affected by neural tube defects. The consultation responses have been analysed and a summary is posted on the DH website.

Following the consultation, the Department and FSA undertook or commissioned further work to address concerns raised. This work included a preliminary cost-benefit analyses. However, there are considerable uncertainties on key costs and effectiveness variables. The analyses took account of the increased risk of neuropathy in the elderly as well as the benefits of reduced risks of birth defects.

The policy options will need to be considered by the FSA Board as well as Health Ministers. The UK Health Departments and the FSA held a stakeholders meeting on 18 March 2002 to discuss the issue and inform policy decisions.

Breast Cancer

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what provision is being made to ensure that there are sufficient specialist breast cancer consultants, surgeons and nurses in the North West in the next 10 years. [41939]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* The NHS Plan set out our commitment to increasing the workforce and the NHS Cancer Plan confirmed our commitment to investment in the cancer workforce. Cancer networks (including those in the North West) nationally have recently been completing a number of toolkits which have looked at both clinician and nursing posts. Cancer networks are expected to audit their workforce requirements as part of the national standards for cancer. This is monitored through the peer review appraisal process. This information will continue to be used so that appropriate workforce development programmes are in place, which will help ensure that sufficient numbers of breast cancer consultants, surgeons and nurses are in place for future years.

Indium III Octreotide Imaging

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which NHS hospital trusts are able to offer Indium III Octreotide imaging tests. [42276]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 11 March 2002]*: The approved name for the radiopharmaceutical Indium III Octreotide is Indium III Pentetreotide. A list of the National Health Service hospital trusts where clinicians hold certificates to administer this product for imaging tests is shown in the list.

PQ 6103 NHS Trusts in England where clinicians hold certificates for Indium III Pentetreotide

Addenbrooke's
Aintree Hospitals
Airedale
Ashford and St. Peter's Hospitals
Barking, Havering and Redbridge Hospitals
Bart's and the London
Basildon and Thurrock General Hospitals
Blackburn, Hyndburn and Ribble Valley Health Care
Blackpool Victoria Hospital
Bolton Hospitals
Bradford Hospitals
Brighton Health Care
Central Manchester and Manchester Children's University Hospitals
Chelsea and Westminster Healthcare
Chesterfield and North Derbyshire Royal Hospital
Christie Hospital
City Hospital Birmingham
City Hospitals Sunderland
Countess of Chester Hospital
Dartford and Gravesham
East Kent Hospitals
East Somerset
Eastbourne Hospitals
Epsom and St. Helier
Essex Rivers Healthcare
Frimley Park Hospital

Gateshead Health
Gloucestershire Royal
Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children
Guy's and St. Thomas's Hospital
Hammersmith Hospitals
Harrogate Health Care
Hastings and Rother
Hull and East Yorkshire Hospitals
Kettering General Hospital
King's College Hospital
Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells
Mid Sussex Primary Care
Morecambe Bay Hospitals
Norfolk and Norwich Healthcare
North Bristol
North Cumbria Acute
North Cumbria Acute Hospitals
North Manchester Healthcare
North Middlesex University Hospital
North Tees and Hartlepool
Northampton General Hospital
Nottingham City Hospital
Oxford Radcliffe Hospitals
Peterborough Hospitals
Plymouth Hospitals
Poole Hospitals
Portsmouth Hospitals
Preston Acute Hospitals
Queen Elizabeth Hospital
Rotherham General Hospitals
Royal Berkshire and Battle Hospitals
Royal Brompton and Harefield
Royal Cornwall Hospitals
Royal Devon and Exeter Healthcare
Royal Free Hampstead
Royal Liverpool and Broadgreen University Hospitals
Royal Liverpool Children's
Royal Surrey County Hospital
Royal United Hospital Bath
Salford Royal Hospitals
Scarborough and North East Yorkshire Health Care
Sheffield Teaching Hospitals
Sherwood Forest Hospitals
South Devon Healthcare
South Manchester University Hospitals
South West London Community
Southampton University Hospitals
Southend Healthcare
Southern Derbyshire Acute Hospitals
St. George's Healthcare
St. Mary's
Stockport
Surrey and Sussex Healthcare
Swindon and Marlborough
Tameside and Glossop Acute Services
Taunton and Somerset
The Dudley Group of Hospitals
The Ipswich Hospital
The Leeds Teaching Hospitals
The Lewisham Hospital
The Medway
The Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals
The Norfolk and Norwich University Hospitals
The Royal Bournemouth and Christchurch Hospitals
The Royal Marsden Hospital
The Royal Wolverhampton Hospitals
United Bristol Healthcare
University College London Hospitals
University Hospital Birmingham
University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire
University Hospitals of Leicester
West Hertfordshire Hospitals
West London Hospitals
West Suffolk Hospitals
Whittington Hospital
Wrightington, Wigan and Leigh Health Services
York Health Services

Diabetes

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) whether the national standards framework for diabetes delivery strategy will include a commitment to a systematic approach to targeted screening of at risk groups for Type II diabetes; [42711]

(2) what recent research his Department has commissioned into the numbers of children diagnosed with type II diabetes resulting from obesity; [42722]

(3) what assessment he has made of the long-term potential financial savings to the NHS to be made from screening for Type II diabetes. [42710]

Jacqui Smith: Diabetes is becoming more common, even among children, as the population becomes more overweight and sedentary. We are taking forward a wide range of work across Government to tackle obesity, to increase physical activity and improve diet, especially among children. Prevention of diabetes is one of the key areas covered by the Diabetes National Service Framework standards, published last December.

We have asked the UK National Screening Committee to assess the benefits and drawbacks of screening for Type II diabetes. The Committee will make recommendations in 2005.

Mental Health

Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what the budget of the Mental Health Review Tribunal is; and what plans he has to increase research for the Mental Health Review Tribunal; [42939]

(2) when he last met the Chairman of the Mental Health Review Tribunal; and if he will make a statement. [42940]

Jacqui Smith: Expenditure on the mental health review tribunal in 2000–01 is likely to be just under £12 million, the cost of running the administrative function is just under £2 million. Figures for actual expenditure will not be available until after the end of the financial year.

The Department currently has no plans to commission new research for the mental health review tribunal but does, as part of its normal activity, collect and analyse data to support both the judicial and administrative functions of the tribunal.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has not had occasion to meet any of the four regional chairmen for the tribunal in England.

Nursing Staff

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 4 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 141W, on nursing staff, what his targets are for filling modern matron posts; and what additional funding has been made available to help fill these posts. [42620]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 12 March 2002]:* When launching guidance to the NHS in April 2001, we announced that there would be around 2,000 matrons throughout the NHS by 2004, and 500 in post by April 2002. Posts are funded from general allocations to Health Authorities.

GP Surgeries

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many (i) GP surgeries and (ii) single handed GP surgeries there have been in each of the last five years for which figures are available, broken down by *(a)* region and *(b)* health authority. [42586]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 12 March 2002]:* The information requested is shown in the table. The table identifies all General Practitioner partnerships (but not individual GP surgeries) including those "partnerships of one", by region and health authority. Some GPs who practice without being in partnership with another doctor may have a salaried Assistant or may work in a group practice.

Partnerships and single-handed partnerships of unrestricted principals and equivalents (UPEs)[1] in England by 2001 Health Authorities, 1997–2001

			1997		1998		1999		2000		2001	
Region name	*HA name*	*HA code*	*All partnerships*	*of which single-handed*	*All partnerships*	*of which single-handed*	*All partnerships*	*of which single-handed*	*All partnerships*	*of which single-handed*	*All partnerships*	*of which single-handed*
Northern & Yorkshire	Bradford HA	QDD	96	32	98	35	100	38	98	37	98	34
	Calderdale & Kirklees HA	QDT	113	46	111	41	112	39	110	39	111	38
	County Durham Health Commission	QDE	86	20	88	26	87	23	85	22	86	22
	East Riding HA	QDF	102	33	100	32	98	33	97	34	97	32
	Gateshead & South Tyneside HA	QDG	62	20	62	19	59	18	60	16	62	17
	Leeds Healthcare	QDH	125	28	124	27	126	29	125	26	125	29
	Newcastle & North Tyneside HA	QDJ	75	11	74	10	73	9	70	7	69	6
	North Cumbria HA	QDK	56	12	56	11	55	9	55	10	55	11
	North Yorkshire HA	QDR	112	14	111	12	109	10	108	10	110	13
	Northumberland HA	QDM	51	9	53	9	53	10	53	11	52	10
	Sunderland HA	QDN	52	15	54	18	54	17	55	18	54	15
	Tees HA	QDP	84	19	88	24	84	18	81	15	81	12
	Wakefield Health Care	QDQ	45	8	45	7	44	8	44	8	44	7
Trent	Barnsley HA	QCG	43	15	41	12	41	14	43	16	43	16
	Doncaster HA	QCK	53	20	52	19	53	21	52	21	51	18
	Leicestershire HA	QCL	156	48	157	50	153	49	149	46	150	45
	Lincolnshire HA	QCM	105	20	104	21	108	23	106	23	106	23
	North Derbyshire HA	QCH	62	16	61	12	60	10	59	11	59	8
	North Nottinghamshire HA	QCN	60	17	63	19	63	19	62	17	63	18
	Nottingham HA	QCP	116	32	117	33	119	35	119	32	118	30
	Rotherham HA	QCQ	41	17	41	17	41	18	40	15	40	15
	Sheffield HA	QCR	107	24	99	14	98	13	97	13	95	10
	South Humber HA	QDL	64	28	62	26	61	26	58	25	58	25
	Southern Derbyshire HA	QCJ	86	16	84	13	80	13	81	10	80	12
Eastern	Bedfordshire HA	QA6	93	25	94	26	92	23	93	24	92	24
	Cambridgeshire HA	QER	106	10	105	9	103	10	109	15	110	18
	Hertfordshire	QEX	143	27	144	31	139	24	140	28	138	29
	Norfolk HA	QET	109	18	109	18	110	14	106	10	106	10
	North Essex HA	QAX	137	27	138	27	138	28	140	31	134	25
	South Essex HA	QAY	146	68	147	69	147	72	148	74	144	70
	Suffolk HA	QCF	92	13	93	13	92	12	92	13	93	16
London	Barking & Havering HA	QAP	99	57	96	51	97	53	97	50	98	54
	Barnet, Enfield & Haringey HA	QEW	203	86	206	91	206	94	207	95	209	93
	Bexley, Bromley & Greenwich HA	QEY	144	58	145	59	146	62	143	55	143	58
	Brent & Harrow HA	QAR	124	54	122	53	120	51	117	49	119	46
	Camden & Islington HA	QAT	102	49	106	56	98	46	98	46	97	44
	Croydon HA	QAD	69	24	70	23	70	25	68	24	67	27

Partnerships and single-handed partnerships of unrestricted principals and equivalents (UPEs)[1] in England by 2001 Health Authorities, 1997–2001

			1997		1998		1999		2000		2001	
Region name	*HA name*	*HA code*	*All partnerships*	*of which single-handed*	*All partnerships*	*of which single-handed*	*All partnerships*	*of which single-handed*	*All partnerships*	*of which single-handed*	*All partnerships*	*of which single-handed*
	Ealing, Hammersmith & Hounslow HA	QAV	196	94	188	84	190	86	189	90	188	89
	East London & The City HA	QAW	165	75	166	77	164	72	165	74	161	75
	Hillingdon HA	QA2	55	21	55	23	52	18	53	22	53	19
	Kensington, Chelsea & Westminster HA	QA3	106	59	104	57	102	54	99	48	99	46
	Kingston & Richmond HA	QAG	62	18	61	18	61	18	62	18	60	15
	Lambeth, Southwark & Lewisham HA	QAH	162	62	166	62	162	60	159	57	161	56
	Merton, Sutton & Wandsworth HA	QAJ	132	46	128	42	124	39	118	35	115	32
	Redbridge & Waltham Forest HA	QA5	120	63	123	58	119	57	116	54	121	63
South Eastern	Berkshire HA	QA7	116	27	117	29	121	31	118	30	118	28
	Buckinghamshire HA	QA8	92	9	95	13	95	11	95	9	92	5
	East Kent HA	QAE	110	47	109	43	106	37	102	31	101	30
	East Surrey HA	QAK	62	10	61	11	60	11	61	12	57	11
	East Sussex, Brighton & Hove HA	QAM	137	44	136	39	135	39	132	34	131	34
	Isle of Wight, Portsmouth & South East Hampshire HA	QEV	99	13	96	10	97	11	96	10	94	8
	North & Mid Hampshire HA	QD1	69	9	67	6	66	6	65	5	66	7
	Northamptonshire HA	QCC	82	10	83	12	79	12	76	10	76	8
	Oxfordshire HA	QCE	87	10	87	10	88	8	87	8	86	6
	Southampton & South West Hampshire HA	QD3	79	13	78	12	78	11	79	11	78	10
	West Kent HA	QAF	213	93	215	96	208	89	204	82	204	85
	West Surrey HA	QAL	86	16	86	16	84	14	85	15	84	14
	West Sussex HA	QAN	98	10	96	8	100	11	97	10	95	10
South Western	Avon HA	QD8	147	19	147	22	147	19	146	22	145	19
	Cornwall & Isles of Scilly HA	QDV	77	5	76	5	76	4	75	3	74	2
	Dorset HA	QDW	108	17	108	15	110	16	110	16	109	15
	Gloucestershire HA	QDY	84	4	84	4	85	4	85	4	85	4
	North & East Devon HA	QDX	76	7	76	7	76	8	77	9	76	9
	Somerset HA	QD5	75	10	76	12	77	11	77	11	76	7
	South & West Devon HA	QD6	102	16	102	16	102	17	102	16	102	16
	Wiltshire HA	QD7	92	22	91	17	94	19	94	18	94	19
West Midlands	Birmingham HA	QD9	247	107	245	109	242	100	239	97	239	100
	Coventry HA	QEA	65	21	66	22	67	22	66	21	64	19
	Dudley HA	QEC	63	24	61	22	60	23	59	21	59	21
	Herefordshire HA	QED	26	2	27	2	26	2	26	2	25	1
	North Staffordshire HA	QEH	101	44	102	43	103	45	102	46	99	44
	Sandwell HA	QEE	70	28	69	28	68	27	67	27	69	32
	Shropshire HA	QEF	65	7	65	6	67	7	67	9	67	10
	Solihull HA	QEG	32	6	32	7	34	9	32	5	31	3
	South Staffordshire HA	QEJ	97	38	99	40	102	43	101	42	105	50
	Walsall HA	QEK	72	39	70	38	69	38	68	36	67	38
	Warwickshire HA	QEL	81	18	79	16	75	12	76	12	75	11
	Wolverhampton HA	QEM	64	31	65	36	67	40	70	40	69	40
	Worcestershire HA	QEN	67	4	68	4	68	4	68	4	68	4
North West	Bury & Rochdale HA	QCT	79	29	78	25	79	26	80	28	75	22
	East Lancashire HA	QCX	112	43	111	41	115	46	110	43	109	41
	Liverpool HA	QC2	106	42	106	45	105	45	108	49	105	46
	Manchester Health	QC3	109	36	109	40	110	38	107	34	110	37
	Morecambe Bay HA	QC4	59	17	59	16	59	15	59	16	59	18
	North Cheshire HA	QCV	46	14	47	14	49	16	48	13	49	14
	North West Lancashire HA	QCY	91	34	91	33	89	32	89	31	86	28
	Salford & Trafford HA	QC6	113	51	114	47	114	50	115	54	109	49
	Sefton HA	QC7	53	17	53	16	53	17	53	16	52	18
	South Cheshire HA	QCW	93	9	93	6	95	9	94	9	94	9
	South Lancashire HA	QC1	65	22	69	27	67	25	66	25	66	24
	St. Helen's & Knowsley HA	QC5	76	26	76	25	76	24	77	28	77	30
	Stockport Health	QC8	60	20	60	17	60	15	59	14	59	17
	West Pennine HA	QC9	91	35	92	33	91	28	93	32	91	31
	Wigan & Bolton HA	QDA	128	59	128	57	123	53	125	51	118	45
	Wirral HA	QDC	64	11	63	11	64	11	65	10	63	10
England Total			9,003	2,719	8,994	2,683	8,944	2,631	8,878	2,575	8,817	2,534

[1] UPEs include GMS unrestricted principals, PMS contracted GPs and PMS salaried GPs. Data as at 1 October 1997 to 1999 and 30 September 2000 and 2001.

Source:

General and Personal Medical Services Statistics

Appeals Panels

Ms Drown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to ensure that NHS trusts establish appeals panels promptly. [40018]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 12 March 2002]:* The Department is currently discussing new doctors' disciplinary procedures with the British Medical Association. This will include the handling of local appeals by NHS employers.

The aim is to develop a national system that will provide for fair, quicker and more effective local procedures.

Blood Donation

Mr. Havard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health who, on behalf of his Department, is conducting the assessment into the possible exclusion of transfusion recipients giving blood; and how many years in retrospect the assessment will cover. [42794]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 12 March 2002]:* The Advisory Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Blood and Tissues has asked the Department's Economics and Operational Research Division to assess the impact of excluding transfusion recipients from donating blood on possible secondary infections of variant CJD, assuming blood to be infective. This risk assessment is still in progress and consequently no decision has been taken into the possible exclusion of transfusion recipients giving blood.

Health Expenditure

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the answer given to the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) of 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 391W, on health expenditure, if he will list the expenditure on health by weighted head of population in real terms for each health authority area, to include expenditure accounted for by *(a)* the Dental Practice Board and *(b)* the Prescription Pricing Authority. [42800]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 12 March 2002]:* Expenditure per weighted head of population is not a reliable indicator to compare different health authorities. Allocations per weighted head are a much more reliable indicator.

Expenditure by the Dental Practice Board and the Prescription Pricing Authority is not attributed to individual health authorities in their annual accounts.

Public Appointments

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many appointments to public bodies have been made through his Department *(a)* from April 2000 to March 2001 and *(b)* since 31 March 2001; and how many of these were (i) men and (ii) women. [42158]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 12 March 2002]:* The number of men and women appointed, or re-appointed, to bodies sponsored by this Department during the period in question is as follows.

Period	*Men appointed*	*Women appointed*
1 April 2000–31 March 2001	1,125	942
1 April 2001–28 February 2002	836	693

As well as appointments made by Ministers, the figures include appointments made by the National Health Service Appointments Commission to NHS trusts, health authorities and primary care trusts since the Commission's establishment in April 2001.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many answers to parliamentary questions, are more than *(a)* two weeks and *(b)* three months outstanding; and if he will make a statement. [43926]

Ms Blears: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) on 13 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 1147W.

As at the end of business on 25 March there were 22 parliamentary questions outstanding that were due for answer on or before 28 February.

Correspondence

Joyce Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will reply to the letter from the right hon. Member for Gateshead, East and Washington, West dated 19 November 2001 relating to Dr. Sheikh, a constituent. [44291]

Mr. Hutton: A reply was sent on 15 March.

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he intends to reply to the letter dated 4 December 2001 addressed to the Minister for Local Government and transferred to his Department on 10 January about the availability of benefits to the disabled within unitary authorities. [44305]

Jacqui Smith: A reply was sent on 12 March.

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reason the letter of 26 September 2001 to him from the hon. Member for Fareham was answered on 15 March. [45802]

Jacqui Smith: I apologise for the delay in replying to your letter of 26 September. This was caused by the letter being mislaid within the Department.

Home Care

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 12 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 1022W, on home care, how many households, in each of the last five years for which figures are available received *(a)* up to five contact hours, *(b)* five to 10 contact hours and *(c)* more than 10 contact hours of intensive home care during a survey

week (i) per thousand head of population aged 65 or over and (ii) per total number of people aged 65 or over. [44673]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 21 March 2002]:* The available information is shown in the following table.

Households receiving home help/home care by contact hours
Rates per 1,000 households and 1,000 population aged 65 or over

		Percentage of households receiving			
Up to 5 hours	69	65	62	59	58
5 to 10 hours	30	20	21	25	23
More than 10 hours	—	15	17	19	19
Number of households receiving intensive home care[1]	—	61,200	67,000	72,100	76,400
Rate per 1,000 households 65+	—	12	13	14	15
Rate per 1,000 population 65+ (C28)	—	7.8	8.8	9.2	—

[1] From 1998 intensive home care/home help is defined as six or more visits with more than 10 contact hours, prior to this the criterion was six or more visits with five or more contact hours
— Not available
Source:
DH HH1 Return

Hospital Patients

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 13 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 1141W, on people remaining in hospital, what estimate he has made of the cost of, and what assessment he has made for the case for, social services departments being charged by the NHS for people who remain in hospital, after being medically discharged; and if he will make a statement. [44675]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 21 March 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the response I gave him on Wednesday 13 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 1141W.

Primary Health Care Trusts (Wirral)

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the membership of the two primary health care trusts for the Wirral. [44994]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 21 March 2002]:* The non-executive members of the Primary Care Trusts are as follows:

Bebington and West Wirral PCT
Mr. Charles Pursglove (Chair)
Mr. James Burns
Mrs. Marion Cureton
Dr. William Foggin
Mrs. Ruth Shaw
Mrs. Alexandra Wall
Wallasey and Birkenhead PCT
Mrs. Muriel Downs MBE
Mr. Raymond Allen
Lord Michael Chan
Mr. Frederick Corkhill
Mrs. Rosaleen Dixon
Mr. Peter Russell.

Hospital Readmissions

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many readmissions within 30 days there were to hospitals in Shropshire in *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* 2001. [44678]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 21 March 2002]:* The Department of Health publishes statistics on emergency re-admission to hospital within 28 days of the last, previous discharge from hospital.

The figures in the table are from The Royal Shrewsbury Hospital. This is the only hospital within the Shropshire Health Authority that has data that meets this statistic.

	Number of discharges	*Number of re-admissions*	*Percentage of re-admissions, indirectly age and sex standardised*
2000–01	42,786	2,821	6.53
1999–2000	41,212	2,495	6.00
1998–99	40,293	2,360	5.85

Care Home Beds

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many care home beds were available in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999, *(d)* 2000 and *(e)* 2001 in Shropshire. [44680]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 21 March 2002]:* The information on the number of residential and nursing care beds in Shropshire is shown in the table at 31 March each year.

Residential and nursing care beds in Shropshire[1], 1997 to 2001
At 31 March *Rounded numbers*

	Total number of registered care beds	*Residential care beds*	*Nursing care beds[2]*
1997[3]	5,000	3,090	1,920
1998	5,950	4,030	1,920
1999	5,430	3,470	1,970
2000	5,320	3,390	1,930
2001	5,310	3,430	1,880

[1] Information on residential care for 1999 onwards is presented for Shropshire County Council and Telford and Wrekin Unitary Authority.
[2] Includes beds in private hospitals and clinics.
[3] Nursing beds relate to the period 1 October 1996 to 31 March 1997.
Source:
Department of Health's annual returns.

NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency will publish its annual business plan. [46859]

Ms Blears: We are pleased to announce that the NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency's annual business plan has been published and copies have been placed in the Library.

Medical Devices Agency

Mr. Pound: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the key targets for 2002–03 for the Medical Devices Agency. [46860]

Ms Blears: We have agreed the Agency's key targets for 2002–03 and copies have been placed in the Library.

Nursing and Midwifery and Health Professions Councils

Alan Keen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if appointments have been made to the Nursing and Midwifery and Health Professions Councils in readiness for their formal establishment on 1 April. [46929]

Mr. Hutton: The Nursing and Midwifery and Health Professions Orders 2001 provide for the Privy Council to make appointments to the new Councils. I can confirm that members have accepted the invitations to serve for a three-year term from 1 April 2002. The following is a list of their names.

Nursing and Midwifery Council

President

Jonathan Asbridge—England

Practitioner members

Nurses

Jonathan Asbridge—England

Sharon Hall—Wales

Kathleen McLean—Scotland

Mary Hanratty—Northern Ireland

Midwives

Catherine Warwick—England

Jean Keats—Wales

Heather Shaw—Scotland

Elizabeth Bannon—Northern Ireland

Health Visitors

Bronya Webster—England

Marianne Cowpe—Wales

Ishbel White—Scotland

Fiona Wright—Northern Ireland

Alternate members

Nurses

Professor David Sines—England

Elizabeth Hewett—Wales

Nancy Kirkland—Scotland

Angela O'Connor—Northern Ireland

Midwives

Professor Paul Lewis—England

Christine Hayes—Wales

Mary Vance—Scotland

Eileen Pollock—Northern Ireland

Health Visitors

Heather Livesey—England

Angela Roberts—Wales

Sheena Wright—Scotland

Maureen Jamison—Northern Ireland

Lay (Others)

Education

Professor Gordon Dickson—Scotland

Professor Donald Pennington—England

NHS Employers

Catherine Gritzner—England

Non-NHS Employers

Trevor Purt—England

Lay (users)

Jill Carter—England

Christina Funnell—England

William Buxton—England

Moi Ali—Scotland

Alan Ferguson OBE—Northern Ireland

John Leece Jones—Wales

Health Professions Council

President

Professor Norma Brook—England

Practitioner members

Professor Diane Waller (Arts Therapists)—England

Pamela Sabine (Chiropodists)—England

Dr John Old (Clinical Scientists)—England

Morag MacKellar (Dietitians)—Scotland

Neil Willis (Medical Laboratory Technicians)—Wales

Mary Crawford (Occupational Therapists)—England

Clare McGartland (Orthoptists)—Northern Ireland

Joanna Manning (Paramedics)—England

Dr Robert Jones (Physiotherapists)—England

William Munro (Prosthetists & Orthotists)—Scotland

Dr Alexander Yule (Radiographers)—Wales

Dr Anna Van Der Gaag (Speech & Language Therapists)—Scotland

Alternate members

Michael Barham (Arts Therapists)—England

Paul Frowen (Chiropodists)—Wales

Dr Graham Beastall (Clinical Scientists)—Scotland

Gillian Pearson (Dietitians)—England

Gordon Sutehall (Medical Laboratory Technicians)—England

Carol Lloyd (Occupational Therapists)—England

Helen Davis (Orthoptists)—England

Michael Collins (Paramedics)—Wales

Eileen Thornton (Physiotherapists)—England

Laurence Hughes (Prosthetists & Orthotists)—Northern Ireland

Rosemary Klem (Radiographers)—England

Jacqueline Pearce (Speech & Language Therapists)—England

Lay Members

Education

Professor Anthony Hazell—Wales

Professor John Harper—Scotland

NHS employers

Robert Clegg—England

Non-NHS employers

Shaheen Chaudhry—England

Lay (users)

Jacqueline Stark—England
Professor John Lilleyman—England
Anne Foster—England
Keith Ross—Scotland
Christine Farrell—England
Barbara Stuart—Northern Ireland
Colin Lea—Wales
Professor Jeffrey Lucas—England

No Secrets Guidance

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make his policy to include adult protection indicators arising from the implementation of No Secrets in the performance indicator framework; and if he will make a statement. [45634]

(2) when the Social Services Inspectorate plans to inspect social services' implementation of the No Secrets guidance. [45625]

Jacqui Smith: This Department is not currently planning to inspect local councils for compliance with the "No Secrets" guidance. We have commissioned the Centre for Policy on Ageing to undertake an analysis of all local council multi-agency codes of practice. Once the results of this work are made available a decision will be made on the need to follow up the "No Secrets" guidance.

At present there are no plans to include a specific adult protection indicator in the Personal Social Services Performance Assessment Framework. There are however several existing indicators of relevance to adult protection (for example emergency admissions, avoidable harm from falls and hypothermia, clients receiving reviews and inspections of residential care). A decision on including a specific adult protection indicator will be made once the Centre for Policy on Ageing have concluded their analysis.

Community Pharmacists

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to utilise community pharmacists in the review of medication of older people. [45642]

Jacqui Smith: The NHS Plan set a target for all Primary Care Trusts to have schemes in place so that people get more help from pharmacists in using their medicines by 2004.

The National Service Framework (NSF) for Older People highlighted the importance of medication review and the role pharmacists can play in helping older people take their medicines more effectively.

We are investing in medicines management services including through the collaborative hosted by the National Prescribing Centre. This initiative will build on and complement other local initiatives through which community pharmacists are involved in reviewing the medication of older people, as promoted in the NSF.

Nursing Care Payments

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list those homes which have received a letter from the Minister of State, Department of Health, the hon. Member for Redditch (Jacqui Smith), following representations regarding the failure to pass on the free nursing care payments to residents. [45698]

Jacqui Smith: I wrote to four national care home providers about their fees and charging structures in the light of the introduction of National Health Service funded nursing care following the receipt of correspondence from concerned individuals. As a result of the responses received, on 11 March I announced my intention to issue a national model contract; to amend regulation 5 of the Care Home Regulations; and to ask the National Care Standards Commission to ensure that the minimum standard relating to contracts was enforced.

Domiciliary Care

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures are in place to prevent *(a)* financial, *(b)* sexual, *(c)* physical and *(d)* mental abuse against older people in home care settings. [45624]

Jacqui Smith: Statutory guidance on the prevention of elder abuse, "No Secrets", was issued on 20 March 2000 to councils with social services responsibilities. This required the implementation of local multi-agency codes of practice by 31 October 2001.

Care providers registered with the National Care Standards Commission will be required to comply with the protection of vulnerable adults scheme from 1 August 2002.

The National Care Standards Commission will take account of National Minimum Standards for domiciliary care agencies in deciding whether agencies comply with the forthcoming Domiciliary Care Agencies Regulations. The prevention of financial, sexual, physical and mental abuse in the home care setting will be an essential part of the National Minimum Standards.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he plans to publish the Protection of Vulnerable Adults consultation document. [45635]

Jacqui Smith: We are planning to begin a consultation exercise involving all relevant stake-holders within the next few months.

Care Home Standards

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps the National Care Standards Commission will take with those care homes that fail to comply with the Care Standards Act 2000 Part 11, section 11(1) by 1 April. [45630]

Jacqui Smith: Providers who have submitted applications for registration by 31 March 2002 will be given transitional protection from section 11(1) of the Care Standards Act until their application can be processed by the National Care Standards Commission. Providers who fail to submit their application for registration by 31 March will be committing an offence under section 11(1) of the Act. However, before taking prosecution action as set out at section 11(5), we would expect the Commission to take account of the relevant circumstances.

Bioterrorism

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what actions the Government have undertaken to warn the public *(a)* about possible bio-terrorist attacks and *(b)* of the symptoms of smallpox. [44010]

Mr. Hutton: The Department has not issued guidance to the public about possible bio-terrorist attacks as it is not currently considered that a specific or credible threat exists to the UK.

Guidance was issued to all health authorities and Regional Directors of Public Health on the procedures to be followed in the event of a deliberate release of smallpox and other biological agents on 17 October 2001. At the same time, guidance for medical and laboratory staff was issued by the Public Health Laboratory Service on 17 October 2001. This is available on the PHLS website: http://www.phls.co.uk/advice/smallpox—guidelines.pdf. This is also available to the public. Guidance is also available to the public from NHS Direct.

Primary Care Trusts

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how he plans to deal with the revenue consequences of capital schemes which are in progress, but not yet in use, in making allocations to PCTs; and if he will list the *(a)* PCTs affected and *(b)* related capital schemes. [46413]

Mr. Hutton: We currently allocate funding to health authorities, and they allocate funding to primary care trusts, on the basis of the relative needs of their populations. A weighted capitation formula is used to determine each health authority and primary care trust's fair share of available resources, to enable them to commission similar levels of services for populations in equal need.

In future the intention is that allocations will be made direct to primary care trusts. This is subject to the passage of legislation through Parliament. Allocations will continue to be based on the principle of weighted capitation. PCTs will meet the revenue consequences of capital schemes that are in progress but not completed from these allocations.

Information for *(a)* and *(b)* is not centrally available.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how he plans to allocate money to PCTs in order that they can meet expenditure associated with functions delegated to them; and when such allocations will be made. [46414]

Mr. Hutton: We currently allocate funding to health authorities, and they allocate funding to primary care trusts, on the basis of the relative needs of their populations. A weighted capitation formula is used to determine each health authority and primary care trust's fair share of available resources, to enable them to commission similar levels of services for populations in equal need.

In future the intention is that allocations will be made direct to primary care trusts. This is subject to the passage of legislation through Parliament. Allocations will continue to be based on the principle of weighted capitation.

We announced allocations to health authorities for 2002–03 on 6 December 2001. Health authorities are setting initial primary care trust allocations for 2002–03 for those functions for which primary care trusts will be responsible from 1 April 2002. Subject to Parliament the intention is that further functions will be devolved to primary care trusts from 1 October 2002. Primary care trust allocations will be reset to cover these functions.

Faversham Cottage Hospital

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health further to his answer of 19 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 308W, on cottage hospitals, what funding is available to Faversham Cottage Hospital to develop its role. [46312]

Hazel Blears: The information requested is not collected centrally. The information is available from the Chairman of the East Kent Community NHS Trust.

Ashford and St. Peter's Hospitals NHS Trust

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many trolley waits of over four hours in locations other than within the accident and emergency department there were at the Ashford and St. Peter's Hospitals NHS Trust in each month between January 2001 and February 2002; [46503]

(2) how many operations were cancelled on the day before an operation had been scheduled at the Ashford and St. Peter's Hospitals NHS Trust in each month between January 2000 and February 2002. [46502]

Ms Blears: This is day to day management information and is not available centrally.

Information is not collected centrally in the format requested.

Information on the number of operations cancelled at the last minute for non-medical reasons, and breaches to the standard to re-admit patients within one month following such cancellations, are collected on a quarterly basis at health authority level and placed in the Library. The latest figures are for Quarter 2 (July–September) of the 2001–02 financial year.

NHS Finance

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what the overspend is in each NHS trust, PCT and health authority; [45937]

(2) what his assessment is of the likely level of *(a)* underspending and *(b)* overspending in the NHS in 2001–02; [45936]

(3) which *(a)* NHS trusts and *(b)* health authorities are expected to exceed their resource limits in 2001–02; and by what amount the resource limit is expected to be exceeded in each case. [46416]

Mr. Hutton: We are in discussions with NHS Trusts, health authorities and PCTs about managing their end-of-year positions. The information requested will be available when the annual audited accounts are completed and published.

Smoking-related Deaths

Mr. Ian Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, how many deaths there have been since May 1997 from stroke; how many of these were smoking related; and what plans he has to introduce a bill on tobacco advertising and promotion. [18463]

Jacqui Smith *[pursuant to her reply, 5 December 2001, c. 367W]:* I regret that my previous reply was incorrect. It should read as follows:

The table shows the number of deaths from cerebrovascular disease, including stroke, which occurred in the United Kingdom.

Year	*United Kingdom (all ages)*
1995	69,395
1996	68,506
1997	66,352
1998	66,018
1999	64,515

Source:
Office of National Statistics; ICD 9 430-438

The latest available UK figure for the number of deaths from cerebrovascular disease, including stroke estimated to be caused by smoking is 7,300 deaths among those aged 35 and over (1995 data). These deaths represent approximately 11 per cent. of all deaths from cerebrovascular disease in the UK in that year (Christine Callum, *The UK Smoking Epidemic: Deaths in 1995*. Health Education Authority, 1998).

We have recently announced that we will take the Tobacco Advertising and Promotion Bill through the House of Commons. The Second Reading will take place on 9 April 2002.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Ports

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what representations he has received about state support to British ports. [45302]

Mr. Jamieson: We have received representations about the proposed Great Yarmouth Outer Harbour Project and about the ferry service from the Port of Rosyth to Zeebrugge. We believe that port developments and port operations should not in general need public subsidy. However, if a project has the potential to justify worthwhile economic and environmental benefits, it may qualify to be considered for an element of public funding.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the differing levels of state assistance provided to European Union ports. [45301]

Mr. Jamieson: The European Commission included a report on public financing and charging in European ports in its Communication on Ports, published in February 2001. We believe that state funding and subsidies are an important factor affecting competition between European ports, and we have urged the Commission to take a further look at these issues.

British Seafarers

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 20 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 348W, on British seafarers, what performance indicators are used by his Department to assess the impact of *(a)* the Support for Maritime Training Scheme and *(b)* the Tonnage Tax on the training and employment of British seafarers. [46359]

Mr. Jamieson: The indicators are the number of trainees as given in the reply of 20 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 348W, to the hon. Member's previous question.

We recognise that this falls short of the approximately 1,400 recruits a year estimated by academic studies to meet current needs at sea and future posts in the onshore maritime sector. The validity of this estimate is to be reviewed. We believe that the recent changes to the SMarT scheme, together with the tonnage tax training commitments, will lead to a significant increase in seafarer recruitment.

Short Sea Shipping

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 20 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 350W, on short sea shipping, when he will publish the proposals being considered by his Department for a short sea shipping employment grant. [46362]

Mr. Jamieson: We are awaiting the industry to publish their proposals.

Maritime and Coastguard Agency

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he expects to announce the key targets for the Maritime and Coastguard Agency for 2002. [46926]

Mr. Jamieson: I will shortly place in the Libraries of both Houses a copy of the Agency's Business Plan, which includes its key targets for 2002–03. The key targets are:

to decide on the appropriate search and rescue response to accidents and life threatening situations, and initiate action if necessary, within five minutes of being alerted in at least 95 per cent. of incidents;

to introduce three pilot search and rescue accident prevention projects targeted at the most common incident categories and measure their impact by 31 March 2003;

to build on the risk based approach to improve the focus of ship inspections, and deliver at least 96 per cent. of the planned inspections based on that approach;

to increase the percentage of available surveyor time spent on surveys, inspections and related operational work by 5 per cent.

to achieve an 80 per cent. customer satisfaction rating as a result of a survey of the shipping industry; and

to improve our performance by 5 per cent. in regard to Service Standard 4: Issue Notices of Eligibility for admission to seafarers' examinations.

EU State Aid

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 20 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 350W, on EU state aid, if he will publish the assessments made by his Department of the operation of EU state aid rules on the encouragement of national flag shipping and seafarer employment. [46361]

Mr. Jamieson: Our assessment, in response to the EU Commission's enquiries, is that the current state aid rules allow for increasing UK ship registration and seafarer employment. The assessment cannot be published as it contains commercially sensitive information.

Ferry Links

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps he is taking to encourage expanded ferry links between Scotland and Northern Ireland via the Lockryan ports. [45917]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* The provision of ferry services is a matter for decision by individual ferry operators and port authorities.

Swanwick

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment his Department has made of closures of air traffic control sectors by the centre of Swanwick since it began operations; what the *(a)* dates of *(b)* nature of and *(c)* reasons for closures were; and if he will make a statement. [45652]

Mr. Jamieson: These are operational matters for National Air Traffic Services as the operator of Swanwick and the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) as the independent aviation safety regulator. The CAA is satisfied that the operational arrangements at Swanwick are safe and it is scrutinising the performance of the system closely.

Air Cargo

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the total net change in air cargo movements has been since 1997 for each UK airport. [45308]

Mr. Jamieson: This information is not available in the form requested.

Galileo Project

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he expects the Galileo Project for positioning to be completed; and when he expects it to be made compulsory for air movements in EU airspace. [45307]

Mr. Jamieson: The upcoming Transport Council on 26 March is expected to take decisions on the development and validation phase (2002–05) of Galileo, the European Commission's global navigation satellite system. The Government understands that Galileo is expected to become operational in 2008 and that the future Galileo aviation requirements have yet to be determined.

Airports

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the impact of the proposed international airport in Northern France on the airports in the South East of England. [45247]

Mr. Jamieson: The South East and East of England Regional Air Services Study (SERAS) has not undertaken an assessment of the impact of the proposed airport in northern France on airports in the study region. It should be noted that the proposed French airport is a long way from London—about the same distance as Manchester.

Slot Allocations

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he plans to make a decision on the application for public service obligation on the Gatwick to Inverness route; and if he will make a statement on the decision of Scot Air to delete the Inverness to London-City route and its implications for security of access from Highlands to London. [45140]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 21 March 2002]:* The Government will make an announcement on the application to impose a public service obligation on the Gatwick to Inverness route shortly. Scot Air's decision to cease to operate air services between Inverness and London City was a commercial one for the airline. Two other airlines continue to provide air services between Inverness and London.

NATS

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment has been made of future funding requirements for NATS. [44338]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing North (Mr. Pound) on Wednesday 20 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 353W.

Airlines

Mr. Pound: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proposals he has to pay compensation to airlines affected by the closure of US, Israeli and central London airspace following the terrorist attacks in the USA on 11 September; and if he will make a statement. [46927]

Mr. Jamieson: Following my right hon. Friend's announcement on 13 December 2001, *Official Report*, columns 103–04W, of a scheme of financial assistance to airlines, applications for compensation have been received. These have now been scrutinised and my right hon. Friend has decided that assistance totalling some £39.7 million will be paid to 11 airlines.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions on what basis state aid will be paid to airlines; which ones will receive it; whether such subsidy will be made available to all UK airlines who can prove financial loss due to the events in the USA on 11 September in proportion to the downturn in traffic they have experienced since that time; whether such subsidy will include meeting losses that can be shown to have been incurred by UK airports; and if he will make a statement. [9352]

Mr. Spellar: Following my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State's announcement on 13 December 2001, *Official Report*, columns 103–04W, of a scheme of financial assistance to airlines, applications for compensation have been received. These have now been scrutinised and my right hon. Friend has decided that assistance totalling some £39.7 million will be paid to 11 airlines. Air 2000, Airtours, BA, bmi British Midland, Britannia, British European, JMC, KLM uk, Monarch, Scot Airways, Virgin Atlantic. Airports were not eligible under the scheme.

Airport Security

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) pursuant to the answer of 19 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 232W, on airport security, which United Kingdom *(a)* airports and *(b)* airlines have signed up to the Voluntary Commitments on Air Passenger Rights; [46449]

(2) what non-legally binding commitments are set out in the Voulntary Commitments on Air Passenger Rights. [46444]

Mr. Jamieson: Twenty UK airports have signed up to the Airport Passenger Service Commitment. They are Aberdeen; Belfast International; Birmingham International; Bournemouth; Bristol International; Cardiff International; East Midlands; Edinburgh; Exeter International; Glasgow; Humberside; Leeds Bradford; Liverpool; London Gatwick; London Heathrow; London Luton; London Stansted; Manchester; Norwich International; Southampton.

Ten UK airlines have signed up to the Airline Passenger Service Commitment. They are Air 2000; Airtours International (now MyTravel Airways); bmi British Midland; Britannia Airways; British Airways; British European Airways; JMC Airlines; KLM(UK); Monarch Airlines; Virgin Atlantic Airways.

The Airport Passenger Service Commitment covers 11 areas, with signatories agreeing to: provide assistance to persons with reduced mobility; display passenger information on legal rights; provide assistance during periods of significant delays or disruption; improve airport access and ground transportation; provide appropriate infrastructure for check-in, baggage and security; regularly maintain equipment; ensure that sufficient trolleys are available; provide clear way-finding and staffed information desks; keep all public areas clean at all times; ensure that customer comment and complaint procedures are clear and effectively managed; produce regular consumer reports on levels of passenger satisfaction.

The Airline Passenger Service Commitment covers 14 areas, with signatories agreeing to: offer the lowest fare available through each of their direct outlets; honour the agreed fare after payment; notify passengers of known delays, cancellations and diversions; assist passengers facing delays; deliver baggage as quickly as possible; allow telephone reservations to be held or cancelled without commitment or penalty within 24 hours; provide prompt refunds; provide assistance to passengers with reduced mobility and passengers with special needs; meet passengers essential needs during long on-aircraft delays; take measures to speed up check in; reduce the number of passengers who are involuntarily denied boarding; provide information to passengers regarding commercial and operational conditions; provide information on the operating carrier; and be responsive to passengers' complaints.

The full text of the Commitments can be found on the website of the Air Transport Users Council at http://www.auc.org.uk.

Air Traffic Control

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) of 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 177W, on air traffic control, if the estimate provided included *(a)* the direct internal costs referred to in his answer of 11 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 742W, *(b)* controller relocation and training costs and *(c)* interim costs of expanding the West Drayton Centre while Swanwick was non-operational; and if he will make a statement; [44450]

(2) if he will provide a definition of commissioned cost he used in the answer; and if he will make a statement. [44574]

Mr. Jamieson: The figure of £623 million quoted in my answer of 5 March, comprises the capital and revenue costs, together with costs associated with bringing the system into operation (which include costs

of operation, maintenance and support of the Swanwick site). The figure includes the direct internal costs and the controller relocation and training costs, but not the interim costs of expanding the West Drayton centre prior to Swanwick becoming operational.

Heathrow

Lawrie Quinn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will announce his decisions on the applications to extend the Heathrow Express and the Piccadilly Line to the proposed fifth terminal at Heathrow Airport; and if he will make a statement. [46934]

Mr. Byers: When I gave approval on 20 November last to the building of a fifth terminal at Heathrow, I said that I shared the inquiry Inspector's view on the importance of these two proposed railway extensions to the case for approving the new terminal. I therefore imposed conditions requiring two railway extensions to be provided before the core terminal building is opened. I also said that I was minded to make the necessary Orders under the Transport and Works Act (TWA) authorising the proposed railway extensions, and to grant planning permission for this development.

I was, however, unable at that stage to grant the necessary approvals for the railway works. This was because I wished to attach planning conditions giving satisfactory control over the railway development, but these conditions had not been discussed at the inquiry. I therefore set out in my November letter the conditions I was minded to impose and invited comments. I have subsequently received comments from interested parties which have shown a good measure of agreement for the conditions I proposed, and which have helped me to finalise their wording.

I have therefore now decided to make the TWA Orders and to give planning approval for the Heathrow Express and Piccadilly Line extensions. Copies of both decision letters, which include the full sets of conditions for these works, have been placed in the Library of the House.

PFI/PPPs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the *(a)* private finance initiative and *(b)* public private partnership projects which have been delayed. [44877]

Dr. Whitehead: In this Department, the only PPP/PFI project where contract signature is likely to be reached later than originally planned is the Health and Safety Laboratory Estate Rationalisation project which I expect to be signed shortly.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what role his Department played in the transfer of *(a)* real estate and property and *(b)* other assets to the shadow PPP infracos. [45656]

Mr. Jamieson: The Secretary of State gave consent for the necessary transfers in accordance with the provisions of the London Regional Transport Act 1984 (as amended).

London Underground

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what changes relating to reputational externalities were made in the Ernst & Young, London underground PPPs Value for Money Review, between the receipt of a copy from Ernst & Young and the presentation of the copy to the House on 5 February; and if he will make a statement. [46448]

Mr. Jamieson: No such changes were made.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether he intends to appoint an interim arbiter for the London Underground PPP; and under what powers and specification he is able to make such an appointment. [46381]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the answers given on 5 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 170W, and 12 March, *Official Report,* column 920W.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the ability of London Underground rolling stock to operate on main lines beyond the terminal points of the tube network. [45880]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* This is a matter for London underground (LU). LU's rolling stock is purpose-designed and the Underground uses a four-rail system and operates to different rules from the main line. These differences make it difficult for LU rolling stock to operate beyond the existing network. However, there are short sections of the main line over which LU has long standing running rights and which have been specially adapted for this purpose.

LU has carried out an assessment of a section where they plan to extend the Metropolitan line to Watford Junction (the Croxley Link). This involves a short section of new line and then a connection to the Euston/ Watford Junction main lines.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the safety case that will be required to be conducted by the Health and Safety Executive before the transfer of London Underground to Transport for London; and what implications this has for contracts between infracos and London Underground under the PPP. [45660]

Mr. Jamieson: London Underground, as the operator of trains, stations and infrastructure, is responsible for preparing a safety case. The Health and Safety Executive considers whether the safety arrangements made out in the case, if implemented, are capable of delivering safety.

HSE is currently considering London Underground's revision of its existing case, which sets out safety arrangements with its infrastructure companies in the private sector. Acceptance of these arrangements by HSE is necessary before the Tube modernisation plans can proceed. Whether a further revision will be necessary to cover transfer of London Underground to

Transport for London depends on the extent of any further changes to safety arrangements that may be involved.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions which aspects of the modernisation plans for the London Underground have been set as requirements by his Department; and what the mechanism is by which these requirements have been set in each case. [45654]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government do not have powers to set specific requirements in relation to London Underground's plans for the modernisation of the Tube. London Underground shares the Government's objectives of improving the Tube and ensuring that there should be no privatisation, that safety be maintained or improved and that the contracts should only go ahead if they represent value for money.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) pursuant to the answer of 11 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 736W, on London Underground, who in Government have been involved in the discussions on increased public grants to support the tube modernisation programme with Transport for London; on what dates discussions have take place; and what reference has been made to the infraco contracts in discussions with Transport for London; [45662]

(2) what discussions he *(a)* has had and *(b)* plans to have with other parties regarding increased public grants to support the tube modernisation programme. [45655]

Mr. Jamieson: Tripartite discussions have begun between officials of my department, London Underground and Transport for London on the overall level of grant provision over the first seven and a half years of the Tube modernisation contracts. It is envisaged that a number of further discussions will take place between the three parties before the grant determination process is concluded.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to the answer of 11 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 737W, on PPP Infracos, who has statutory powers to take over work from the London Underground PPP Infracos; and under what legislation. [45708]

Mr. Jamieson: Under the plans for the modernisation of the Underground, three infrastructure companies will carry out work to maintain and modernise the Tube's infrastructure under contract to London Underground. The contracts provide powers for London Underground to take over the work of the infrastructure companies if necessary for safety or other reasons.

As referred to in my answer of 4 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 85W, the Greater London Authority Act 1999 provides statutory powers for an infrastructure company to be managed under a PPP administration order.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to the answer of 7 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 555W, on London Underground, how many revisions of the draft PPP contracts were received by his Department; on which dates; and what the reasons were for the revisions in each case. [45623]

Mr. Jamieson: As stated in my answer of 7 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 555W, London Underground has shared revisions to draft contracts with DTLR throughout the process of developing the proposals for the modernisation of the Underground. Details of the number and dates of changes could only be provided as disproportionate cost. The reasons for any changes are a matter for London Underground, but throughout the aim has been to ensure that the public sector gets the best value for money overall.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what correspondence was received from *(a)* Transport for London, *(b)* the London Mayor and *(c)* London Transport on the London Underground PPP in the week preceding 7 February; and if he will place the correspondence in the Library. [42113]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* Consistent with the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information exemption on internal discussion and advice, it would not be appropriate to place such correspondence in the Library.

Central Railway

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the impact on Chiltern Railway passenger services of *(a)* the construction and *(b)* the operation of the Central Railway project. [46314]

Mr. Jamieson: The impact on the operations on the existing network is among the key areas that the SRA will be examining in its further detailed assessment of Central Railway's proposals.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 15 March 2002 to the hon. Member for Luton, North (Mr. Hopkins) *Official Report,* column 1276W, on the Central Railway, if he will place in the Library a copy of the Strategic Rail Authority's report on the Central Railway proposal. [46367]

Mr. Jamieson: I am arranging for a copy of the SRA's consultants' report to be placed in the library.

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions on what date he received the report of the SRA on the proposed Central Railway Project. [39106]

Mr. Jamieson: The SRA first notified my Department of the conclusions of its high level review on 20 September and discussions about the proposal are continuing.

Rolling Stock

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to the answer of 15 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 1271W on rolling stock, what proportion of the new vehicles entering service between 1999 and 2001 were ordered after 25 February 1999;

when the remainder were ordered; and where information regarding the refurbishment of railway rolling stock is held. [45669]

Mr. Jamieson: 15 per cent. of these vehicles were ordered after 25 February 1999. Of the remainder, 53 per cent. were ordered in 1998 and 32 per cent. in 1997. None was ordered between 1 January 1999 and 24 February 1999. Information about refurbishment of rolling stock is held by the rolling stock leasing companies (ROSCOs).

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what rules the Health and Safety Executive applies to the loan of rolling stock by preservation societies to train operating companies. [45304]

Mr. Jamieson: Provided that the vehicles have not been deleted from the Library list of rolling stock permitted to run on the network, and they have not been modified, they are covered by "grandfather" rights and do not require further approval under the Railway and Other Transport System (Approval of Works, Plan and Equipment) Regulations.

However, the Railway Safety Regulations 1999 prohibit Mark 1 rolling stock from carrying fare paying passengers from 1 January 2003 unless the vehicles are modified to reduce the risk of overriding or an exemption has been granted for their use. These regulations also prohibit trains from running on the mainline railway that are not protected by a train protection system such as TPWS. The operation of the vehicles will also need to be addressed in the duty holder's Railway Safety Case.

Railtrack

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether the Government have approached the European Commission about the possible extension of state aid approval for Railtrack in administration beyond September. [45347]

Mr. Jamieson: No approach has been made.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimate he has made of the additional state aid approval that would be required to extend Railtrack administration for an additional six months beyond the end of September. [45299]

Mr. Jamieson: No such estimate has been made.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimated funding levels were included in the 10 year plan for the level of income assessed for Railtrack by the Regulator for Control Period 3. [45677]

Mr. Jamieson: The original 10-year Plan, published in July 2000, assumed that Railtrack's income in Control Period 3 would be based upon our projections for the fixed element of Railtrack's track access charges. This involved a 2 per cent. increase in real terms for fixed track access charges in 2001–02 and a 2 per cent. reduction in real terms for each of the subsequent nine years.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what percentage increase the 10-year Plan includes for Railtrack income between Control Period 2 and Control Period 3. [45678]

Mr. Jamieson: No detailed breakdown is currently made of how much of the 10-year Plan funding in the Control Period 3 years (2006–07 to 2010–11) will be for Railtrack or for other individual companies. The level of income for Railtrack's successor in CP3 will depend upon the nature of the company and will be determined by the Rail Regulator through a Periodic Review, having regard to his statutory duties under section 4 of the Railways Act 1993.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what system of assessment is in place to monitor the work of Railtrack plc and the Rail Regulator in repairing and replacing rail track; and if he will make a statement; [44635]

(2) what assurances the Government have received from Railtrack plc and the Rail Regulator that the track is being repaired and replaced to a proper level of safety; and if he will make a statement. [44605]

Mr. Jamieson: The Office of the Rail Regulator (ORR) receives monthly information from Railtrack on the physical condition of its track. Railtrack also supplies monthly reports on the numbers of broken rails and other incidents that cause delay. These reports are shared with the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and regular liaison takes place between the ORR and HSE so that the safety implications and performance of Railtrack are fully understood.

In addition there is now in place a system of independent reporters who make an assessment directly to the Rail Regulator of the adequacy of Railtrack's stewardship of the network. The Regulator does not repair or replace track and so no system of monitoring his activities exists.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether he is able to provide financial guarantees for commercial funding to the Railtrack administrator beyond 30 September. [40233]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given yesterday, 25 March 2002, by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to my hon. Friend, the Member for Scarborough and Whitby (Lawrie Quinn) [ref. 45966]. I would also refer the hon. Member to the Statement made to the House yesterday by the Secretary of State.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) when he will have to make a further application for state aid consent to the European Commission if the process of ending Railtrack administration is delayed; [36316]

(2) how much the application for state aid consent from the European Commission for Railtrack was for; [36313]

(3) how much contingency funding the Government have allowed for in the state aid application to the European Commission for Railtrack. [36315]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given yesterday, 25 March 2002, by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to my hon. Friend the hon. Member for Scarborough and Whitby (Lawrie Quinn) [ref. 45966].

Channel Tunnel

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent discussions he has had with *(a)* the EU Commissioner for Transport and *(b)* his French counterpart on the suspension of rail freight services through the Channel Tunnel. [46134]

Mr. Jamieson: Rail freight services through the Tunnel have been severely disrupted since November last year as a result of the actions of would-be illegal immigrants at SNCF's Fréthun yard. The Government is extremely concerned at the impact of this disruption on UK businesses. My Department, and others, are in regular contact with both the European Commission and the French Government on this matter.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the impact has been on his rail freight targets under the 10 year transport plan of the suspension of rail freight services by SNCF through the Channel Tunnel. [46133]

Mr. Jamieson: We will be producing a review of the 10 Year Plan in July this year.

ScotRail

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what discussions he has had with National Express about the train drivers' strikes against ScotRail; and if he will make a statement. [46355]

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what discussions his Department has had with National Express regarding the industrial dispute by employees of ScotRail; if his Department has given instructions to the company relating to the company's pay offer to drivers; and if ministers have intervened in giving advice to National Express on this matter. [46480]

Mr. Jamieson: Neither DTLR Ministers nor their officials have given any instructions or advice to National Express or ScotRail concerning ScotRail's pay offer to its drivers.

Rail Freight (Harwich–Colchester Line)

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what representations he has received on proposals to increase rail freight on the line between Harwich and Colchester; and if he will make a statement. [46187]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* My Department receives representations from time to time about rail freight to the Haven Ports. As part of its Freight Strategy, the Strategic Rail Authority is developing proposals to upgrade rail links to Harwich and Felixstowe.

Strategic Rail Authority

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to the answer of 6 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 369W, on the Strategic Rail Authority for what reasons *(a)* the expected amount of private investment under the plan will not exactly match that envisaged under the 10-year Plan and *(b)* infrastructure renewals are defined as investment. [45496]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority have indicated in their Strategic Plan that the total amount of private sector investment envisaged will be very similar to that envisaged in the 10-year Plan. They have also indicated that the precise amount will depend on the pace of negotiations and the terms that can be negotiated.

Infrastructure renewals, which are the replacement or updating of railway assets to make them fit for use on the railway network, create assets that have a useful life over more than one accounting period. Under accounting rules, they can therefore be properly accounted for as investment to be amortised over the expected accounting life of the assets. Railtrack's current accounting policies reflect this, as did British Rail's when that organisation still existed.

SWT Franchise

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what impact the SRA consultation on the franchising structure of the South West Trains and Wessex areas will have on the timetable to complete the new SWT franchise agreement. [45297]

Mr. Jamieson: The consultation process is not expected to delay completion of the new South West Trains franchise agreement.

Train Drivers

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many train drivers were working in the rail industry in November 1998. [45429]

Mr. Jamieson: This information is not held centrally in the form requested. According to ATOC information, in April 1999 there were 8,684 established drivers of passenger trains.

Train Operating Companies

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will place in the Library the franchise agreement ancillary document D for each of the train operating companies. [40872]

Mr. Byers: These documents are available for inspection at the Strategic Rail Authority's offices, in accordance with section 73 of the Railways Act 1993. I have arranged for copies to be placed in the Library.

Railways

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what benchmarks and baseline periods he will use to assess the performance of the rail network in the next five years. [45351]

Mr. Jamieson: We published on 18 February a quarterly set of key indicators against which progress on improving the railways could be measured. They are intended to provide a benchmark for future reference. The baseline period is April–June 2001. The indicators focus on the issues that matter most to passengers: punctuality, reliability, safety and quality. The first quarterly update was published on 18 March. The next will be published on 6 June.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions for what reason the total length of the electrified rail network has fallen since 1997. [45350]

Mr. Jamieson: The reduction referred to represents a very small proportion of total network length, about 0.2 per cent., and is an operational matter for Railtrack. I am not aware that it is attributable to a single factor.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent discussions he has had with *(a)* the Strategic Rail Authority, *(b)* the Association of Train Operating Companies, *(c)* train operating companies, *(d)* the Rail Passenger Committee and *(e)* other passenger representatives regarding (i) rail fares and fare regulation and (ii) Network railcards. [45416]

Mr. Jamieson: The SRA is conducting a review of fares policy and will report to Ministers. The Association of Train Operating Companies has met with Ministers to explain their proposals for the SouthEast Network Card.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what targets he has set for his rail performance measures to be met by March 2005. [45418]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government's 10 Year Transport Plan sets out clear targets for Rail focusing on increasing the number of passengers and volume of freight using the railways, and on tackling overcrowding. We do not intend to introduce yet further targets, but rather to have a set of benchmarks against which progress and improvements can be judged.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what changes have taken place in the last five years to railway discount cards; what changes are planned; and if he will make a statement. [45417]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) requires franchised train operators to continue to offer the Young Person's, Disabled Person's and Senior Citizen's railcards on the same terms as applied before privatisation. Train operators also operate commercial railcard schemes such as the Network Railcard (for travel in the South East) and the Family Railcard, whose terms are a matter for the train operators, and which are not subject to regulation by the SRA.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many staff are employed in each key area of the railway industry; what the total requirement for staff in each key area is; what assessment he has made of staff shortage numbers in each key area; how many individuals are *(a)* in training and *(b)* trained for each key area; and how many individuals have (i) retired and (ii) left employment in each key area since 1995. [45500]

Mr. Jamieson: Information from the Railway Industry Training Council indicates that approximately 140,000 people are employed in rail related work. The most recent information available indicates that in 2001 approximately 1,200 vacancies were reported as hard to fill. It is estimated that 5,500 people were in training for employment in the industry in 2001. No information is held centrally on numbers of people leaving the industry.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to the answer of 15 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 1271W, on rail summit targets, what issues arising from the National Rail Summits are not being taken forward through the SRA Strategic Plan. [45670]

Mr. Jamieson: The broad thrust of the Rail Summits—improving both the rail network and its performance—is the fundamental goal of the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) and its Strategic Plan. That improvement will only come, as the Plan has made clear, through action to stabilise the industry and get back to basics now and through significant investment in renewal and enhancement of the network, in order to provide increased capacity for passenger and freight services. The SRA is currently engaged in delivering both of these.

Barcelona Summit

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the discussions and resolutions of the Barcelona Summit related to transport. [45349]

Mr. Spellar: I am pleased to report that there was substantial progress made at the Barcelona summit in a number of areas related to transport, consistent with Her Majesty's Government's objectives.

The summit outcomes and discussions will advance the liberalisation of the transport sector, in particular, the calls to: progress work on the Second Railway Package; liberalise public transport more generally; achieve a Single Sky in air traffic management in 2004; take decisions on the proposed rules on airport slot allocation by the end of 2002; and, adopt by December 2002 the pending proposals on port services.

In addition, the summit called for the Council and the European Parliament to adopt revised guidelines and financial rules on the Trans-European Networks (TEN) and welcomed progress on the Galileo satellite navigation system. The Council was requested to conclude its work on the proposed Regulation on HGV Drivers' Hours. There were also discussions on the proposed directive for fairer transport tariffs across different modes of transport by 2004.

I should also refer the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell to the Prime Minister's statement to the House on 18 March on the outcomes of the summit.

10-Year Plan

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the rail projects in the 10-year Plan on which development work has already started. [45348]

Mr. Jamieson: Examination of the high-level feasibility of all of the rail projects listed in the 10-year Plan is either under way or has already been completed. The SRA's Strategic Plan lists at page 49 the major projects to which the SRA is already committed or which are prioritised for delivery by 2010.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 25 February 2002, ref. 37093, on 10-year Plan funding, for what reason £1.5 billion of advanced grants to Railtrack has resulted in an increase in the 10-year Plan total. [40604]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend, the Chief Secretary on 26 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 1207–08W.

Multi-modal Transport Studies

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many multi-modal transport studies are behind schedule; and if he will make a statement. [46111]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer: Monday, 25 March 2002]:* The Multi-Modal Studies programme contains 22 Studies which were split into three tranches. Five Studies from tranche 1 have so far reported to Regional Planning Bodies with recommendations. We have announced our decisions on three of these.

From the remaining 17 Studies, two Studies from tranche 3 of the programme are expected to commence later this year. Nine studies from tranches 1 and 2 have been given time extensions. This is due to the complexity of the Study process, and the need for some additional work identified during the course of the Studies. Ten Studies are now due to report by summer 2002 and a further three Studies by December 2002. The remaining four Studies will report in 2003.

Concessionary Fares

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will publish the results of his survey with local authorities to assess the impact of the introduction of the statutory minimum requirement for concessionary fares introduced under the Transport Act 2000. [46858]

Ms Keeble: My Department will be publishing the results of the survey on 28 March. A copy of the Statistics Bulletin will be placed in the Library and will be available on my Department's website (www.dtlr.gov.uk) shortly.

The statutory minimum requirement for concessionary fares was introduced in Spring 2001 and guarantees all elderly and disabled people half-fare or better on local bus services, with a free bus pass.

The survey of local authorities in England was undertaken at the end of last year to assess the impact of the introduction of the statutory minimum requirement in each local authority area. The survey showed that over 50 per cent. of local authorities now offer a more generous concessionary fares scheme than before the introduction of the statutory minimum requirement, and 17 local authorities have introduced a concessionary fares scheme where none previously existed.

Ninety four per cent. of local authorities offer a half fare concession for elderly people and 90 per cent. offer half fare for disabled people. The remaining local authorities either offer flat rate fares or free travel. Just under half of local authorities offer concessions on modes of public transport other than local buses.

Vehicle Clamping

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of *(a)* how many vehicles have been clamped and *(b)* how much revenue has been obtained from car clamping in each year since 1997. [46164]

Ms Keeble: Wheel clamping is undertaken on both the public highway and private land as a means of enforcing parking restrictions. There is no central record of the number of vehicles that have been clamped in particular years.

Parking Fines

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of how much revenue has been obtained from parking fines in each year since 1997. [46165]

Ms Keeble: Parking fines are issued by local authorities and the police service. The table below sets out the information available to the Department on total local authority income from parking in England and Wales. This is published in *Local Government Financial Statistics; England* and *Welsh Local Government Financial Statistics.* The figures include income from penalty charge notices and excess charge notices as well as parking charges—the Department does not have a breakdown of these elements.

Year	*Income*[1] £
1997–98	652,644,000
1998–99	668,929,000
1999–2000	739,645,000
2000–01	799,719,000

[1] Covers all local authority income from parking, including fines.

The following table shows the number of fixed penalty notices (FPNs) issued by police forces in England and Wales for obstruction, waiting and parking offences and estimated related income, which accrued to the Consolidated Fund, in each of the years since 1997 for which figures are available was as follows:

Year	Number of FPNs	Estimated FPN income £
1997	2,199,000	45,590,000
1998	2,118,000	44,425,000
1999	1,808,000	38,087,000
2000	1,595,000	33,877,000

Road Safety

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) how much money his Department spent on producing free road safety literature in 2001; and how much money it plans to spend on producing it in 2002; [45666]

(2) how his Department markets the free road safety literature it produces. [45667]

Dr. Whitehead: The Department has committed approximately £750,000 to producing free road safety literature in the year 2001–02 in support of the Think! road safety campaign. It is envisaged that a similar amount will be spent on this next year.

The Department markets its road safety literature via Road Safety Officers, Police forces, private sector and voluntary organisations who are active in support of national or local road safety campaigns. It also targets teachers and parents via exhibitions and advertising and editorials in the educational media. The literature is used on sites and in meetings throughout the country to spread road safety best practice to the public. All literature is also available on the Think! Road Safety website at www.think.dtlr.gov.uk.

M4 Bus Lane

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the effect on congestion of the operation of the bus lane on the M4 motorway since its introduction. [45971]

Mr. Spellar: The Transport Research Laboratory (TRL) monitored use of the bus lane during its first year of operation. A copy of their report was placed in the House of Commons Library in January 2001.

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to change the bus lane on the M4 motorway to a carriageway for general use. [45970]

Mr. Spellar: The Highways Agency has recently consulted interested parties on a proposal to increase the speed limit between Junction 4 and the elevated section of the M4 from 50 to 60 mph and to allow motorcycles to use the M4 bus lane.

Alternative Fuels

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what estimates he has made of the number of vehicle refuelling points in the UK in each of the last four years for *(a)* liquefied petroleum gas, *(b)* compressed natural gas and *(c)* hydrogen/fuel cell technology; [45896]

(2) what estimates he has made of the number of vehicles in the UK for each of the last four years which were powered by *(a)* liquefied petroleum gas, *(b)* compressed natural gas and *(c)* hydrogen/fuel cell technology; [45895]

(3) what *(a)* representations he has received from and *(b)* meetings he has had with vehicle manufacturers on measures to create incentives for investment in higher volumes of vehicles propelled by road fuel gases after 2004; [45894]

(4) if he will make it his policy to set a target for the UK's consumption of liquefied petroleum gas as a road fuel as a proportion of total fuel consumption for vehicle propulsion. [45897]

Mr. Jamieson: My Department sponsors the Energy Saving Trust's Powershift programme which provides grants towards the cost of purchasing cleaner fuel vehicles. Last year, following an extensive consultation with vehicle manufacturers and fuel suppliers, I announced changes to the programme which offered higher levels of grants for manufacturer-approved LPG vehicles. This move is intended to encourage more manufacturers to invest in the development of production-line LPG vehicles. My Department maintains close links with vehicle manufacturers to keep track of their plans to introduce LPG models.

The Government's general policy has been to encourage the wider use of LPG through fuel duty incentives and purchase grants offered under the Powershift programme rather than by setting an outright target for LPG consumption. Where Government does set targets these will tend to be based on environmental performance rather than specifying particular fuels or technologies.

The table shows how the numbers of LPG vehicles and refuelling points have increased in the UK over the last four years (figures supplied by the LP Gas Association).

Year	Number of vehicles	Number of refuelling points
1998	3,500	150
1999	13,000	285
2000	39,000	610
2001	65,000	1,000

The take up of natural gas vehicles has been much slower. Over the last four years the population of natural gas vehicles has grown by around 50 vehicles per year with a total of 10 refuelling points over the same period.

Hydrogen fuel cell technology is still in its infancy and there are, as yet, no hydrogen refuelling points for vehicles in the UK. However, the Government will be supporting a hydrogen refuelling point to be used in conjunction with a trial of three fuel cell buses in London expected to start in 2003.

Vehicle Emissions

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what information he has collated on the effectiveness of

particulate traps, as fitted to vehicle diesel engines, for the reduction of emissions of *(a)* $PM_{2.5}$ particles and *(b)* oxides of nitrogen; [45898]

(2) if he will make a statement setting out the measures and policy objectives, including targets, the Government have to reduce emissions from road traffic of *(a)* benzene, *(b)* 1,3 butadiene, *(c)* particulates and finer particles (PM_{10} and $PM_{2.5}$), *(d)* carbon monoxide, *(e)* sulphur dioxide and *(f)* oxides of nitrogen. [45946]

Mr. Jamieson: The effectiveness of diesel particulate filters has been the subject of a number of studies in recent years. All show that these filters can effectively remove more than 90 per cent. of particulate matter including all particulates that would contribute to the $PM_{2.5}$ value.

Controls of oxides of nitrogen is not the objective of a particulate filter, but depending upon the specific system design, reductions can be achieved. Departmental research on heavy-duty engines has shown that systems comprising an oxidation catalyst and particulate filter can reduce NO_x by approximately 10 per cent.

The Government's measures and policies for tackling air pollution from road transport, industry and other sources are set out in the Air Quality Strategy for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, published in January 2000. It includes ambient air quality standards for benzene, 1,3 butadiene, particles (PM_{10}) carbon monoxide, sulphur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide, lead and low level ozone and objectives for their achievement between 2003 and 2008. Proposals were issued last year to strengthen the objectives for PM_{10}, benzene, carbon monoxide and introduce a new objective for polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons. The current advice from the advisory Expert Panel on Air Quality Standards is that PM_{10} provides the most appropriate basis for an air quality standard rather than the finer fraction particles $PM_{2.5}$.

Traffic Noise Pollution

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what policies the Government have in place to reduce traffic noise pollution; and if he will make a statement. [45944]

Mr. Jamieson: Since 1996 all new vehicles have had to meet stringent noise standards before entering service. No further reductions in noise limits are planned in the short term but the UK is participating in the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Working Group on vehicle noise which is examining the scope for further noise reductions. Requirements restricting the noise from tyres are being introduced in stages from this year in accordance with EU Directive 2001/43/EC.

The 10-year Transport Plan extended the Government's commitment to reducing trunk road noise by stating that lower noise road surfacing will be used for all future maintenance and new construction work. All concrete roads on the national network will be resurfaced with this quieter material by March 2011. Current plans are that at the end of the 10-year Plan period some 60 per cent. of the national road network will have a lower noise surface.

A programme of work is also underway to provide noise mitigation measures on certain trunk roads built or altered before 1988 prior to current methods of assessing traffic noise being adopted.

Night Time Deliveries

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when his Department will announce a relaxation of night time delivery curfews for gas-powered trucks; what studies he has made of the impact on the environment in the neighbourhood around supermarkets; and what definitions he will apply to the relevant vehicles. [45123]

Mr. Spellar: My Department is currently involved in a joint initiative by the Commission for Integrated Transport and the Freight Transport Association to explore the scope for Local Authorities to consider flexibility in delivery restrictions in exchange for better environmental performance by the distribution industry resulting in less disturbance to local residents. The aim is to develop a Code of Practice which would result in a significant reduction in the noise and other nuisance commonly associated with urban deliveries. This would enable deliveries to be carried out outside peak congestion hours, more flexibly and efficiently with fewer vehicles. Improved distribution would also help to ensure that products are available on the shelves at the times people want to buy them. The use of gas-powered vehicles might be amongst the appropriate "best practice" measures considered by local authorities in determining whether to ease delivery restrictions.

Fire Service

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 14 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 1200W, on extra training for the Fire Service, if he will place in the Library the guidance on mass decontamination methods that has been provided for Fire Authorities by central Government; and where information on the additional training for firefighters since 11 September is held. [45336]

Dr. Whitehead: I have arranged for copies of the letter from Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Fire Services to all Chief Fire Officers dated 19 December 2001, (Dear Chief Officer Letter July 2001), which contains the central guidance on mass decontamination, to be placed in the Libraries of the House. Information on the additional training for firefighters since 11 September is held by individual Fire Brigades.

Civil Defence

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what budget allocation his Department has made to support civil defence planning at national level. [45356]

Mr. Jamieson: The Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions' civil emergency co-ordination unit has a budget in 2001–02 of £711,000 for administration and programme resources.

In addition, the Fire Service Inspectorate have three officers working full time and other officers part time on issues as part of the "New Dimension" review following the events of 11 September. The Operational Practices section of the Inspectorate deals with civil defence planning as part of its references. The approximate costs of providing the above support are:

Salaries—£140,000 pa.

Expenses—£20,000 pa.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether the Department has been involved in updating contingency plans to deal with a major civil emergency since 11 September. [45355]

Mr. Jamieson: The Department's contingency plans for dealing with a major civil emergency have been reviewed in light of the events which took place on 11 September. In addition, the Department is actively involved in the Government wide post 11 September review of Civil Contingency arrangements.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the organisations which have responsibility for civil defence planning in the UK. [45352]

Mr. Christopher Leslie: I have been asked to reply.

Local authorities have the main responsibility for preparing civil defence plans. They will need to include others with a role to play such as the emergency services, health authorities, utilities, transport operators, voluntary organisations and government departments and agencies.

The Civil Contingencies Secretariat at the Cabinet Office was established in 2001 in order to aid co-ordination of civil defence matters at a national strategic level.

Telecommunications

Jim Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps are being taken to force public sector agencies in the South West to obtain best value for telecommunications services; and to what extent such agencies are being encouraged to use broadband. [33728]

Mr. Alexander: I have been asked to reply.

The Office of Government Commerce (OGC) is responsible for delivering value for money improvements in procurement by the public sector. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has asked OGC to consider what more can be done to help Government departments and other public sector organisations buy broadband more effectively.

In addition I recently detailed the allocation of a £30 million RDS broadband such with the South West RDA being awarded a £3.78 million package to encourage take up and rollout in their region.

EU Directives

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the European Union directives and regulations relating to his Department that have been implemented in each of the last four years, specifying *(a)* the title and purpose of each, *(b)* the cost of public funds of each and *(c)* the cost to businesses of each. [39119]

Dr. Whitehead: The information requested is not held centrally and providing it would involve disproportionate cost. Regulatory impact assessments are produced for all proposals, including those originating in European legislation, likely to impose significant costs on businesses in the UK and are made available in the Libraries of the House. We do not hold information on the costs of implementation to public funds or businesses.

Electoral Register

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he intends to publish the consultation document on the Electoral Register. [45881]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer Monday, 25 March 2002]:* The difficult and complex issues involved are necessitating very careful consideration and we hope to publish our policy paper on access to the electoral registers after Easter.

Free Literature

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many *(a)* local authorities, *(b)* schools and *(c)* companies ordered DTLR free literature in 2001. [45668]

Dr. Whitehead: The dissemination of DTLR Free Literature is contracted to an external distribution contractor. The contractor is unable to provide the information in the exact form requested but can provide the following information.

During calendar year 2001:

(i) 18,432 orders were received from 3,862 different address points within local authorities;

(ii) 1,358 orders were received from 1,107 different school addresses; and

(iii) 16,078 orders were received from 10,180 different company addresses.

Privatisation

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if his Department has a standard definition of *(a)* privatisation, *(b)* part-privatisation, *(c)* public private partnership, *(d)* private finance initiative and *(e)* not for profit company (i) to which they must or have worked and (ii) which they have developed. [45673]

Dr. Whitehead: The Government set out its definitions for the various types of public private partnership in "Public Private Partnerships—The Government's Approach" published in April 2000 and is available from the Libraries of the House.

Council Officers (Libel Actions)

Mr. Patrick Hall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what guidance he has issued to local authorities on the use of

public funds to support costs incurred by council officers who have pursued libel actions; and what plans he has to review such guidance. [42666]

Dr. Whitehead: No guidance has been issued to local authorities. However, section 101 of the Local Government Act 2000 makes provision for the Secretary of State, by order, to give local authorities a power to provide indemnities to their members and officers. We intend to consult on the scope of this power in due course. The consultation paper will clarify the circumstances in which authorities will be allowed to indemnify their members and officers against costs that they might incur.

Finance (Liverpool)

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what revenue and capital support he plans to make available to local government services in Liverpool in 2002–03. [44395]

Dr. Whitehead: Liverpool City Council will receive a general grant for the funding of revenue expenditure (excluding local authority housing) of £432.9 million under the Local Government Finance Settlement for 2002–03. Of the special and specific grants paid by this Department, Liverpool will receive £15.1 million from the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund. They will also receive Housing Revenue Account subsidy (HRAS) calculated on the basis of claims yet to be made by the authority. The amount of HRAS claimed for 2001–02 is some £97 million, including a Major Repairs Allowance of over £17 million for capital repairs to their stock.

In 2002–03, Liverpool will receive £31.4 million basic credit approvals to support other capital spending as part of the single capital pot. They will also receive £9.9 million capital grant for Local Transport Plan administration. Additionally, £1.4 million Disabled Facilities Grants, and £0.4 million transitional private sector renewal grants are available to Liverpool, dependent on receipt of eligible grant claims.

Local Government Finance

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the criteria are for the use of local authorities' section 33 arrangement to reclaim VAT as applied to *(a)* the New Deal for Communities partnerships and *(b)* registered social landlords (i) wholly and (ii) partially comprising stock transferred from a local authority. [43494]

Ms Keeble: This is a matter for local authorities, New Deal for Communities partnerships and registered social landlords to resolve with Customs and Excise.

Local Authority Finance

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the average level of local authority debt in England is *(a)* in cash terms and *(b)* as a percentage of their budget; and if he will make a statement. [46039]

Dr. Whitehead: The average level of local authority debt in England, as at 31 March 2001, is £95 million per local authority. This figure is 70 per cent. of their total budgeted revenue expenditure for 2001–02. These figures cover the London boroughs, Metropolitan Districts, Unitary authorities, Shire counties, Shire districts and the Isles of Scilly.

Local authority debt finances capital investment. Long-term borrowing to finance capital expenditure is regulated by Government through the issue of credit approvals.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the debt-free authorities in England, broken down by the parties which control them. [46038]

Dr. Whitehead: The 108 English local authorities listed below, together with the parties which control them, have reported that they had debt-free status as at 30 September 2001:

Local Authority	*Political control*
Barking and Dagenham	Lab
Basingstoke and Deane	Noc
Bath and NE Somerset	Noc
Bedford	Noc
Bracknell Forest UA	Con
Breckland	Con
Broadland	Con
Bromley	Con
Bromsgrove	Con
Broxbourne	Con
Chichester	Con
Cihltern	Con
Christchurch	Con
City of London	Oth
Congleton	LDem
Corby	Lab
Cotswold	Noc
Crawley	Lab
Dacorum	Con
Dartford	Lab
Daventry	Con
Dorset	Con
Est Cambridgeshire	LDem
East Devon	Con
East Dorset	Con
East Hampshire	Con
Eden	Ind
Elmbridge	Noc
Epsom and Ewell	Ind
Forest Heath	Con
Fylde	Noc
Hambleton	Con
Harlow	Lab
Hart	Con
Havant	Noc
Hertsmere	Con
Horsham	Con
Huntingdonshire	Con
Kennet	Con
Lichfield	Con
Malvern Hills	Noc
Mid Bedfordshire	Con
Mid Sussex	Con
Mole Valley	Noc
North Devon	LDem
North Dorset	Con
North Wiltshire	Noc
Penwith	Noc
Redditch	Lab
Reigate and Banstead	Con
Runnymede	Con
Rushmoor	Con

Local Authority	*Political control*
Ryedale	Noc
Salisbury	Noc
Sevenoaks	Con
South Bucks	Con
South Cambridgeshire	Noc
South Hams	Con
South Northamptonshire	Con
South Oxfordshire	Noc
South Ribble	Noc
South Shropshire	Ind
South Somerset	LDem
South Staffordshire	Con
Spelthorne	Con
St. Edmundsbury	Con
Staffordshire Moorlands	Noc
Stevenage	Lab
Stratford-on-Avon	Con
Suffolk Coastal	Con
Surrey Heath	Con
Swale	Noc
Tandridge	Con
Tewkesbury	Noc
Three Rivers	LDem
Tonbridge and Malling	Noc
Tunbridge Wells	Con
Tynedale	Noc
Uttlesford	Noc
Vale of White Horse	LDem
Watford	Noc
Waverley	Con
Welwyn Hatfield	Lab
West Berkshire UA	LDem
West Wiltshire	LDem
Windsor and Maidenhead UA	Noc
Worthing	Con
Wychavon	Con
Wycombe	Con
Wyre	Con
Wyre Forest	Noc
Cambridgeshire Police Authority	
Dorset Police Authority	
Kent Police Authority	
Merseyside Police Authority	
Suffolk Police Authority	
Sussex Police Authority	
Wiltshire Police Authority	
Dartmoor Natonal Park Authority	
Exmoor National Park Authority	
Lake District National Park	
North York Moors National Park Authority	
Northumberland National Park Authority	
Peak National Park	
The Broads Authority	
Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority	
North London Waste Au[illegible]y	
Greater London Authority	

Source:
Capital Payments and Receipts (CPR2) 2001–02
Definition: An authority is debt-free if (a) at 31 March 2001, the authority's credit ceiling was nil or a negative amount and (b) at 30 September 2001, the authority had no money outstanding by way of external borrowing other than short-term borrowing or hard to redeem debt, as defined in Regulation 154 of the Local Authorities (Capital Finance) Regulations 1997.
Con = Conservative
Ind = Independent
Lab = Labour
Noc = No Overall Control
LDem = Liberal Democrat

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proposals he has to require debt-free local authorities to pay into a central fund. [46037]

Ms Keeble: Our proposals for local government funding are set out in the recent Local Government White Paper—"Strong Local Leadership—Quality Public Services". They include the introduction of an arrangement for pooling a proportion of housing capital receipts arising in debt-free authorities to fund new housing investment where the need is greatest. This will mirror the arrangements that apply to non debt-free authorities. We are not proposing that this pooling should apply to receipts already realised.

EU Directives

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment the Government have made of the cost to British farming of the Vibrations Directive. [45700]

Dr. Whitehead: The Health and Safety Executive's Regulatory Impact Assessment of the Vibration Directive is available in the House of Commons Library. It assesses the cost of the Directive to industry as a whole; no assessment has been made of the costs to individual sectors.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment the Government have made of the impact of the noise directive on small manufacturers. [45701]

Dr. Whitehead: The Health and Safety Executive's Regulatory Impact Assessment of the Physical Agents Noise Directive is available in the House of Commons Library. It includes an assessment of the impact of the Directive on small firms.

Human Rights Act

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what monitoring his Department undertakes on local authorities to ensure compliance with the Human Rights Act 1998 when undertaking best value reviews of services. [45812]

Dr. Whitehead: The Department does not monitor compliance with the Act. The DETR, along with Home Office and the LGA published the document "A New Era of Rights and Responsibilities—core guidance for public authorities" in October 2000, to draw authorities' attention to the requirements of the legislation. Beyond this, compliance is a matter for the individual authority.

Wembley National Stadium

Mr. McCabe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the proposals for car parking arrangements and public transport contained in the planning application for Wembley National Stadium, with specific reference to *(a)* the requirements for a 90,000 seat world class sporting venue, *(b)* the transport and environmental needs of the Brent area and *(c)* the Government's vision for a 21st century transport system. [46323]

Ms Keeble: It is for Brent Council to form a view of the content of the planning application.

Fatal Farming Accidents

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many fatal farming accidents there were in England and Wales in the last 12 months. [45209]

Dr. Whitehead: Figures for fatal injuries in farming for 2001–02 will be available by September 2002. The provisional figures for 2000–01 show 38 work-related fatal injuries in farming in England and Wales.

Football Stadium

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the public inquiry into the redevelopment of Odsal Stadium will start. [45478]

Mr. Byers: The planning application was called in on 19 February 2002. The Planning Inspectorate is making the inquiry arrangements in accordance with the Town and Country Planning (Inquiries Procedure) (England) Rules 2000. The target is to arrange inquiries within 22 weeks of the date of call-in.

Asbestos-related Illnesses

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if he will make a statement on the criteria for compensation for asbestos-related illnesses contracted at work; [45206]

(2) if he will introduce legislation to ensure compensation for individuals who have contracted asbestos-related diseases after working with asbestos for more than one employer; [45208]

(3) if he will make a statement about the apportionment of responsibility between employers in cases where an individual suffering from asbestos-related illness has been employed by several employers. [45207]

Dr. Whitehead: The recent judgment of the Court of Appeal in the Fairchild case has the effect of preventing people suffering from work-related mesothelioma who worked for more than one employer from seeking compensation through the courts. On 13 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 401W, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced that my Department will use the compensation scheme that the Department administers under the Pneumoconiosis etc. (Workers' Compensation) Act 1979 to make payments to people affected by the Fairchild judgment, provided that they meet the other conditions of eligibility under the scheme.

The House of Lords will hear an appeal against the judgment of the Court of Appeal on 22–23 April. We will determine whether we need to act further in the light of the outcome of the appeal.

Care Homes

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many appeals for *(a)* the demolition and *(b)* the conversion of nursing and residential homes the Planning Inspectorate has considered in the past 12 months. [45296]

Ms Keeble: The provision of information on planning appeals is the responsibility of the Planning Inspectorate. I have asked the Inspectorate's Chief Executive, Mr. Chris Shepley, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Chris Shipley to Mr. Chris Grayling dated 26 March 2002:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your Question about planning appeals involving the demolition or conversion of nursing and residential homes.

The Planning Inspectorate does not record the existing land use of a site that is subject to appeal; just the proposed one, together with the development description give at the time of the planning application. To identify any appeals that fall into the categories you require, we have had to rely on the description also including existing usage.

We can identify a total of 13. Four included the demolition of a home, all of which were dismissed. Of the nine involving converting a home to another use, five were allowed and four dismissed.

North West Regional Assembly

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the annual cost is of the North West Regional Assembly. [45343]

Dr. Whitehead: The North West Regional Assembly is a voluntary body which receives funds from a number of sources. It is responsible for its own budget and publishes its accounts annually. The Department has made available £0.5 million for the Assembly in this financial year and proposes to make available £0.6 million in 2002–03.

Urban Renewal

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on recent inner city regeneration initiatives. [45377]

Ms Keeble: The Urban White Paper Implementation Plan issued in March 2001 sets out how a wide range of initiatives across Government are supporting the objectives of the White Paper to deliver an urban renaissance. The Implementation Plan and six-monthly Implementation Bulletin (due to be re-issued in March 2002) provide an account of progress to date, as well as the key objectives we aim to deliver on over the next two years. Both documents can be found on my Department's website: www.regeneration.dtlr.gov.uk.

We are working closely with 24 towns and cities across the country to take forward the urban agenda. These efforts will feed into the Urban Summit 2002. This will take place on 31 October and 1 November at the ICC in Birmingham. The Summit will reconfirm the Government-wide commitment to urban renaissance, celebrate success in bringing about change and identify where further action is needed, and evaluate the recommendations in the White Paper.

The Government's vision for neighbourhood renewal was set out in the Neighbourhood Renewal National Strategy Action Plan, launched by the Prime Minister in January 2001. It aims to deliver economic prosperity, safe communities, high quality schools, decent housing and better health to the poorest parts of the country.

This approach focuses Government programmes explicitly on deprived areas, many of which are located in inner cities, and requires local people and the public and private sectors to work in partnership. Government departments, local government and other public service providers are expected to bend their mainstream budgets to meet better local needs in deprived neighbourhoods. Departments have been set a series of minimum standards known as floor targets—for the first time they will be judged on the areas where they are doing worst and not on the national average.

Extra resources are being directed to the 88 most deprived local authority areas to kickstart the strategy, including the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund, worth £900 million over three years.

The strategy is co-ordinated and driven forward by the cross-cutting Neighbourhood Renewal Unit based in DTLR. Further information on the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal, including updates on progress, can be found on the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit website: www.neighbourhood.gov.uk.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list, in date order from June 1997, the Government *(a)* reports and *(b)* white papers relating to urban renewal and social inclusion. [45376]

Ms Keeble: Government reports and White Papers relating to urban renewal and social inclusion, in date order, are as follows:

(a) Reports (All were produced by the Social Exclusion Unit, unless stated otherwise)

Truancy and School Exclusion (May 1998)

Rough Sleeping (July 1998)

Teenage Pregnancy (June 1999)

Bridging the Gap: New Opportunities for 16–18 Year Olds not in Education, Employment or Training (July 1999)

A Report of Policy Action Team 5: Housing Management (August 1999)

A Report of Policy Action Team 9: Community Self Help (September 1999), Home Office

Opportunity for all—tackling poverty and social exclusion (September 1999)

A Report of Policy Action Team 7: Unpopular Housing (October 1999), DETR

A Report of Policy Action Team 2: Skills (December 1999), DfEE

A Report of Policy Action Team 3: Business (1999), HM Treasury

A Report of Policy Action Team 6: Neighbourhood Wardens (1999), Home Office

A Report of Policy Action Team 10: Arts and Sport (1999), DCMS

A Report of Policy Action Team 11: Schools Plus (December 1999), DfEE

A Report of Policy Action Team 13: Shops (1999), DoH

A Report of Policy Action Team 14: Financial Services (1999), HM Treasury

A Report of Policy Action Team 15: Closing the Digital Divide: Information and Communication Technologies in Deprived Areas (February 2000), DTI

A Report of Policy Action Team 1: Jobs (2000), DfEE

A Report of Policy Action Team 8: Anti-Social Behaviour (March 2000)

A Report of Policy Action Team 12: Young People (March 2000)

A Report of Policy Action Team 16: Learning Lessons (March 2000)

A Report of Policy Action Team 17: Joining It Up Locally (February 2000), DETR

A Report of Policy Action Team 4: Neighbourhood Management (April 2000)

A Report of Policy Action Team 18: Better Information (April 2000)

Minority Ethnic Issues in Social Exclusion and Neighbourhood Renewal—A guide to the work of the Social Exclusion Unit and the Policy Action Teams so far (June 2000)

Opportunity for all—one year on: making a difference (November 2000), DSS

National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal—Policy Action Team Audit (January 2001)

A New Commitment to Neighbourhood Renewal—National Strategy Action Plan (January 2001)

Preventing Social Exclusion (March 2001)

New Deal for Communities Annual Review 2000–01 (September 2001), NRU

Opportunity for all—making progress: third annual report (September 2001), DWP

All 18 Policy Action Team Reports are summarised in: "National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal. Policy Action Team report summaries: a compendium".

(b) White Paper

Bringing Britain Together: A National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal (September 1998)

The Urban White Paper "Our towns and cities: the future—Delivering an urban renaissance" (November 2000) DETR.

Development Land Trusts

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on his Department's policy towards development land trusts. [37468]

Ms Keeble *[holding answer Tuesday, 26 February 2002]:* "Development Land Trusts" is not a term that the department is aware of. If my hon. Friend would care to write to me, I will investigate further.

Deaths at Work

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many deaths at work occurred in London in 2001. [45180]

Dr. Whitehead: Twenty six employees and self-employed people were fatally injured at work in Greater London in 2001.

Planning Inquiries

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will set out the criteria by which a public inquiry on planning is designated as a major inquiry. [45449]

Mr. Byers: A Code of Practice, "Preparing for Major Inquiries in England" outlines procedures for handling major inquiries under the Planning Acts in England. The Code is set out in Annex 4 of DETR Circular 5/2000 "Planning Appeals: Procedures (Including Inquiries into Called-in Planning Applications)".

Paragraph 4 of the Code indicates that it is intended for application in cases where the development proposal is of major public interest because of its national or regional implications, or the extent or complexity of the environmental, safety, technical or scientific issues involved, and where for these reasons there are a number of third parties involved as well as the applicant and the local planning authority.

Housing

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what information his Department has collated on the proportion of former council tenants who purchased a property on the open market with the aid of a cash incentive scheme grant and who were subsequently unable to maintain their mortgage payments; [44464]

(2) what proportions of local authority properties released for letting as a result of the cash incentive scheme in each Government office region in each of the past four years were let to *(a)* a homeless household, *(b)* a transfer applicant and *(c)* a waiting list applicant. [44462]

Ms Keeble: Forty six local authorities have been running cash incentive schemes in 2001–02. The detailed information requested is not available centrally.

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will commission research to update the Review of the Cash Incentive Scheme 1994–97. [44463]

Ms Keeble: Two substantial research programmes have already been carried out into the Cash Incentive Scheme. Both showed that Cash Incentive Schemes could play a valuable part in freeing up council housing for households in housing need and in supporting moves into home ownership. We have no plans at present for any further research work on these Schemes.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the banding status of local housing authorities since performance bandings in the Housing Investment Programme were first introduced. [43025]

Ms Keeble: I am arranging for a copy of a table showing the performance banding assessments for all housing authorities given in the annual Housing Investment Programme exercise since these were first published in 1997 to be placed in the Libraries of the House. Six authorities—Bolton, Derby, Ipswich, New Forest, Portsmouth and Southampton—have been assessed in the top performance band in each of the five years.

Mr. Hopkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the average management costs are for large scale voluntary transfer housing associations in the most recent year for which figures are available. [46370]

Ms Keeble: The Department does not hold this information.

Housing Transfers

Mr. Hopkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much expenditure has been incurred by each local authority in transferring its stock to RSLs; and what he estimates the cost will be in *(a)* 2002–03 and *(b)* 2003–04. [46365]

Ms Keeble: The Department does not hold this information.

Introductory Tenancies

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many introductory tenancies have been terminated on the grounds of *(a)* antisocial behaviour and *(b)* rent arrears each year since their introduction. [43071]

Ms Keeble: This information is not collected centrally.

Property Management

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he intends to consult on how to tackle poor standards amongst certain managers of property let on residential long leases; and if he will make a statement. [46928]

Ms Keeble: My Department intends to issue a consultation paper entitled "Improving the Standard of Residential Leasehold Management" on Friday 5 April. The paper is a response to widespread concern about the variable standards of management in the residential leasehold sector. It explores various options for improving standards, each of which has its own advantages and disadvantages.

The Government is issuing this paper to stimulate a constructive and informed debate which will assist us in making our decision. Copies of the paper will be placed in the House Library.

Noise Insulation

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what requirements for noise insulation exist in the case of the conversion of residential dwellings into a larger number of units. [45749]

Ms Keeble: The sound insulation between dwellings is controlled under Part E of the Building Regulations. Building Regulations 5 and 6 deal with Material change of use and sub-paragraphs 5(g) and 6(e) make it clear that Part E applies when a building which contains at least one dwelling undergoes a change of use such that it contains a greater or lesser number of dwellings than it did oreviously.

Starter Homes Initiative

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if he

will list *(a)* the areas and *(b)* the number of households within each area which have benefited from the Starter Homes Initiative so far; [44985]

(2) what the outturn expenditure so far incurred each year under the Starter Homes Initiative by his Department is; [44984]

(3) what the estimated public expenditure expected to be incurred each year under the Starter Homes Initiative by his Department is. [44983]

Mr. Byers *[holding answers Thursday, 21 March 2002]:* We have provided £250 million for the Starter Home Initiative over the three years 2001–02 to 2003–04. Outturn expenditure figures for 2001–02 and the numbers of key worker households that have benefited are not available at present.

Following the allocations in September 2001, schemes have been set up in local areas; priorities have been agreed with employers; and applicants have been assessed and instructed to select properties.

Regional Assemblies

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much the Government contributed to each of the regional assemblies in the last year for which figures are available. [46186]

Dr. Whitehead: In 2001–02, the Government is contributing £500,000 to each voluntary regional assembly.

Regional Assemblies

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans the Government have to establish regional assemblies in England; and what the implications will be for the shire counties. [45835]

Dr. Whitehead: The forthcoming Regional Governance White Paper will set out our proposals for elected regional assemblies for England, including the implications for local government.

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much the regional assembly board in the South West is paid; and what payments members are entitled to. [45282]

Dr. Whitehead: This is a matter for the Assembly which is a voluntary body.

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what role the South West Regional Assembly has in determining Government policy in the South West. [45273]

Dr. Whitehead: The South West Regional Assembly has an important role in the region in both scrutinising the regional development agency and in acting as a strategic focal point for the region. The Government is keen to take account of the Assembly's view, but there is no direct role in determining Government policy in the South West.

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much funding the regional assembly in the South West receives from *(a)* Government and *(b)* local sources. [45283]

Dr. Whitehead: The South West Regional Assembly (SWRA) is a voluntary body funded by local authorities and others in the region. Last year the Government announced £500,000 worth of funding for the SWRA as part of the £15 million fund for regional chambers over three years. The SWRA have recently submitted their plans for 2002–03 and 2003–04 amounting to a bid for £1.2 million from the fund. Other elements of the Assembly's budget are a matter for the Assembly.

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what type of projects in the South West Regional Development Agency's area the regional assembly may *(a)* reject and *(b)* recommend. [45277]

Dr. Whitehead: The assembly has no role in the SWRDA's decisions on projects.

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what criteria he has set for joint working between regional development agencies and regional assemblies; and which is the lead organisation. [45276]

Dr. Whitehead: The Regional Development Agencies Act 1998 allowed for the Secretary of State to issue directions to require a RDA to have regard, in formulating and reviewing its strategy, to any views expressed by the chamber. No directions have been issued under this provision as the voluntary arrangements between the RDAs and chambers have precluded the need for this.

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what role the regional assembly has in scrutinizing the working of regional development agencies; and if the regional assembly may turn down recommendations made by regional development agencies. [45281]

Dr. Whitehead: The Regional Development Agencies Act 1998 allowed for the Secretary of State to designate a voluntary grouping of stakeholders in the region as the regional chamber for the regional development agency (RDA), and each region now has a designated chamber (or assembly). It also allowed for the Secretary of State to issue directions to require a RDA to have regard, in formulating and reviewing its strategy, to any views expressed by the chamber. No directions have been issued under this provision as the voluntary arrangements between RDAs and chambers have precluded the need for this.

e-Government

Barbara Follett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to pay grant to *(a)* provide e-voting pilots and *(b)* help local authorities achieve the vision of e-Government set out in their implementing electronic Government statements. [47163]

Mr. Raynsford: As part of the package of funding previously announced under the £350 million Local Government On-Line (LGOL) Programme, I have today laid before the House a Special Grant Report

containing powers for my Department to Pay £4.1 million of grant to provide 15 e-voting pilots, £200,000 to each local authority that has submitted a satisfactory Implementing Electronic Government (IEG) Statement (to support the work set out in that Statement), and a further £200,000 to authorities that submit a satisfactory updated IEG and that demonstrate they have used the first £200,000 to good effect.

The Report will also enable £50,000 of grant to be paid to fund the dissemination of best practice from the e-government pathfinders, and allow the 24 LGOL funded e-government pathfinders to continue, where necessary, past 31 March 2002 in order to complete their pioneering work.

Arms-length Management

Mr. Hopkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much his Department estimates the average local authority will spend in setting up an arms-length management organisation, with specific reference to *(a)* employment or purchase of legal and other professional, *(b)* new accommodation, *(c)* new staff and *(d)* regrading of existing posts. [46371]

Ms Keeble: We have made no estimates of these costs, which will depend on each authority's circumstances. In 2001 a working group chaired by the Local Government Association, in which my Department participated, developed and published model legal documentation for arms length housing management organisations (ALMOs), so helping to reduce authorities' individual legal costs. We will continue to work closely with authorities and the local government associations to ensure that ALMOs are established and operate efficiently.

Departmental Leak Inquiry

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if the leak inquiry being undertaken by the Permanent Secretary has been completed; and if he will publish the findings. [45978]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer Monday, 25 March 2002]:* The internal investigation into apparent leaks from DTLR between 11 and 14 February has been completed. Reports on internal investigations are not published. Consideration is being given to whether disciplinary action should be taken against any member of staff as a result of this investigation in accordance with procedures in the DTLR Staff Handbook.

Self-funding Safety Camera Project

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many statements his Department has issued to counter mis-reporting of its self-funding safety camera project in the media, since it was launched in April 2000. [46245]

Dr. Whitehead: There have been two press releases (on 13 August 2001 and 3 December 2001) which mention the results from the pilot scheme of camera funding.

No record is kept of oral statements made by the press office to the media.

Research and Policy Programmes

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what changes to the management of research and policy programmes in his Department *(a)* have taken place since May 1997 and *(b)* are planned. [46337]

Mr. Jamieson: The Department continues to modernise and improve the approach taken to the management of research and policy programme, through a wide variety of means. It is not possible to list separately, all projects which contribute to this aim over the period specified.

Public Engagements

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list his public engagements since 8 October 2001. [45450]

Mr. Byers: I have carried out engagements across the country and in Europe.

Ministerial Meetings

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he last met *(a)* Ian McAllister and *(b)* Ian Coucher. [45357]

Dr. Whitehead: It is not the normal practice of the Government to release details of meetings or discussions with private individuals or companies.

Reports

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to the answer of 13 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 1090W, on reports, if he will place a copy of the standard terms and conditions referred to in the Library. [45676]

Dr. Whitehead: The information requested has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

HSE

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what technical support contracts were awarded by the Health and Safety Executive between 1 January and 31 December 2000. [45657]

Dr. Whitehead: HSE has a number of Framework Agreements with various suppliers of technical support services. These are listed in Annex 1 together with the number of jobs and the value of work undertaken by the supplier(s) for HSE during the specified period.

In addition to the work carried out under these Framework Agreements, a number of individual pieces of technical support work were contracted during the period 1 January 2000 to 31 December 2000 and are listed at Annex 2.

Both Annexes have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Correspondence

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the target time will be in 2002–03 for *(a)* ministers to reply to letters from hon. Members and *(b)* officials in his Department to reply to letters received directly from members of the public. [44950]

Dr. Whitehead: This Department's target for 2002–03 is for Ministers to respond to 76 per cent. of letters from hon. Member within 15 working days and 90 per cent. within 20 working days. For letters received directly from members of the public, the target for the centre of the Department for 2002–03 is for officials to respond within 15 working days. Our executive agencies also have a 15 working days target for such correspondence, with the exception of the Rent Service (five days), the Fire Service College (seven days) and the Driving Standards Agency (10 days).

Human Rights Act

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many cases have been brought against his Department under the Human Rights Act 1998; and what has been the cost in *(a)* legal fees to defend cases and *(b)* compensation payments. [45067]

Dr. Whitehead: We do not collect central records of all cases in which the Human Rights Act 1998 is relied on. Human rights are now integrated in the general law and are rarely the sole basis for a challenge. We do monitor centrally those cases which we consider may be of particular significance to this department. We have recorded 68 cases to date.

We do not collect information centrally about the costs to public funds, legal fees or compensation payments in cases that include a human rights issue. In most cases it will be difficult to single out associated costs relating to the human rights element.

Public Service Agreement

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions which public service agreement targets scheduled to be met in 2002 will not be achieved by the due date. [44818]

Dr. Whitehead: Information about progress on PSA targets will be published in the department's 2002 Departmental Annual Report.

New Deal

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many people employed by his Department under the New Deal for Young People in each of the last four years have subsequently *(a)* found unsubsidised employment for more than 13 weeks and *(b)* returned to jobseeker's allowance or other benefits. [44907]

Dr. Whitehead: This information is not held by this Department.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many people have been employed by his Department in each of the last three years under *(a)* the New Deal for Young People, *(b)* the New Deal for the Over 50s and *(c)* the New Deal for Lone Parents; and at what cost, listed by category, to public funds. [44926]

Dr. Whitehead: This Department and its agencies have employed 77 New Dealers to date. Records are not kept centrally of the separate categories.

New Deal recruits take up existing vacancies so extra costs to public funds are limited to the subsidy, where appropriate, and any additional training and development which may be needed. These amounts are not held centrally.

Crèche Facilities

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what crèche facilities are provided by his Department; and at what cost. [44865]

Dr. Whitehead: The Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Central) currently provides 12 subsidised nursery places in two London nurseries run by Westminster Children's Society and subsidises four nursery places for DTLR(C) staff in Hastings. In 2001–02 the Department also, exceptionally, paid subsidy on the first year costs of 4.5 places for DTLR(C) staff in Temple Quay, Bristol.

The DTLR also participates in the Westminster Holiday Playscheme. In 2001–02, DTLR staff took up 51 places on the scheme.

The Department's budget for 2001–02 for the provision of the subsidised element of its childcare provision was £50,600. The Department pays approximately 45 per cent. of the cost of places at the London nurseries—parents meet the remaining proportion. Places at the holiday playschemes are 50 per cent. subsidised by the Department.

The Department is conducting a review of childcare provision in DTLR(C), which will make recommendations on a range of options—including childcare vouchers.

Ministerial Private Offices

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the running costs were of *(a)* his Ministers' private offices, separately identifying expenditure on staff and *(b)* his Department in each year from May 1997 to the nearest date for which the information is available. [40984]

Dr. Whitehead: *(a)* The table shows the total administration and pay expenditure on Ministers' Private Offices. The figures for the years prior to 2001–02 are in cash terms and relate to the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions prior to changes in Departmental responsibilities following the last election. The forecast for 2001–02 is on a resource basis.

(b) The running costs for the Department have been published in the individual years' appropriation accounts and resource accounts, which are available in the Libraries of the House.

Administration costs expenditure

£000

	1997–98 Expenditure	1998–99 Expenditure	1999–2000 Expenditure	2000–01 Expenditure	2001–02 Forecast
Private office total	n/a	2,475	2,475	2,517	2,132
of which Pay	n/a	1,371	1,498	1,597	1,309

Departmental Procedures

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if it is the policy of his Department for him to be consulted about *(a)* the discussions on the resignation of a senior official, *(b)* a decision to secure the resignation of a senior official, and *(c)* a decision to suspend a senior official. [41282]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 7 March 2002]:* Staffing and disciplinary matters within the Department are handled in accordance with the DTLR Staff Handbook, which reflects the provisions of the Civil Service Management Code. The Permanent Secretary informs or consults me as appropriate within this framework in relation to senior staffing matters.

Jo Moore

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether Jo Moore received a one-off payment from public funds following her resignation. [40090]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* Personnel matters of this kind are a confidential matter between the individual and the Department.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether Jo Moore is employed by his Department. [40089]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the Statement I made to the House on 26 February 2002.

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what severance package was offered to Ms Jo Moore as a result of her resignation. [40176]

Mr. Byers: Personnel details of this kind are a confidential matter between the individual and the Department.

Press Office

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his reply of 19 March, if he will list the Government departments to which press officers leaving his Department since June 2001 have transferred. [46120]

Mr. Byers: DTLR press officers have transferred to the following government departments or agencies:

Cabinet Office;

Home Office;

Office of Fair Trading;

Health and Safety Executive; and

British National Space Centre.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if Ian Jones is suspended on full pay. [45973]

Mr. Byers: I understand that Mr. Jones is currently suspended on full pay pending a decision whether to bring disciplinary charges against him. This decision will be taken in due course following the procedures laid down in the DTLR Staff Handbook.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions who was between Mr. Ian Jones and Sir Richard Mottram in the reporting line of the former at the time of his suspension. [42585]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer Tuesday, 12 March 2002]:* The acting Director of Communication.

Departmental Filler Advertisements

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) how many television filler advertisements his Department produced in 2001; and how many it intends to produce in 2002; [46237]

(2) how much air-time was allotted to his Department's television filler advertisements, indicating the channels used, in 2001; and how much air-time it expects to be allotted in 2002. [46238]

Dr. Whitehead: The Department has produced eight new TV fillers in the financial year 2001–02. Five of these cover road safety and three, which were modifications of previous TV advertising, cover fire safety. We have also updated five existing fire safety fillers. The total cost committed was £219,745.

The eight new fillers will be launched at the beginning of the new financial year and we will monitor their success to inform future strategy, including the need to produce additional films.

Figures returned by TV stations indicate an estimated total of 19,765 transmissions will have been secured by the end of March 2002, equivalent to £3.2 million worth of airtime. Coverage was achieved on BBC, ITV, Channel 5 and various satellite channels.

We expect the value of airtime received to increase in the next financial year as our research has indicated that TV stations are more receptive to newer films.

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) how much air-time was allotted to his Department's radio filler advertisements, indicating the radio stations used, in 2001; and how much air-time it expects to be allotted in 2002; [46242]

(2) how many radio filler advertisements his Department produced in 2001; and how many it intends to produce in 2002; [46241]

(3) how much of his Department's road safety publicity budget was spent on producing radio filler advertisements in 2001; and how much it intends to spend on producing radio filler advertisements in 2002. [46240]

Dr. Whitehead: In the financial year 2001–02 the department committed £21,545 for producing two radio fillers for road safety which were launched a month ago. We intend to commit an estimated £50,000 in 2002–03 to produce up to five radio fillers for fire safety campaigns.

The Department's previous fillers (as DETR) secured at least 1,000 transmissions to publicise foot and mouth information and the role of the Drinking Water Inspectorate. Actual transmissions will be higher but not all stations provide returns. It is too early to know the number of transmissions secured by the new road safety fillers.

We expect increased coverage in 2002–03 as the number of our fillers and radio use of them increases. Due to commercial sensitivity, we are unable to provide details of which stations have aired fillers.

Road Safety Publicity

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much of his Department's road safety publicity budget was spent on television campaigns in 2001; and how much it intends to spend on television campaigns in 2002. [46235]

Dr. Whitehead: The Department committed approximately £5.2 million to its Think! road safety television campaigns in 2001–02. It is expected that a similar amount will be committed in 2002–03.

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much money his Department spent on road safety publicity in 2001; and how much it intends to spend in 2002. [46234]

Dr. Whitehead: The Department committed approximately £12.9 million to the Think! road safety campaign in 2001–02. A budget of £13.4 million has been agreed for 2002–03.

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much of his Department's road safety publicity budget was spent on radio campaigns in 2001; and how much it intends to spend on radio campaigns in 2002. [46239]

Dr. Whitehead: The Department committed approximately £2.2 million to radio campaigns in the year 2001–02. It is expected that a similar amount will be committed in 2002–03.

Press Releases

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many press releases his Department's press office has released in support of its self-funding safety camera project, since it was launched in April 2000. [46244]

Dr. Whitehead: There have been two press notices concerning the netting off scheme for safety cameras since that date. On 13 August 2001, my Department announced new rules on visibility and the results from the first year of the pilot scheme. On 3 December 2001 new rules on the colour of cameras was announced. The notes to editors contained the previously published figures.

A press notice on 26 July 2001 made mention of speed cameras as a means of cutting speeding.

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many press releases were issued by his Department's press office in 2001 *(a)* on road safety topics and *(b)* on other topics. [46243]

Dr. Whitehead: *(a)* DETR (central)/DTLR (central)

Road Safety topics—31

(b) DETR (central)/DTLR (central)

Other topics—531.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Retirement Ages

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the retirement ages that apply to the employees of his Department and its agencies, including how many and which categories of employees are affected by each; and if he will make a statement on his Department's policy on flexible retirement. [32824]

Malcolm Wicks: All staff in the Department other than the Senior Civil Service, a total of 129,342 (99 per cent.) can elect to remain in employment until age 65. At present the retirement age for staff in the Senior Civil Service is set by the Cabinet Office at 60, although there is the option to retain members beyond the age of 60 if it is judged to be in the public interest and the Department is satisfied about the fitness and efficiency of the individual to carry out his or her duties.

We are committed to ending age discriminatory practices and Government ministers, through the Cabinet Office, are actively working towards removing the current barriers for members of the Senior Civil Service.

Pensioners

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many retirement pensioners are receiving *(a)* housing benefit and *(b)* council tax benefit in (i) Great Britain and (ii) each region of Great Britain. [39547]

Malcolm Wicks: The information is in the table.

Retirement pensioners receiving housing benefit and council tax benefit in Great Britain and by region: May 2000

Region	Retirement pensioners receiving housing benefit	Retirement pensioners receiving council tax benefit
Great Britain	1,490,000	2,153,000
North East	93,000	130,000
North West	189,000	289,000
Yorkshire and the Humber	147,000	209,000
East Midlands	99,000	150,000
West Midlands	150,000	232,000
East	125,000	183,000
London	176,000	223,000
South East	155,000	216,000
South West	103,000	161,000
Wales	71,000	112,000
Scotland	182,000	248,000

Notes:

1. The figures are based on a 1 per cent. sample and are subject to sampling error.
2. The data refer to people claiming housing benefit, who may be single people, or one of a couple or a family. More than one person claiming can live in one property, for example two or more adults in a flat or house share arrangement.
3. The figures have been rounded to the nearest thousand.
4. The totals may not sum due to rounding.
5. Retirement pensioners are defined as people where either they and/or their partner are receiving state retirement pension.

Source:

Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit Management Information System, annual 1 per cent. sample, taken in May 2000.

Child Poverty

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will provide the basis for ministers' calculations concerning the number of children who have been lifted out of poverty by the measures introduced by his Government; and what assessment he has made of how many children would be lifted out of poverty by such measures if the take-up rate of social security benefits was 100 per cent. [45288]

Dawn Primarolo: I have been asked to reply.

As a result of personal tax and benefit measures announced in the last Parliament there are an estimated 1.2 million fewer children living in households with incomes below 60 per cent. of the median (after housing costs) than there otherwise would have been. Families with children have very high take-up rates for social security benefits. It would make very little difference whether estimated or 100 per cent. take-up rates were used to calculate the impact of tax and benefit measures on child poverty.

Bereavement Benefit

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, (1) pursuant to his answer of 25 February 2002, ref. 32742, *Official Report*, column 771W, how many complaints he has received on this subject; [39178]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 771W, ref. 32742, if he will make a statement on form BD8. [40293]

Malcolm Wicks: Bereavement Benefits were introduced on 9 April 2001 and are available to both men and women for the first time. They concentrate the help available where and when it is needed most, on immediate needs and on families with children.

Form BD8, registration of notification of death, which is issued by registrars to bereaved people for social security purposes, was amended to incorporate the new bereavement benefits introduced from April 2001.

We have received no complaints about form BD8.

Performance Targets

David Cairns: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what performance targets he has set for the *(a)* Appeals Service, *(b)* Disability and Carers Service and *(c)* Child Benefit Centre for 2002–03. [46930]

Mr. Darling: The targets I have set the Appeals Service, the Disability and Carers Service and Child Benefit Centre are given below.

Further information on the Appeals Service plans for 2002–03 is contained in their individual business plan, which has been published today. Copies have been placed in the Library.

Business plans for the Disability and Carers Service and Child Benefit Centre will be published shortly.

The Appeals Service Targets 2002–03

Waiting Times

The average waiting time for an appeal to be heard will be no more than 14 weeks from the time of receipt by the Appeals Service;

The number of cases over 24 weeks old as at 1 April 2002, will be reduced by at least 30 per cent. by 31 March 2003;

For cases returned by the Commissioner, the average waiting time for an appeal to be re-heard will be no more than 10 weeks from the date of return to the Appeals Service in at least 75 per cent. of cases.

Local Variations

The range of waiting time variations between our local offices will be reduced by a factor of at least 5 per cent. per annum over a two-year period.

Disability and carers service targets 2002–03

	Normal rules claims	Special rules claims	Renewal claims	Reconsiderations	Supersessions	Appeals	Accuracy (%)
Disability Living Allowance (DLA)	43 days	8 days	32 days	39 days	49 days	40 days	96
Attendance Allowance (AA)	27 days	8 days	23 days	38 days	38 days	40 days	96
Invalid Care Allowance (ICA)	32 days	n/a	n/a	95% in 70 days	n/a	40 days	95

Note:

Normal rules claims: Claims on which a qualifying period must be served before benefit can be awarded.

Special rules claims: Claims on which no qualifying period has to be served before benefit can be awarded because the claimant is terminally ill and has a life expectancy of less than six months.

Renewal claims: Claims to renew an existing award of benefit that was made for a finite period. This can be made up to six months before the expiry of the existing award.

Reconsiderations: Applications for review of an initial decision where the application is made on "any grounds" (i.e. dissatisfaction) within one month of the dates of the original decision.
Supersessions: Applications for review of an initial decision where the application is made more than one month after the initial decision.
Appeals: Any case where an independent Tribunal looks afresh at a decision.

Ms Y. Allen

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions for what reasons Ms Y. Allen of Salcombe, Devon was not informed when undertaking a two-year therapeutic counselling course under the new deal scheme that funding would be awarded for the first year only and that only outline sources of alternative funding would be available for the second year; and if he will make a statement as to the impact on *(a)* employers and *(b)* new deal participants of funding courses for less than 12 months. [31181]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The administration of the New Deal is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Employment Service, Leigh Lewis. I have asked him to reply to the hon. Member.

Letter from Clare Dodgson to Anthony Steen dated 11 February 2002:

As the Employment Service is an Executive Agency, the Minister of State has asked me to reply direct to your letter of 12 December 2001, enclosing one from Ms Yvonne Allen of 23 Round Berry Drive, Salcombe, Devon, concerning the funding of her course. This is something that falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Operating Officer of the Agency.

I was naturally concerned to learn of the difficulties Ms Allen is facing. To enable me to respond fully to the issues raised, I contacted Diana Ross, the Regional Director for the South West, and asked her to look into this matter for me.

It may be helpful if I first provide some background information. As you may be aware, Ms Allen undertook the Education and Training Opportunity option which is available to clients taking part in the New Deal for 25plus initiative. To be eligible for the provision clients must be over the age of 25, unemployed and at the time Ms Allen commenced New Deal 25plus, claiming Jobseeker's Allowance for two years or more.

Ms Ross tells me that prior to starting her training Ms Allen agreed an Individual Training Plan with her New Deal Personal Adviser. This states that her objective was to complete the Advanced Certificate in Therapeutic Counselling and gives the dates of the funding, which are from September 2000 to June 2001.

I understand that after completing this funded opportunity, Ms Allen was then invited to discuss her next steps towards finding work with her New Deal Personal Adviser, Fiona Cardrick. At this point, Ms Allen expressed a wish to pursue further training to gain the Diploma in Therapeutic Counselling. Fiona explained that as Ms Allen had already received a year's funding under the Education and Training Opportunity option, she was not eligible for further funding through New Deal. I should add that since New Deal began, it has always been the clearly stated policy to offer funding under the Education and Training Opportunity option for a maximum of one year. I can confirm that Ms Allen has received the maximum amount of funding allowed for participants on this option and that she was made aware of the limitations on funding at the outset.

I understand that Ms Allen is currently considering other sources of funding and has had further discussions with Fiona Cardrick, her Personal Adviser about her next steps.

I am sorry to send what I know will be a disappointing reply, but I hope it is helpful in clarifying the situation.

Guardian's Allowance

David Cairns: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will change the conditions for receiving Guardian's Allowance. [46931]

Malcolm Wicks: Guardians Allowance (GA) is currently paid to people bringing up a child whose parents have either died, or where there is a surviving parent who cannot be traced, or who is serving a prison sentence of five years or more.

From 1 April 2002, we will extend entitlement to GA to those caring for children with a surviving parent who has been ordered by a court to be detained in a hospital, or sentenced to a term of imprisonment for two years or more. This will help to allow more children to remain within their extended family.

Correspondence

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, when he will reply to the letter of 17 January from the hon. Member for Fareham, concerning Mrs. McDonald. [45805]

Maria Eagle: I replied to the hon. Member on 25 March 2002.

Minimum Income Guarantee

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many pensioners are claiming the minimum income guarantee in the Clwyd, South constituency. [41388]

Mr. Nick Brown: As at November 2001, there were 2,500 Minimum Income Guarantee claimants in the parliamentary constituency of Clwyd South.
Source:
Income Support Quarterly Statistical Enquiry November 2001.

Long-Stay Patients (Benefits)

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, (1) what considerations led to the figure of £14.50 allocated to those in long-stay hospitals who are in receipt of a state benefit; [45144]

(2) when the last review was carried out into benefit receipt for patients in long-stay hospitals; and whether there are plans to review the system in the near future. [45145]

Maria Eagle *[holding reply 21 March 2002]:* We have considered carefully the impact of the current rules which reduce certain benefits paid to pensioners and people of working age after six weeks of hospitalisation. The down rating of benefits preserves the principle that the State should not make double provision. It also recognises that a substantial number of people leave hospital before six weeks.

We consider the six week rule strikes a fair balance between what the state should provide financially and the provision individuals should make for themselves.

however, we also recognise that people have on-going financial commitments whilst in hospital. We therefore announed on 5 March 2002 that we have decided to extend the period before benefits are downrated by a further seven weeks to the 13 week stage. This will mean that people previously affected by the six week rule will be able to keep their benefits untouched if their period of stay in hospital is under 13 weeks. This will account for the majority of stays.

We will introduce this change to coincide with the introduction of Pension Credit.

The hospital personal allowance, currently £14.50 per week, is intended to provide for small personal items not provided by the hospital and is set by legislation. The amount is currently set as a percentage of Retirement Pension, which is reviewed every year. Benefit is restricted to this amount because, generally speaking, the National Health Service can be said to have assumed, to a large degree, the responsibility of providing for patients who have spent more than 52 weeks in hospital. There are no plans to change the amount by which benefits are reduced for hospital inpatients who have been in hospital for more than 52 weeks.

PFI/PPPs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the *(a)* private finance initiative and *(b)* public private partnership projects which have been delayed. [44874]

Mr. Darling: None of the Department's 10 PFI/PPP projects have been delayed beyond the expected or forecast contract close date.

Payments to contractors under PFI are not usually made until the service is available. As I explained in my statement 20 March, *Official Report*, column 316W, that in one case, developing the new Child Support computer system, testing work is not yet complete. The Department will not pay EDS for the system until it meets the standard required.

New Deal

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his latest estimate is of the *(a)* number and *(b)* proportion of participants in the New Deal for Young People who have left the scheme for unknown destinations. [44899]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Figures on young people who leave the New Deal for unknown destinations are contained in the regularly published Statistical First Releases which are available in the Library.

Energy Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on energy costs incurred by his Department in each of the last 10 years. [42442]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: I refer the right hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Rural Affairs (Alun Michael) on 19 March 2002, *Official Report*, Volume 382, column 268W.

Celebrations

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what arrangements his Department has made to celebrate *(a)* St. Patrick's Day, *(b)* St. George's Day, *(c)* St. Andrew's Day and *(d)* Her Majesty the Queen's Golden Jubilee; and how his Department celebrated St. David's Day. [42299]

Malcolm Wicks: There are certain days of the year known as "named days" when the Union flag must be flown from Government buildings. The days include St. David's day (in Wales), St. George's day (in England), St. Andrew's day (in Scotland) but not St. Patrick's day. In the Department for Work and Pensions there are no celebrations other than raising the Union flag.

Consideration is being given to the Union flag flying protocol for the Jubilee. The Union flag will fly on Coronation Day (2 June), as this is a named day.

I should also like to refer the hon. Member to the reply the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport gave to the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) on 11 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 58–59W. In the Department for Work and Pensions all staff will be given the additional public holiday on 3 June 2002 to celebrate Her Majesty The Queen's Golden Jubilee.

Minimum Income Guarantee

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate how many of the single pensioners who fail to take up their entitlement to the minimum income guarantee are aged 80 years or above. [32615]

Mr. Nick Brown: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available can be found in the publication "Take Up of Income Related Benefits: Statistics for 1999–2000", copies of which are available in the Library.

Working Families Tax Credit

Andy King: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps have been taken by his Department to ensure that the tapers determining the amount of housing and council tax benefit to which the recipients of working families tax credit are entitled do not result in a lower income in work after rent and council tax than out of work after receiving 100 per cent. housing benefit and council tax benefit. [29534]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding reply 25 January 2002]:* We are transforming the welfare system from a passive organisation paying out benefits to an active system that fights poverty, creates opportunity and helps people become self-sufficient.

In support of these aims we are ensuring that work pays. The Working Families Tax Credit and the National Minimum Wage have for the first time guaranteed a minimum income for working families with children. These measures together guarantee that every family with children where at least one person is working 35 hours a week will receive a minimum income of £225 a week, or almost £12,000 a year.

Entitlement to Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit is assessed by comparing a person's net income, less income disregards, with the amount they would receive on Income Support or income-based Jobseeker's Allowance. For each pound that their income exceeds this level, the amount of benefit payable is reduced by fixed tapers. For people moving from welfare into work these tapers ensure they are better off.

For people in work, who receive a pay rise, the combined effect of the tapers in Working Families Tax Credit, Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit means they remain better off. If Working Families Tax Credit was not taken into account in Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit families who worked longer hours or took better paid jobs would be worse off as they would face high marginal deduction rates.

Housing Benefit Fraud

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the Department's policy towards providing incentives for local authority procedures for reducing housing benefit fraud. [34423]

Malcolm Wicks: Our immediate priority for Housing Benefit is to work with local authorities to drive up standards across the board, tackle fraud and error and promote work incentives. We have introduced a wide range of measures providing incentives for local authorities to tackle housing benefit fraud.

In November 1997 we launched the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate to help raise standards in secure housing benefit administration. The BFI has so far published 116 reports helping local authorities to tackle weaknesses in their services and identifying and spreading good practice.

In April 1998 we tightened the criteria for establishing fraud to prevent abuse of the Weekly Benefit Savings scheme which was originally introduced in 1993.

In May 1998 we introduced the Verification Framework to help prevent fraud and error from entering the housing benefit system and help to detect it when it occurs. £160 million has been made available from April 2001 to fund local authorities which sign up to the Verification Framework, and over 75 per cent. of authorities have now done so.

In April 2001 we introduced a comprehensive new anti-fraud scheme for local authorities that provides a broader range of financial incentives to prevent, detect, punish and prosecute fraud than did the old Weekly Benefit Savings scheme. To fund these two schemes we have made £180 million available since April 2001. Sixty-three authorities adopted the new scheme in April 2001 and the remaining authorities will do so in April this year.

New Deal

Mrs. Irene Adams: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people in Paisley, North have *(a)* entered work and *(b)* are in unsubsidised employment through the New Deal Programme. [43915]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The available information is in the table.

Number of people entering jobs in Paisley, North (up to the end of December 2001)

Programme	*Total*	*Unsubsidised jobs*
New Deal for Young People	636	585
New Deal 25 plus	197	163
New Deal for Lone Parents	[1]191	191
New Deal 50 plus	[1]129	129

[1] Subsidised employment is not available through the New Deal for Lone Parents or New Deal 50 plus. All jobs for these programmes are therefore unsubsidised.

Note:

Information at constituency level is not available for the New Deal for Disabled People and the New Deal for Partners.

Source:

New Deal Evaluation Database

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions since the New Deal for Young People began, how many participants have joined the scheme *(a)* once, *(b)* twice, *(c)* three times and *(d)* more than three times. [44095]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: At December 2001, 741,000 people had entered the New Deal for Young People programme. Of these 104,550 clients have entered the programme twice (14 per cent. of all entrants), 14,200 (2 per cent.) have entered three times, and 1,880 (0.2 per cent) more than three times.

Source: New Deal Evaluation Database.

Means-tested Benefits

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions by what date he estimates the number of pensioners qualifying for means-tested benefits to fall to the level that existed in 1995. [43935]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The number of pensioners currently receiving one or more income related benefits is below the level in 1995, and has been in every year since 1995.

Benefits Agency (Slough)

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on each of the violent incidents that took place at the Benefits Agency Office at Slough during February. [45196]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding reply 21 March]:* On 1 February at 15.25 a person forced his way through a door between the public counter into the caller staff area. He verbally threatened a member of staff and made physical contact with him (touching him on the nose) although he did not physically harm him. The police had been called immediately and they arrested the person. A review risk assessment was carried out on 4 February.

On 15 February a male member of the public fatally stabbed a female member of the public. Police have arrested a man in connection with the incident. A further risk assessment has been carried out and recommendations sent to local management.

Winter Fuel Allowance

David Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pensioners in Telford are in receipt of the winter fuel allowance. [41426]

Mr. Nick Brown: Figures for this year are not yet available. Details of last year's payments are in the Library.

Minimum Income Guarantee

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pensioners in *(a)* St. Helens South, *(b)* St. Helens MBC area, *(c)* Merseyside, *(d)* the North West and *(e)* England are eligible to claim the minimum income guarantee. [44717]

Mr. Nick Brown *[holding reply 21 March 2002]:* Estimates of the number of people eligible for the Minimum Income Guarantee are not available below National level. Figures for the number of pensioners who may be entitled to but are not receiving the MIG are contained in the publication, "Take Up of Income Related Benefits: Statistics for 1999–2000".

The figures in the report pre-date the MIG take up campaign in May 2000 which, up to the end of January 2002, has resulted in 128,163 additional successful claims—pensioners are on average £20 a week better off as a result.

The table shows the number of MIG recipients as at November 2001, by area:

Thousands

Area	*Number of MIG claimants*
St. Helens South Parliamentary Constituency	3,200
St. Helens MBC	6,300
Merseyside	6,180
North West GOR	24,540
England	1,459,200

Source:
Income Support Statistics Quarterly Enquiry November 2001

Benefit Fraud

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people were prosecuted for housing benefit or council tax benefit fraud in the last year for which figures are available; how many of those prosecutions were successful; and if he will break down the succesful prosecutions by type of punishment. [44097]

Malcolm Wicks: Information on the number of people successfully prosecuted for housing benefit and council tax benefit fraud in the last year for which figures are available is in the table. Information is not held centrally on successful prosecutions by type of punishment.

Fraud investigations conducted by Local Authorities (LAs) 2000–01

	Number
Cases referred to the LA fraud/investigation section for further action	460,000
Cases referred to the LA fraud/investigation section for further action that were investigated	370,000
Cases where fraud was established and a Weekly Benefit Saving was claimed	100,000
Cases referred by LAs for prosecution	2,300
Successful prosecutions	1,100

Source:
Housing Benefit Management Information System Quarterly Administration Returns April 1999 to March 2000.

Notes:
1. The data refers to benefit units, which may be a single person or a couple.
2. The figures have been rounded to 2 significant figures.
3. Data is not available for all 409 Local Authorities. These totals include estimates for Local Authorities that have not responded which are based on historical and regional data. This type of estimate is standard practice in reporting totals where there have been non-respondents.

New Deal for Young People (NAO Report)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he intends to reply to the National Audit Office report entitled "The New Deal for Young People". [43100]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Government's response to the National Audit Office Report "The New Deal for Young People" and the subsequent Public Accounts Committee Report will be published in the Treasury Minute. The Treasury Officer of Accounts is responsible for publishing the Treasury Minute approximately two months following publication of the Public Accounts Committee Report.

Defaulters

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment has been made of the likely number of defaulters on grounds of principle; and what steps he is taking to address the issue. [44438]

Malcolm Wicks: No such assessment has been made. We do not accept that any non-resident parent who can afford to support their children has the right to deny children such support.

Despite continued improvement in the rate of compliance over the last few years, at the moment, only around half of non-resident parents pay all the maintenance due or the support of their children. The aim of the Government's reforms is to see a marked increase in those numbers. The new scheme will be rigorously enforced; the simplicity of the new rules will enable the Agency to devote substantially more resources to enforcement. In the meantime, pending the start of the new scheme, I continue to look to the Agency to secure the best possible rate of compliance achievable under the current scheme.

It is important to remember the effect of regular payments of child maintenance. It can transform the lives of lone mothers and their children; where the families are dependent on income support, providing a stable income can help lone parents into work.

Annuities

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer of 4 March 2002, to the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb), *Official Report*, column 8, on annuities, if he will set out the calculation on which his estimate of 18 million beneficiaries of the state second pension is based. [43349]

Mr. Nick Brown *[holding reply 14 March 2002]:* A breakdown of the 18 million people expected to gain from the introduction of the state second pension is in the table:

million

Low earners	*Moderate earners*	*Carers*	*Long-term disabled*
4.5	9.5	2.2	2

Figures for low and moderate earners were calculated by the Government Actuary's Department using an earnings distribution based on the New Earnings Survey. Estimates for carers and long-term disabled people were based on the Family Resources Survey and Department for Social Security administrative data.

These figures are consistent with the projections contained in the report by the Government Actuary on the financial effects on the National Insurance Fund of the Child Support, Pensions and Social Security Bill 1999.

Council Tax

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer of 5 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 271W, on council tax, what proportion of pensioner households and how many pensioners in total, paid *(a)* more than five per cent., *(b)* more than 10 per cent. and *(c)* more than 15 per cent. of their gross income in council tax in 2000–01. [42546]

Mr. Ian McCartney: Forty per cent. of pensioner households in Great Britain paid more than 5 per cent. of their gross income (net of council tax benefit) in council tax in 2000–01, 8 per cent. of pensioner households paid more than 10 per cent., and 2 per cent. paid more than 15 per cent.

From April 2002 this Government will be spending an extra £6 billion a year in real terms on pensioners as a result of policies, including the Minimum Income Guarantee, free TV licences and Winter Fuel Payments, introduced since 1997.

Notes:

1. For the purpose of this analysis, council tax is taken to be net of council tax discount and council tax benefit.

2. These figures are from the Family Resources Survey 2000–01 (Great Britain).

3. Gross income is net of tax credits and council tax benefit.

4. A pensioner household is one where the head is over state pension age.

5. The estimates are based on sample counts, which have been adjusted for non-response using grossing factors that control for region, council tax band, tenure and a number of demographic variables. Estimates are subject to sampling error and to variability in non-response.

6. All percentages have been rounded to the nearest 1 per cent.

Housing Benefit Regulations

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when the proposed amendment to the Housing Benefit Regulations will be brought into force to enable an ex-owner to claim housing benefit provided five years have elapsed since he or she ceased to own a property. [44802]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding reply 21 March 2002]:* The regulations were amended by SI 2001 No. 487, The Housing Benefit (General) Amendment Regulations 2001, which were laid before Parliament on 27 February 2001 and came into force on 21 May 2001.

Child Support

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will place in the Library a copy of *(a)* each of the CSA's monthly Business Information Bulletins since April 2001, *(b)* the CSA Board's quarterly review of its progress, *(c)* the CSA's Risk Management Framework and report on Risk Management and *(d)* the CSA's Latest Controls report from December 2001. [32548]

Malcolm Wicks: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what consideration will be given in the new child support system to fathers who have identical incomes and costs of travel to work and *(a)* who have different housing costs, and *(b)* who have former partners who have different incomes. [44434]

Malcolm Wicks: We believe a simple scheme is the right way forward, because the complexity of the current scheme is one of the major causes of the current administrative problems. Every non-resident parent has different costs or responsibilities. Any attempt to take account of them all would lead to the reinvention of the complexity of the current formula.

The Government accepts that some parents have special, exceptional expenses that make complete reliance on a percentage-based assessment unreasonable. That is the justification for the variations system.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the average maintenance assessment is for child support; and what the estimated average maintenance calculation is under the new scheme. [44435]

Malcolm Wicks: This information is in the tables.

Average maintenance assessment in the current Child Support Scheme

Number of qualifying children	*Average per week in pounds*
1	18.46
2	24.57
3	23.40

Source:

5 per cent. scan of Child Support Computer System August 1998.

Average maintenance calculation in the new Child Support Scheme

Number of qualifying children	*Average per week in pounds*
1	14.88
2	21.80
3	24.86

Source:
5 per cent. scan of Child Support Computer System August 1998.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what factors underlay the decision to reform the child support system; and on what date the reforms will be brought into effect. [44439]

Malcolm Wicks: Research commissioned for the White Paper of July 1999, "A new contract for welfare" found that the child support system was failing the children it was set up to help. A major part of the problem is that the existing formula for assessing maintenance is too complex. As a result too few resources have been available for enforcement. Consequently currently only around half of those Non-Resident Parents with an assessment pay all of the maintenance that is due. The Government therefore decided to simplify the child support system basing it on a simple percentage of the non-resident parents net income. It will be transparent and easier to understand so allowing a more customer focused Child Support Agency to spend less time calculating maintenance and more time chasing payments.

As far as the start date for the new scheme is concerned, I refer the hon. Member to the statement given by my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State, on 20 March 2002, *Official Report,* columns 315–16W.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when existing cases will be brought into the new scheme for child support; how they will be treated when *(a)* there is an application on foot for revision or supersession, *(b)* the assessment is the subject of an appeal and *(c)* applications for an assessment are pending at the date of implementation. [44440]

Malcolm Wicks: The Government has made clear that existing cases will be brought onto the new system only after it is clear that the new scheme is operating effectively. Parents will be given advance notice of the new liability.

If existing clients make or have made an application for revision or supersession of, or appeal against, their maintenance assessment, that application will be dealt with under current rules. If appropriate, any change will be reflected in the conversion calculation.

Where a maintenance assessment is pending when the new scheme is introduced for new cases, it will be treated in one of two ways. If no effective date has been set, it will be processed under the new rules; if an effective date has already been set, the current scheme will apply.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate he has made of the rate of compliance under the new child support formula; and what the present rate of compliance is. [44436]

Malcolm Wicks: The rate of compliance in the current year to January 2002, is 70.9 per cent. In the new child support scheme we expect compliance to rise to at least 75 per cent.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to set up a child support council. [44430]

Malcolm Wicks: My right hon. Friend is not persuaded that there is a need for such a body.

The Child Support Agency has set up fora for ongoing discussion with major stakeholders in the area of child support. These function well as a formal mechanism for dialogue between the Agency and the significant interested parties.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on when the changes to the CSA will come into force. [43893]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 18 March 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the statement given by my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State, on 20 March 2002, *Official Report,* columns 315–16W.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the maximum percentage is of net income that a non-resident parent can be asked to pay in child support maintenance under the CSA system for *(a)* one child, *(b)* two children and *(c)* three children. [33265]

Malcolm Wicks: Under the current Child Support provisions, the maximum percentage of net income that a non-resident parent can be expected to pay is 30 per cent. regardless of the number of children. This increases to 33 per cent. where the non-resident parent is paying child support maintenance arrears. Exceptionally, where the non-resident parent has failed to make or keep to an agreement to pay arrears of maintenance he or she can be required to pay up to 40 per cent.

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list his areas of responsibility in connection with the Child Support Agency. [43077]

Malcolm Wicks: My right hon. Friend has overall responsibility for the policy and legislation in relation to child support. Day to day operation of the child support scheme is in the hands of the Child Support Agency, an Executive Agency of the Department. Its Chief Executive is accountable to my right hon. Friend, via the Permanent Secretary.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he last met the Solicitors' Family Law Association to discuss forthcoming changes in the Child Support Agency's maintenance formula; and if he will make a statement. [44267]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding reply 20 March 2002]:* My right hon. Friend has held no meetings with the Solicitors' Family Law Association over the last 12 months to discuss the changes in the child support system.

Zimbabwe

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what benefits are available to

British citizens leaving Zimbabwe to resettle in the UK because of the internal problems in that country; and if he will make a statement; [31190]

(2) what recent discussions he has had with the Foreign Secretary about the numbers of British citizens likely to leave Zimbabwe for the UK and the impact on the social security budget; and if he will make a statement. [31191]

Malcolm Wicks: Officials across government stay in very close contact about the situation in Zimbabwe. On 14 January 2002, there were 25,054 British nationals registered with the British High Commission in Zimbabwe. We do not know how many of these people may wish to remove to the United Kingdom as there is no requirement for them to inform the High Commission if they plan to leave Zimbabwe, or of their destination. It is not therefore possible to estimate the potential impact on the social security budget.

British citizens leaving Zimbabwe to resettle in the United Kingdom currently have the same access to benefits as any other British citizen returning from abroad. If they claim income-related benefits within two years of arrival in the United Kingdom they must demonstrate that they are habitually resident in this country, in addition to satisfying the normal conditions of entitlement.

Departmental Sponsorship

Jim Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the financial resources and initiatives sponsored by his Department in the last 12 months for Dorset which are additional to the Government SSA grants. [29893]

Malcolm Wicks: The information is in the table.

2001–02

Local authority	*Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit subsidy payments*[1] £	*Anti-Fraud Incentive Scheme*[1] £	*Discretionary Rent Allowance*[2] £	*Discretionary Housing Payments*[2] £	*Administration Grant* £	*Verification Framework*[3] £	*Benefits Agency/ local authority Joint Working Payments* £
Christchurch	7,548,315	8,000	2,527	7,574	103,261	32,311	2,700
East Dorset	8,729,550	26,699	2,789	17,742	128,946	40,775	—
North Dorset	8,226,478	24,101	2,259	9,905	107,762	33,596	—
Purbeck	4,430,394	34,455	3,041	9,108	90,878	28,527	—
West Dorset	15,308,958	66,000	4,722	8,438	211,224	68,148	4,449
Weymouth & Portland	15,606,859	125,476	9,256	15,408	171,624	56,714	—

Notes.
1. Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit subsidy and anti-fraud incentive scheme figures are taken from local authority mid-year estimates and are subject to change on receipt of the 2001–02 final claims; these claims are also subject to audit.
2. Discretionary Housing Payments replaced Discretionary Rent Allowance from 1 July 2001.
3. Verification Framework figures are for on-going funding only, no payments for set-up costs were made to these local authorities in 2001–02.

Sources:
Anti-Fraud Incentive Scheme: quarterly Weekly Benefit Savings/WIB5 returns.
Discretionary Rent Allowance: DWP circular HB/CTB S3/2001.
Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP): DHP Estimate Forms.
Administration Grant: DWP circular HB/CTB A4/2001.
Verification Framework: DWP circular HB/CTB A4/2001.
Benefits Agency/local authority Joint Working Payments: DWP Counter Fraud Investigation Branch (Joint Working Unit).

Benefit Deductions

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to *(a)* abolish, *(b)* reform and *(c)* freeze non-dependent deductions for housing benefit and council tax benefit. [45127]

Malcolm Wicks: For 2002–03, for the second year running, we are freezing the levels of non-dependant deductions while uprating the qualifying income thresholds. I also refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 14 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 787W.

Scottish Parliament

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions for what reason no devolved administration Minister attended the 2415 European Union Council of Ministers (Employment and Social Policy) meeting on 7 March; which particular suggestions or matters of concern from the Scottish Executive were raised in their absence by the UK Government delegation; and what information is being provided by his Department to guarantee effective post-council scrutiny by the European Committee of the Scottish Parliament. [44316]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding reply 19 March 2002]:* The composition of the UK delegation to specific Council of Ministers meetings is decided in accordance with the Concordat on the Co-ordination of EU Policy Issues.

For information about the meeting on 7 March I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 20 March to the hon. Member for Clydesdale (Jimmy Hood). Post-council scrutiny by the European Committee of the Scottish Parliament is a matter for that Parliament and for the Scottish Executive. Reports of Council meetings are available to Scottish Executive officials and officials stand ready to provide other information in line with the provisions of the Concordat.

Job Sharing

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the extent of job sharing in his Department. [41042]

Malcolm Wicks: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 26 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1261W.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions for what reason housing benefit statistics produced by his Department exclude extended payment cases. [41786]

Malcolm Wicks: Extended payments of Housing Benefit were introduced in 1996 and are available when an Income Support or an income-based Jobseeker's Allowance claim ends due to a person starting work (or increasing their hours and/or earnings) which is expected to last at least five weeks. They can be paid for four weeks and remove the uncertainty faced by many people about whether they will be able to pay their rent and council tax between the last payment of benefit and receipt of their first wages.

As these claims are a fixed period award of Housing Benefit for up to four weeks they were originally excluded from all Housing Benefit statistics to make sure they did not inflate or distort the figures. They were, however, collected for internal use and they have been included in a footnote to tables in the Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit Quarterly Summary Statistics since November 1999.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer of 13 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 500W, on the departmental expenditure limit, to the hon. Member for Blackpool North and Fleetwood, what aspects of the administration of housing benefit and council tax benefit appeals have been transferred to the Lord Chancellor's Department. [44294]

Malcolm Wicks: The Lord Chancellor's Department has responsibility for the Social Security Commissioners. From 2 July 2001 people can appeal against a Housing Benefit or Council Tax Benefit decision to an independent appeal tribunal administered by the Appeals Service. A further appeal against the decision of these tribunals can be made to the Social Security Commissioners. Funds were transferred to the Lord Chancellor's Department to cover the costs of administering these appeals.

Attendance Allowance

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if attendance allowance will be paid to claimants who are recipients of the free care for the elderly scheme due to be introduced by the Scottish Executive; and if he will make a statement. [45967]

Maria Eagle: Attendance Allowance is intended to provide a contribution towards the extra costs faced by severely disabled people as a result of their disabilities.

In accordance with the Great Britain-wide rules which aim to avoid duplicate provision, Attendance Allowance is not paid to people living in residential care homes or nursing homes who receive financial help—which includes the provision of free personal care—with their placement from public funds.

Child Benefit Centre (Tyne and Wear)

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what performance targets are in place relating to the handling of complaints and inquiries to the Child Benefit Centre at Washington, Tyne and Wear. [44255]

Malcolm Wicks: The Child Benefit Centre has performance targets for the handling of complaints and enquiries. These are published in the Child Benefit Centre's Statement of Service. The aim is to answer all complaints, whether verbal or written within seven working days. Enquiries by letter will normally be answered within 10 working days.

Pension Credit

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions under what circumstances *(a)* two pensioners of the same sex living at the same address and *(b)* two pensioners of different sexes living at the same address would separately be entitled to claim the proposed pension credit. [42957]

Malcolm Wicks: There will be no provision for two members of the same sex to claim Pension Credit jointly.

Residence at the same address will not be the sole factor in deciding whether two pensioners of different sex should claim Pension Credit separately or jointly. Rather, of particular importance is the nature of their relationship and whether or not they were living together as husband and wife in a single household unit within that building. Each case will be considered on its individual merits, in the same way as for Minimum Income Guarantee now.

Pensions

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer of 11 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 104W, on pensions, what his definition is of good information; and if this includes information on loss of entitlement to means-tested benefits. [38317]

Malcolm Wicks: The government objective is to provide information that is, and continues to be, accurate and relevant to enable people to plan effectively for their future income in retirement.

At the point at which such information is produced, it is not possible to forecast an individual's possible entitlement to means tested benefits at state pension age.

However, there are a number of leaflets that give information on government support to those on low incomes and the impact that other income may have on their future pension entitlement.

These leaflets include IS20—a Guide to Income Support, MIG1L—on the Minimum Income Guarantee for people aged 60 or over, GL16—Help with your rent and GL17—Help with your council tax.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what reports his Department publishes on public sector pension schemes. [43348]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding reply 14 March 2002]:* None. Responsibility for Public Sector Schemes rests with HMT.

Pension Payment

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what guidance is given to those approaching pensionable age as to the methods of pension payment; and if he will make a statement. [35992]

Malcolm Wicks: Approximately four months before reaching State Pension age (60 for a woman, age 65 for a man) an automatic claims package is issued to prospective pensioners provided the customer's current address is held on the computer.

This contains form BR833 which sets out the options of how to make a claim for State Retirement Pension and leaflet AC1 which explains the benefits of payment straight into a bank account. The claim form gives the customer the option of payment by order book or payment straight into a bank or building society account.

We are modernising the service we offer to pensioners and since November 2000 customers can make a claim over the phone with an experienced operator to guide them through the claim form. As part of this process callers are explained the methods of payment available i.e. either order book or payment straight into a bank or building society account. The claim form is thereby tailored to the particular circumstances of that customer and is returned for them to sign and date. All they need to do then is to send the completed form to their nearest processing centre.

From 2003, payments directly into a bank or building society account will become the Department's normal method of payment. This is a more modern, secure and efficient way of paying benefits and pensions, already chosen by over 40 per cent. of all customers and 60 per cent. of new pensioners.

The Department has been aware of FRS17 throughout its development, a process that has taken several years.

Ministers and officials hold regular consultations with those involved with the pensions industry. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State met representatives from the ASB on 27 February.

There are many factors tending to increase the costs and risks faced by employers who choose to offer defined benefit occupational pension schemes including longer life expectancy and lower expected future investment returns. It is not possible to isolate the effects of FRS17 from these other factors.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what arrangements he has made to offer *(a)* state basic and *(b)* state second pension eligibility to workers earning less than the lower earnings limit from April. [42953]

Maria Eagle: Qualifying carers or disabled people who are earning less than the Lower Earnings Limit will be given automatic entitlement to State Second Pension. This will benefit approximately four million people.

None.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what guidance he issues to companies that offer an occupational pension scheme on including pension surpluses in payments to former employees; and if he will make a statement. [43961]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Since 1986 the Inland Revenue has required pension funds which are funded in excess of 105 per cent of their liabilities to reduce their surplus. This may be done in a variety of ways, including improved benefits to scheme members, employer or employee contribution holidays and taxable refunds to the employer sponsoring the scheme. The Pensions Act 1995 requires that, before any refund is made to an employer, all current and future pensions in payment should be increased annually in line with the Retail Prices Index up to a maximum of 5 per cent., that trustees should satisfy themselves that the use of the surplus is in the interest of the members, and that members should be notified of the proposal in the manner set out in law.

The trust deed for each pension scheme may also regulate the way that surpluses can be reduced. If the trustees propose to make a payment to the employer, and this is permitted by the trust deed, members can challenge their decision through the Occupational Pensions Regulatory Authority (Opra) if they believe that the statutory procedures have not been followed. If the trust deed does not permit payments to the employer, the trustees may apply to Opra to change the scheme rules in order to allow payment.

My right hon. Friend has not issued formal guidance on the operation of the Pensions Act 1995. Opra issues guidance on a variety of topics. Note 3, published in 1998, deals with Opra's role in the payment of surplus.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to allow provision for representation of pension members on pension trustee boards. [43954]

Mr Nicholas Brown: The Government is currently in the process of strengthening the law relating to the nomination and selection of trustees to ensure that every occupational pension scheme has member-nominated trustees. We do not think it was right to force schemes to have member trustees from particular categories of membership, because that would erroneously give credence to the idea that trustees have a representative role, which they do not. The duties and responsibilities of all the trustees are the same, regardless of how they come to the post.

The timing of this work will depend on the outcome of the broader simplification review being undertaken by Alan Pickering which is due to report in June, but we remain firmly committed to increasing the number of member trustees generally.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people living in England and Wales are in private pension schemes. [43923]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: There are an estimated 13.2 million people of working age in England and Wales contributing to a private pension.

Notes:

Working age is 16–59 for women and 16–64 for men.

Numbers are rounded to nearest 100,000.

Estimates based on Family Resources Survey 2000–01 and may be subject to a margin of error.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer of 11 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 566W, on the Pensions Education campaign, when the summary of the quantitative tracking research on the pensions education marketing campaign will be placed in the Library. [44201]

Malcolm Wicks: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him on 22 October 2001, *Official Report*, volume 373, column 54W, ref. 7901.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what methods his Department uses to identify the names and addresses of people four months away from state pension age, in order to contact them about claiming their retirement pension; and if he will make a statement. [45183]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Data held by the Inland Revenue on the National Insurance Recording System is used to identify people within four months of the relevant age.

The data is passed to the Department's Pensions Computer System (PSCS) and a claim package is issued.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the average pensioner income as a percentage of average earnings in *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000, *(d)* 2000–01 and *(e)* the last year for which figures are available. [43357]

Mr. Nick Brown *[holding answer 14 March 2002]:* Not all the information requested is available. The information that is available is presented in the following table.

Average pensioner income as a percentage of average earnings

Year	*Average pensioners' incomes (a)* £	*Average earnings (b)* £	*(a) as percentage of (b)*
1997–98	209	368[1]	57 per cent
1998–99	224	385[1]	58 per cent
1999–2000	235	400[1]	59 per cent

Sources:

Pensioners' Incomes Series 1999–2000, DWP, 2001, Table 1.

New Earnings Survey 2000, ONS, 2001, Table A30.

Notes:

1. Average earnings estimates relate to April 1997, April 1998 and April 1999.

2. Pensioners are defined as single (non-cohabiting) people over state pension age (65 for men, 60 for women) and couples (married or cohabiting) where the man is over state pension age.

3. Average pensioners' incomes are defined as mean gross weekly income of all pensioner units in Great Britain and are expressed in current prices rounded up to the nearest one pound.

4. Average earnings figures are taken from the New Earnings Survey and are defined as mean gross weekly earnings of full-time employees on adult rates, in Great Britain, whose pay for the survey period was not affected by absence, rounded to the nearest £1.

5. Percentages have been rounded to the nearest 1 per cent.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the average time taken by his Department to answer *(a)* a named day question and *(b)* an ordinary written question tabled by (i) all hon. Members and (ii) the hon. Member for Northavon in (A) this and (B) the previous session. [43327]

Maria Eagle: The information for this session up to 20 March 2002 is in the table. Information for previous session is not available.

	Average time to answer Parliamentary Questions (Days)	
	Ordinary Written	*Named Day*
All honourable Members	12	6
Hon. Member for Northavon	14	5

Age Discrimination

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his Department's policy is towards age discrimination. [42580]

Malcolm Wicks: We recognise the importance of tackling age discrimination in the workplace. We have already provided voluntary guidance to help employers adopt age positive employment practices. We are consulting extensively with employers, individuals, and expert groups and, by 2006 we will legislate against age discrimination in the workplace.

As an employer, the Department is committed to equality and valuing diversity within its workforce, and specifically to age diversity and non-discrimination on age grounds. In support of this policy we are working to ensure that our practices will be compliant with future age legislation. The Departmental retirement age for all staff below Senior Civil Service level was increased from 60 to 65 with effect from 1 April 2000 and staff have the choice to retire at any time between these ages. All staff are positively encouraged to take appropriate development opportunities regardless of age including promotion and change of duties. We acknowledge the skills and experience of our staff and are committed to utilising these to provide the best possible public service.

Winter Fuel Payment

Mr. Ivan Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate how many pensioners in the Harwich constituency are *(a)* entitled to and *(b)* have taken up the winter fuel payment. [45116]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: I refer the hon. Member to the Written Answer I gave the hon. Member for South East Cornwall (Colin Breed) on 18 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 153W.

Pension-related Benefits

James Purnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate he has made of how much money would be accrued by the delay in payment of pension-related benefits, by two years in comparison to the payment of such benefits at 65 years if the retirement age were increased to 67 years. [43649]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding reply 20 March 2002]:* Currently state pension age is 65 for men and between 60 and 65 for women, depending on their date of birth. From 2020 state pension age will be 65 for all.

If the state pension age were increased to 67 in 2020–21, we estimate that the gross savings on state pension expenditure in that year would be around £6.2 billion, in 2002–03 prices.

Benefit Fraud

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what lessons have been learnt from the prosecution pilots in which DSS lawyers helped local authorities to prosecute people suspected of benefit fraud; and whether the scheme will be replaced. [42514]

Malcolm Wicks: The prosecution pilots showed that provision of legal services and advice to Local Authorities can help raise the profile of Local Authority prosecutions and encourage Local Authorities to pursue prosecutions and sanctions. The assistance provided through these pilots is just one aspect of the help being provided by the Department to Local Authorities to increase the professionalism of their investigation work.

From April 2002, all Local Authorities will be participating in a new incentive scheme that provides greater financial support for prosecution-related work. We are also considering afresh what help Departmental solicitors might give Local Authorities who wish to impose sanctions on and, where appropriate, prosecute those who commit benefit fraud.

Age Discrimination

Mr. MacDougall: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what plans his Department has to introduce legislation on age discrimination in employment before the EU directive is implemented; [42397]

(2) what consultations his Department is having regarding the EU directive on age discrimination in employment; [42402]

(3) what organisations his Department is having discussions with regarding the EU directive on age discrimination in employment. [42403]

Mr. Nick Brown: The introduction of the employment related age discrimination legislation, and the consultations on its development, are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry.

The Department for Work and Pensions leads in challenging ageism in employment with its Age Positive campaign that is vigorously promoting the business benefits of employing an age diverse workforce. The campaign focuses on the Code of Practice on Age Diversity in Employment and a wide range of research and development activities with both public and private organisations to help employers develop non-ageist employment practices that will help them prepare for the future legislation. Integral to this is the Age Positive Website (www.agepositive.gov.uk) that was launched in December.

WBS Subsidies

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the National Audit Office's comments in the Appropriation Accounts, HC335, on the fall in WBS subsidies during 2000–01; and whether the Department intends to revise the weekly benefits savings rules. [42512]

Malcolm Wicks: The Weekly Benefit Savings (WBS) scheme was introduced in April 1993 to encourage Local Authorities to undertake activity to combat benefit fraud. It is based on a system of rewards and penalties for the amount of fraud detected.

Changes were made to the scheme in 1998 following concerns from the National Audit Office and Audit Commission that WBS was being inappropriately claimed in cases where fraud had not been established or a fraud investigation had not been properly undertaken. It was therefore decided to tighten the WBS claiming criteria and limit the amount of WBS claimed in certain circumstances.

This tightening of the criteria was followed by a large reduction in the WBS savings scored by Local Authorities in 1998–99 and 1999–2000. To address this, increased rates of additional subsidy were made payable to Local Authorities and a reduced level of penalty was introduced in April 1999.

In January 2000 the Department announced that it would replace WBS with a new anti-fraud incentive scheme over two years from April 2001. Sixty three Local Authorities took up the new scheme in 2001–02 with the remainder joining in April 2002.

Households Below Average Income Survey

Mr. Jim Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his Answer of 6 November 2000 to the hon. Member for Havant, *Official Report*, column 92W, if he will estimate the same data for each region and nation of the UK; and if he will also express the estimates as a percentage of the total numbers of pensioners and children the figures represent. [37885]

Mr. Nick Brown: Such information as is available is in the tables. However, estimates of year on year change at regional level should be viewed with caution, as sampling error may be large in relation to the change itself.

Percentage of children living in households below 60 per cent. of contemporary median income by region, including the self-employed

	Percentage of children				
	1994–95	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*
Income before housing costs					
England	22	20	25	25	24
of which					
North East	29	31	28	32	33
North West and Merseyside	25	23	30	29	33
Yorkshire and the Humber	29	26	33	30	29
East Midlands	25	21	23	24	24
West Midlands	22	24	30	29	24
Eastern	21	14	20	18	17
London	23	21	24	25	25
South East	13	15	18	17	14
South West	19	16	22	22	22
Scotland	25	25	29	28	26
Wales	27	28	28	29	29
Income after housing costs					
England	32	31	34	33	33
of which					
North East	35	36	35	38	40
North West and Merseyside	33	33	38	37	40
Yorkshire and the Humber	35	32	37	35	36
East Midlands	31	29	29	29	30
West Midlands	28	33	34	36	31
Eastern	31	22	29	26	27
London	38	39	40	43	41
South East	24	25	28	25	24
South West	30	28	32	32	32
Scotland	27	32	34	30	30
Wales	34	36	36	36	35

Percentage of children living in households below 60 per cent. of contemporary median income by region, excluding the self-employed

	Percentage of children				
	1994–95	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*
Income before housing costs					
England	20	19	24	24	22
of which					
North East	28	26	27	30	31
North West and Merseyside	23	22	29	29	30
Yorkshire and the Humber	27	25	32	29	27
East Midlands	23	20	21	23	24
West Midlands	20	22	27	29	24
Eastern	17	13	18	16	16
London	21	21	24	26	24
South East	10	13	16	15	11
South West	16	15	20	20	20
Scotland	23	24	28	27	27
Wales	26	25	26	28	27
Income after housing costs					
England	30	31	34	34	33
of which					
North East	36	31	35	37	41
North West and Merseyside	31	33	37	37	38
Yorkshire and the Humber	33	31	37	34	35
East Midlands	29	29	28	30	31
West Midlands	27	32	33	36	31
Eastern	29	22	28	24	27
London	38	41	43	45	42
South East	22	25	29	25	23
South West	27	29	32	30	31
Scotland	27	32	33	30	29
Wales	35	35	37	36	34

Percentage of pensioners living in households below 60 per cent. of contemporary median income by region, including the self-employed

	Percentage of pensioners				
	1994–95	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*
Income before housing costs					
England	21	21	21	22	23
of which					
North East	23	28	19	21	25
North West and Merseyside	24	20	22	23	24
Yorkshire and the Humber	23	25	25	23	25
East Midlands	19	25	24	27	26
West Midlands	23	22	25	24	23
Eastern	21	21	20	20	24
London	17	16	18	18	18
South East	20	18	17	19	20
South West	19	23	22	24	24
Scotland	23	23	24	19	20
Wales	27	24	19	23	25
Income after housing costs					
England	26	25	27	27	27
of which					
North East	31	34	26	30	29
North West and Merseyside	26	23	28	26	27
Yorkshire and the Humber	28	26	30	30	30
East Midlands	22	26	28	29	28
West Midlands	28	24	28	27	27
Eastern	28	24	28	24	30
London	26	27	29	28	28
South East	25	24	23	24	25
South West	25	26	25	29	24
Scotland	28	25	28	25	26
Wales	26	23	22	28	23

Percentage of pensioners living in households below 60 per cent. of contemporary median income by region, excluding the self-employed

	Percentage of pensioners				
	1994–95	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*
Income before housing costs					
England	20	21	20	21	22
of which					
North East	21	27	17	20	25
North West and Merseyside	22	19	21	23	24
Yorkshire and the Humber	23	24	24	22	23
East Midlands	17	24	23	26	26
West Midlands	22	21	24	23	22
Eastern	20	21	20	19	23
London	16	16	17	19	18
South East	20	18	17	19	19
South West	18	22	19	24	22
Scotland	21	22	22	19	19
Wales	27	24	19	23	24
Income after housing costs					
England	25	25	26	27	26
of which					
North East	29	32	26	30	28
North West and Merseyside	24	22	27	26	26
Yorkshire and the Humber	28	25	28	29	29
East Midlands	21	26	26	29	27
West Midlands	27	23	27	27	26
Eastern	28	24	28	24	29
London	25	26	28	28	28
South East	24	24	23	24	24
South West	25	25	25	29	23
Scotland	25	24	27	25	26
Wales	25	22	21	27	22

Notes:
1. All figures are estimates and are taken from the Households Below Average Income (HBAI) data set which is derived from the Family Resources Survey (FRS). The FRS does not include Northern Ireland.
2. The estimates are sample counts, which have been adjusted for non-response using multipurpose grossing factors that control for tenure, Council Tax band and a number of other variables. Estimates are subject to both sampling error and to variability in non-response. The income measure used is weekly net (disposable) equivalised household income (that is to say income that is adjusted to reflect the composition of the household).
3. The estimates are presented on both a Before Housing Costs (BHC) and an After Housing Costs (AHC) basis in line with HBAI conventions. Figures are also provided including and excluding the self-employed, as research suggests that, for self-employed people, income as reported in surveys is often a poor indicator of living standards.
4. Estimates for the numbers of pensioners and children living in households below 60 per cent. median income by region have not been provided as the FRS grossing regime does not permit the provision of reliable estimates of numbers, as distinct from percentages. This issue does not affect either GB level estimates of numbers nor regional estimates of percentages. The grossing methodology in the FRS is currently being reviewed with one aim being to resolve this issue.

Source:
Family Resources Survey

Benefits

Mr. Colin Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many people were in receipt of income related benefits in each of the last 12 years; and what the most recent available figure is for each constituency in England. [38337]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* The available information has been placed in the Library.

Child Benefit Centre operational targets 2002–03

Area	*2002–03 Target*
Child Benefit claims processing	95 per cent. completed in 36 days
Child Benefit claims accuracy	98 per cent.
Child Benefit change of circumstances	95 per cent. completed in 14 days
Child Benefit change of circumstances accuracy	96.5 per cent.
Guardians Allowance claims processing	95 per cent. completed in 80 days
Teleservice—proportion of available calls answered	90 per cent.
Appeals processed	92 per cent. completed in 90 days

Basic Pensions

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will change the practice of starting a pension from the Monday following a person's 60th or 65th birthday. [37423]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Entitlement to Retirement Pension begins with the pay-day on or following the pensioner's 60th or 65th birthday. Changes in entitlement, for example a decrease because of a prolonged stay in hospital, also takes effect from the pay-day following the change in circumstances. The same rule applies with the termination of the award. The principle of paying Retirement Pension in whole weeks stems from the fact that the benefit is traditionally paid in advance.

There are no plans to change the present arrangements for paying Retirement Pension.

Personnel Issues

Mr John Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what was the *(a)* percentage and number of rail journeys undertaken on first class tickets, *(b)* average cost of a first class journey by rail and *(c)* total cost of rail travel in each of the past four years broken down by grade of civil servant. [37509]

Malcolm Wicks: The information requested for the percentage, number and average cost of first class journeys is not available. As part of their terms and conditions of employment, first class tickets are available for senior staff undertaking long business journeys or working en route. The department has a contract with an external agent for the provision of rail tickets over £15. Over each of the last three calendar years (1999–2001) the department has purchased an average of £7.2 million worth of tickets.

FRS17

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what assessment his Department made of the impact on occupational pensions of FRS17 prior to its implementation; [37781]

(2) what representations his Department received from employers concerning the introduction by the Accounting Standards Board of FRS17 prior to its implementation; [37782]

(3) whether his Department was consulted about the planned timescale for the introduction of FRS17; [37783]

(4) when he was first informed by the Accounting Standards Board about the planned adoption of FRS17; [37784]

(5) whether his Department consulted employers concerning the introduction by the Accounting Standards Board of FRS17 prior to its implementation; on what dates; and what the contents of those consultations were; [37785]

(6) what representations his Department made to Accounting Standards Board concerning the introduction of FRS17. [37786]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 27 February 2002]*: FRS17 is an accounting standard introduced by the Accounting Standards Board (ASB) which is entirely independent of Government. Financial reporting standards are introduced after a long period of public consultation which offers an opportunity for those with an interest to make representations to the ASB.

The Department has been aware of FRS17 throughout its development, a process that has taken several years.

Ministers and officials hold regular consultations with those involved with the pensions industry. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State met representatives from the ASB on 27 February.

There are many factors tending to increase the costs and risks faced by employers who choose to offer defined benefit occupational pension schemes including longer life expectancy and lower expected future investment returns. It is not possible to isolate the effects of FRS17 from these other factors.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 3 April 2002

DEFENCE

Training Expenditure

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the expenditure is on training in the *(a)* Royal Navy and Royal Marines, *(b)* the Army and *(c)* the RAF in (i) the UK and (ii) Scotland. [32459]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 1 February 2002]:* The latest best estimates for the amounts spent by the Services' Training Agencies on individual training for the Royal Navy, Army and RAF in the last 12 months are respectively: £403.6 million; £894 million and £404.5 million. These figures are approximate and are in accordance with Resources Accounting and Budgeting (RAB) procedures which incorporate consumption figures not included in a cash budget.

For the Royal Navy, a small proportion of trainee days are spent in Scotland, but separate costs are not recorded for these activities by the Naval Training and Recruiting Agency. The Army Training and Recruiting Agency estimates that its total expenditure in Scotland in the current Financial Year will be £22 million. The majority of the RAF Training Group Defence Agency's training establishments are based either in England or Wales, but the in-year cost of their Outdoor Activity Centre in Scotland for the current financial year is £675,000.

The cash costs of Royal Marines individual training for financial year 2001–02 are projected to be £39.9 million. It is not possible to identify separately Royal Marines training expenditure in Scotland.

Training costs falling to the Service Commands are not held centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Deployment

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* army personnel, *(b)* navy personnel and *(c)* RAF personnel are deployed on operations; and what percentage is deployed on operations in each case. [45684]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* The number of personnel deployed on operations is as follows:

Service	*Number*	*Percentage*
Naval Service	3,938	11
Army	19,895	20
RAF	4,480	9

These figures include both joint and single service deployments and are shown as a percentage of trained strength.

Naval Service figures are as at 25 March 2002.

Army and RAF figures are as at 1 March 2002.

Helicopters

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the serviceability rate is of *(a)* Gazelle, *(b)* Lynx, *(c)* Sea King, *(d)* Chinook and *(e)* Puma helicopters. [44660]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 19 March 2002]:* The serviceability rate for the month of February for *(a)* Gazelle, *(b)* Lynx, *(c)* Sea King, *(d)* Chinook, and *(e)* Puma helicopters is shown in the following table:

Aircraft type	*Average serviceability rate*	*Aircraft numbers (actual operating fleet)*
Gazelle	55%	116
Lynx	57%	131
Sea King	61%	84
Chinook	56%	27
Puma	64%	35

The hon. Member should note that these figures represent an average taken over the whole month of February. Serviceability figures are influenced by a number of factors and fluctuate daily.

Chinook Crash

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether it is his policy only to review the findings of the air marshals on the reasons for the crash of the ZD 576 Chinook helicopter on 2 June 1994 if there is new evidence in this case; and if he will make a statement. [45860]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 26 March 2002]:* As my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Defence made clear in the House on 19 March 2002, it is necessary to look very carefully at the report published by the Select Committee in the other place. We are conducting a detailed study of its analysis of the facts and the interesting technical views expressed. Were new evidence to be determined, this would of course, be fully evaluated.

Anti-aircraft Defences

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether anti-aircraft defences in the United Kingdom have combat identification of friend and foe facilities; and what steps he is taking to ensure that all anti-aircraft defences can use information from air traffic control systems. [46612]

Mr. Ingram: I can confirm that all Ministry of Defence Rapier Ground Based Air Defence assets are equipped with combat identification friend or foe facilities. These assets would be integrated within the military Airspace Surveillance and Control System and communicate, co-ordinate and integrate with military air traffic control services as necessary. A joint operating instruction combining civil and military air

traffic control and air defence actions within United Kingdom flight information regions has recently been published which enhances co-ordination of airspace activity. It is planned that Royal Marine and Army man portable air defence systems will have friend or foe identification facilities by 2008 and 2004–05 respectively.

West Freugh Airfield

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will retain external consultants to investigate the potential for future commercial development at West Freugh airfield. [45915]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* The position has not changed since I answered a similar question from the hon. Member on 21 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 558W.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what criteria were used by the Airfield Regulator in assessing the safety of future operations at West Freugh airfield. [45916]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* The criteria used by the Regulator to assess the safety of future operations at West Freugh airfield were the adequacy of safety infrastructure and the number of aircraft movements. Regulatory minima are set for both the overall number of movements and the number of fast jet movements in order to maintain the currency of air traffic controllers. The numbers of aircraft movements at West Freugh had fallen below these regulatory minima, leading to the decision to cease full-time airfield operations.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many air traffic movements were handled at West Freugh airfield in each of the last five years; how many were *(a)* civilian and *(b)* military; and of the military movements, from which countries they were from. [45918]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* The following aircraft movements took place at West Freugh between 1997 and 2001:

Date	*Military*	*Civilian*	*Total*
1997	5,946	5,694	11,640
1998	4,636	7,208	11,844
1999	7,236	1,152	8,388
2000	5,976	—	5,976
2001	3,186	—	3,186

The figures shown do not include overflights. The bulk of military movements shown are in support of the United Kingdom armed forces activities. Foreign aircraft movements are not identified separately in our records.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when, prior to the announcement of 20 March on closure of the airfield, the next scheduled re-surfacing of the West Freugh airstrip was due to be completed; and at what projected cost. [45975]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* Two programmes of re-surfacing work were recommended for 2002 and 2003 at an estimated cost of about £1.6 million and £0.19 million respectively. However, neither task was included in the maintenance plan and completion dates were not allocated.

Property Managers

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which areas have no property managers in post; how the property in these areas is being managed; and if he will make a statement. [46438]

Dr. Moonie: There are no areas of the Defence Housing Executive which currently do not have Property Managers in post. There are vacancies for two Property Managers at the present time but the posts are currently occupied by other experienced staff from within the relevant property management office on temporary promotion, pending the recruitment of permanent replacements. Property Managers are assisted in their tasks by Assistant Property Managers and other staff.

HMS Sheffield

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to the answer of 14 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 1179W (1) if he will list those who gave statements but were not called to give evidence; how many of those who made a statement expressed a wish to give evidence; and if he will make a statement; [45836]

(2) on HMS Sheffield, whether Ministers have reviewed the information now available; and if he will make a statement; [45838]

(3) whether the Board of Inquiry into the sinking of HMS Sheffield were given copies of all statements; whether all 98 people were offered as witnesses; who decided which of them were called to give evidence and be cross-examined; and if he will make a statement. [45837]

Mr. Ingram: As I informed the hon. Member in my reply to his previous questions on HMS Sheffield, I am satisfied that the Board of Inquiry was conducted in a professional and proper manner and no new information has become available that would warrant the re-opening of this tragic incident. We have no record of any individual who made a statement expressing a wish to give his evidence through being interviewed by the Board. The statements taken from the surviving crew members were available to the Board of Inquiry. The Board interviewed witnesses where it was believed that doing so could assist in its inquiries. The decision as to which witnesses were interviewed was the responsibility of the Board. To publish a list of those who provided statements to the Sheffield Board of Inquiry would be a breach of the Data Protection Act 1998 and a breach of confidentiality, unless the permission of all the individuals involved was first obtained. This could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

HMS Invincible

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he plans to withdraw HMS Invincible from service before 2012. [46459]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 15 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 125W, to my hon. Friend the Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle)

Procurement

Laura Moffatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what account his Department takes of a firm's good practice in *(a)* training and *(b)* employment practice in awarding procurement contracts. [46484]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence recognises that supplier training and employment practices are important for the timely delivery of the quality goods and services the MOD requires. The MOD will normally contract only with suppliers who have achieved an appropriate, certified quality management standard. Additionally, it will usually make use of qualification questionnaires and associated tools to help assess a potential supplier's suitability for a contract both before and after invitations to tender are issued. The MOD's standard contract terms also remind suppliers of their obligations under the Racial Discrimination and, where appropriate, Fair Employment (Northern Ireland) Acts.

Correspondence

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the target time will be in 2002–03 for *(a)* Ministers to reply to letters from hon. Members and *(b)* officials in his Department to reply to letters received directly from members of the public. [44955]

Dr. Moonie: In 2002–03, the Ministry of Defence target time for replies to both Ministerial and Treat Official correspondence is within 15 working days.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the average length of time taken to answer letters to Ministers has been in the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement. [43949]

Dr. Moonie: Information is published annually by the Cabinet Office on the volume of correspondence from Members of Parliament received by Ministers and Agency Chief Executives; Departments' and Agencies' handling targets; and their performance in meeting these [illegible] The Report for 2001 is due to be published shortly.

New Deal

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many people have been employed by his Department in each of the last three years under *(a)* the New Deal for Young People, *(b)* the New Deal for the Over 50s and *(c)* the New Deal for Lone Parents; and at what cost, listed by category to public funds; [44921]

(2) how many people employed by his Department under the New Deal for Young People in each of the last four years have subsequently *(a)* found unsubsidised employment for more than 13 weeks and *(b)* returned to jobseeker's allowance or other benefits. [44903]

Dr. Moonie: Data on the number of New Deal appointments under the programme for Young People was recorded from the beginning of the scheme until April 2001. From then, data also included the over 50s and lone parents programmes. Since October 2001 data has not been held centrally on the New Deal programmes. Available data are detailed in the following table:

Financial year	*Lone parents*	*Over 50s*	*Young people aged 18–24*	*Total numbers recruited under New Deal (includes those aged 25 and over)*
1998–99	n/a	n/a	11	17
1999–2000	n/a	n/a	35	58
2000–01	n/a	n/a	20	43
2001–02 (until October 2001)	0	2	6	10

Forty-two New Deal recruits subsequently became permanent members of staff. Others who have left the scheme will have had the opportunity to acquire new skills and enhance their marketability for employment elsewhere, but information is not held on whether they returned to jobseekers allowance or other benefits. New Deal recruits take up existing vacancies so extra costs to public funds are limited to the subsidy, where appropriate, and any training and development that may be needed. Details of costs are not available and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

CFCs

Dr. Pugh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions she has had with her EU counterparts on the handling by the European Commission of the issue of CFCs in refrigerator insulating foam. [44929]

Mr. Meacher: My colleagues and I have not discussed the issue of the European Commission's handling of the clarification of the meaning of Article 16 of EC Regulation 2037/2000 with Environment Ministers from other Member States.

We are taking urgent action to ensure recovery facilities are put in place in the UK as quickly as possible. A mobile plant is already operational in Lewes, and we expect that several static plants will be established at various sites around the UK by July, to ensure that the UK will be able to meet its obligations to recover and destroy CFCs from refrigeration insulating foam.

Dangerous Substance Rules

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the answer of 11 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 793W, on dangerous substance rules, if she will place in the Library copies of the correspondence between the Government and the Commission relating to the reasoned opinions referred to; and if she will make a statement on how the Government are dealing with these Reasoned Opinions. [44727]

Mr. Meacher: No, Reasoned Opinion infraction cases are confidential matters between Member States and the Commission.

Environmental Impact Assessment

Mr. Burnett: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the second draft of the Environmental Impact Statement on the Ashmoor disposal site will be completed; and if drafts will be placed in the Library. [45922]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* The first draft of the Environmental Impact Assessment for the site at Ashmoor is being revised to take account of comments received from the various interested parties we consulted. There is further work to be done and I cannot yet say when it will be completed but we are progressing matters as quickly as possible.

I see no reason to place copies of the draft Assessments in the Library but I will arrange for a copy of the final version to be placed there in due course.

Pesticide Tax

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what monitoring there has been of the annual financial commitments given by the farming unions and the Crop Protection Association in respect of the voluntary measures in place of a pesticide tax; and if she will make a statement. [45923]

Mr. Morley: Some initial monitoring of costs has been carried out by the Steering Group for the voluntary package. The Steering Group are aiming to produce an Annual Report of progress in April/May 2002 which is expected to contain details of costs incurred during the first year of the programme. It is intended that this report will be made widely available and I will place copies in the Library of the House.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what payments have been received from *(a)* farming unions and *(b)* the Crop Protection Association since the introduction of the voluntary measures package. [45924]

Mr. Morley: No payments have been received in connection with the voluntary package of measures to minimise the environmental impact of pesticides nor will they be in the future. The farming unions and the Crop Protection Association have estimated the costs to themselves associated with implementing the voluntary package and they will be expected to show actual costs as the programme progresses.

Sustainable Development

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on her Department's preparations for the forthcoming World Summit on Sustainable Development. [46334]

Mr. Meacher: DEFRA, working closely with other departments, is leading on the UK's domestic and international preparations for the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD). The Department is represented on MISC18, the Cabinet Committee set up to co-ordinate, develop and deliver the Government's strategy for WSSD. DEFRA also chairs two official level groups which co-ordinate preparations across Government. My officials are fully involved in the international preparations for the Summit and are attending the third preparatory meeting in New York which started on 25 March.

DEFRA also leads on the development of a cross Whitehall communications strategy to raise awareness of the Summit. We are working closely with local authorities, NGOs, business and other organisations to ensure that we engage a wide range of stakeholders in the Summit. DEFRA has also developed the government sustainable development website (www.sustainable-development.gov.uk) to include information on WSSD.

Packaging Waste

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) whether the 2001 United Kingdom business package waste recovery and recycling targets for *(a)* recovery and *(b)* material-specific recycling were met; and whether the percentage levels of business packaging waste recovery and recycling in the United Kingdom in 2001 satisfied the stipulations of the EU Packaging Waste Directive 1994; [46357]

(2) what the percentage levels of *(a)* business packaging waste recovery and *(b)* business packaging recycling were in the United Kingdom in 2001. [46358]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 26 March 2002]:* The recovery and recycling targets in article 6(1) of the EC Directive on Packaging and Packaging Waste—94/62EC—were implemented in Great Britain by the Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging Waste) Regulations 1997 (as amended).

In order to comply with the requirements in the Directive, recovery and recycling targets for 2001 under the packaging regulations were 56 per cent. for recovery and 18 per cent. for material-specific recycling of packaging waste. Final figures for 2001 are not yet available, but data received to date suggest that, if all obligated parties met their obligations, these targets should be met. This would mean that the UK had recovered 4.6 million tonnes of packaging waste in 2001 ie 50 per cent. We would expect to recycle some 45 per cent. We also anticipate that all materials will meet the 15 per cent. material-specific recycling target in the Directive, with the possible exception of plastic.

EU Fishing Rights

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her assessment is of the economic benefit to the United Kingdom of European Union fishing rights agreements *(a)* with third countries south of the EU and *(b)* with third countries north of the EU. [45514]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 26 March 2002]:* The United Kingdom's fishing industry has a negligible interest in fisheries agreements south of the EU so no assessment has been carried out. Fisheries agreements with countries north of the EU are of considerable importance to UK fishermen. However, the economic benefit cannot be assessed precisely since it depends on availability of fishing opportunities which can vary year on year and actual catches taken.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what steps the Government have taken to ensure that the funding assigned to conservation within the money spent on the acquisition of EU fishing rights agreements with third countries is spent on the purpose for which it was intended in countries *(a)* north of the EU and *(b)* south of the EU; [45512]

(2) what assessment the Government have made of the environmental impact of EU fishing rights agreements with third countries *(a)* north of the EU and *(b)* south of the EU. [45513]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 26 March 2002]:* It is the responsibility of the European Commission on behalf of the EU to ensure value for money and to assess environmental impact in relation to international fisheries agreements to which the EU is party. It is the United Kingdom's view that, certainly in relation to many of the southern agreements, the Commission's performance of these tasks needs to be improved. We have expressed this view in the Council of Ministers and will be looking for the issue to be addressed in the forthcoming review of the Common Fisheries Policy.

EU Directives

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many EU directives were received by her Department and its predecessor departments; and what the average time taken to implement such directives was from *(a)* 1990 to 1996 and *(b)* 1997 to 2002. [40698]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 5 March 2002]:* The Department does not hold information in the form requested. This information could only be assembled at disproportionate cost.

Catering Services

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the cost was of *(a)* in-house canteen and *(b)* other catering services provided by her Department in each of the last four years. [38932]

Mr. Morley: The Department has only been in existence since June 2001. To collect this information retrospectively from the component parts that now make up DEFRA would involve disproportionate cost.

Golden Jubilee

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much the Department has spent on the Queen's Jubilee in each of the past three years; how the money was allocated; and if she will make a statement. [44595]

Mr. Morley: Any such expenditure has not been separately identified by the Department.

Worldwide Web

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the number of farming businesses which are connected to the worldwide web. [38828]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* Internet access is becoming an essential business tool for agriculture and information on computer and internet usage by farmers was collected in the December 2001 Survey of Agriculture. The results are due to be published in early April.

Farming and Food

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to respond to the report of the Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food; and if she will make a statement. [39399]

Mr. Morley: The Commission's report will make a substantial contribution to a new strategy for sustainable food and farming, which we aim to launch in the autumn. This will be a response to the report but will go further than that. We will work with a wide range of stakeholders to determine how best to take forward the Commission's ideas and deliver positive changes on the ground. As responsibility for addressing the Commission's recommendations rests with industry and other organisations as well as Government, we will be looking for their active involvement.

Countryside Agency

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what criteria are being applied to determine applications for appointments to the Countryside Agency after 1 April; on what date the advertisements for applicants was placed in the national press; what timescale was anticipated for drawing up the list for applicants for interview at the time the advert was first placed; when it is expected that such interviews will now take place; what measures were taken to encourage applicants in addition to the national advertising campaign and on what dates those measures were taken; what the political balance is of board members; what the political balance is intended to be after the appointments are made; and if she will make a statement. [45271]

Alun Michael: The criteria applied to determine the applications for the appointments to the Countryside Agency were that applicants should have a general interest and experience of countryside issues, and preferably have specific expertise in the areas of rural business/rural enterprise, rural development or the

voluntary sector. In addition we made clear that we were particularly seeking applications from candidates based in the West Midlands or South West England.

Advertisements were placed in the national press on 13 and 16 September 2001, with a closing date of 11 October 2001. Our intention was to appoint up to two candidates. In line with our normal timetable, a shortlist of candidates for possible interview was drawn up in November, four shortlisted candidates from South West England were interviewed in January and one has now been appointed. The deadline for applications from candidates based in the West Midlands was extended to 11 February 2002 and this was advertised on the DEFRA and Countryside Agency websites. We are now considering the applications from candidates based in the West Midlands, received both before and after the original deadline, and hope to interview a shortlist in May. However, there is no fixed number for the number of people on the Board, and only one member is leaving the Board in April; so we will not necessarily appoint a second person this year.

In addition to the national advertising campaign, which included information being posted on the DEFRA and Countryside Agency websites, we approached 160 organisations with an interest in countryside issues in September 2001 asking them to suggest candidates. We also made a limited number of further approaches in the West Midlands for additional suggestions in January.

Appointments to the Board of the Countryside Agency are not made on the basis of political affiliation.

Badgers

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what is the present estimated number of badgers in England and Wales. [45248]

Mr. Morley: Based on two surveys, the first conducted in the mid-1980s and the second in the mid-1990s, the number of badgers in Great Britain is estimated to be between 300,000 and 400,000.

Water-based Sport and Recreation

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many enclosed waters of one hectare or more in size there are in *(a)* South Tyneside, *(b)* Tyne and Wear and *(c)* the North East; and how many of these are known to be used for sport and recreation. [45249]

Alun Michael: Our research report, "Water-Based Sport and Recreation: the Facts" was published in December 2001. The researchers found that 73 of the 169 enclosed water spaces of one hectare or more in the North are used for sport and recreation. The report does not provide separate figures for South Tyneside, Tyne and Wear and the North East.

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many clubs are associated with inland water sport and recreation in *(a)* South Tyneside, *(b)* Tyne and Wear and *(c)* the North East. [45250]

Alun Michael: Our research report, "Water-Based Sport and Recreation: the Facts" was published in December 2001. The researchers conducted interviews with 58 national stakeholder organisations in England and Wales and also undertook a questionnaire survey of 1,250 local clubs, associations and organisations. The report does not detail how many clubs are associated with inland water sport and recreation in South Tyneside, Tyne and Wear and the North East.

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will announce what action she plans to take on the research report "Water Based Sport and Recreation: the Facts". [45251]

Alun Michael: Officials recently met British Waterways, the Countryside Agency, the Countryside Council for Wales, the Environment Agency and Sport England as the other sponsors of the research along with other interested Government Departments. We are considering what action to take in the light of the report's findings.

New Deal for Market Towns

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs which market towns have received grants for regeneration under the New Deal for Market Towns, stating *(a)* the amount and *(b)* the purpose of each grant. [46600]

Alun Michael: The Market Town Initiative is being taken forward on DEFRA's behalf by the Regional Development Agencies, working with the Countryside Agency and local partners and using the £37 million of Government funding announced in the Rural White Paper. We hope that match funding will raise the figure to some £100 million. The Department does not plan to monitor the amount and purpose of individual grants made in each town. The process at a local level is important in itself. Most towns are still at the stage of community consultation prior to agreeing action plans, and few project grants have been approved. I understand the total grant allocation by RDAs to individual towns remain indicative. The table below lists the towns included in the programme to date.

North East (12)
Northumberland
Alnwick
Berwick-upon-Tweed
Haltswhistle
Hexham
Morpeth
Seahouses
Wooler

County Durham
Barnard Castle
Crook
Middleton-in-Teesdale
Stanhope

Cleveland
Guisborough

North West (14)
Cumbria
Cockermouth

Egremont
Keswick
Longton
Millom
Penrith
Windermere with Ambleside
Ulverston
Wigton

Lancashire
Barnoldswick
Carnforth
Clitheroe
Garstang
Padiham

Cheshire
Sandbach

East Midlands (13)
Derbyshire
Belper
Bolsover
Chapel en le Frith

Lincolnshire
Market Rasen
Spalding
Louth

Leicestershire
Market Harborough
Melton Mowbray

Northamptonshire
Desborough/Rothwell
Thrapston

Rutland
Oakham

Nottinghamshire
Ollerton
Retford

Yorkshire & the Humber (12)
North Yorks
Bentham
Malton & Norton
Pateley Bridge
Thirsk
Whitby

North Lincolnshire
Brigg

East Riding of Yorks
Hornsea
Market Weighton

South Yorks
Thorne
Penistone

West Yorks
Todmorden
Otley

West Midlands (19)
Shropshire
Craven Arms
Oswestry
Wern
Bridgnorth
Highley
Alveley
Market Drayton
Whitchurch

Herefordshire
Kington
Ledbury
Bromyard

Worcestershire
Evesham
Bewdley
Pershore

Staffordshire
Leek
Uttoxeter

Warwickshire
Alcester
Atherstone
Polesworth

South East (5)
Kent
Hythe
Cranbrook
Minster

East Sussex
Battle
Heathfield

South West (16)
Devon
Okehampton
Hatherleigh
Holsworthy
South Molton
Crediton
Gt Torrington
Tavistock

Cornwall
Launceston
Helston

Dorset
Bridport

Somerset
Minehead
Langport

Gloucester
Lydney (Forest of Dean)

Wiltshire
Devises
Melksham

Bath and NE Somerset
Norton/Radstock

East of England (20)
Cambridgeshire
Wisbech
March
Chatteris
Whittlesey
Ely

Essex
Walton-on-the-Naze
Manningtree
Harwich
Brightlingsea

Norfolk
Dereham
Walton
Downham Market
Aylsham
Harleston
Diss

Suffolk
Beccles
Brandon
Wickham Market
Debenham
Woodbridge

Total 112

GM Crops

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the approved buffer zone is between GM crop trial plantations and non-GM crops; on what basis it was arrived at; and what equivalent buffer zone is in use in other EU countries where GM crop trials are taking place. [43036]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 14 March 2002]:* There is no single approved buffer zone between GM crop trials and non-GM crops. The conditions governing each trial, including the separation distance between GM plants and other crops, are determined on a case-by-case basis and set out in each consent.

The basis for the size and nature of the buffer zone on other conditions is to restrict the impact of the GM crop on the environment. The distances are dependent on the reproductive characteristics of the GM crop, the nature of the modification and whether any alternative form of risk management is in operation (eg flower removal, pollen barrier).

These distances are set after consultation with the Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment (ACRE), the Government's statutory advisory committee on matters relating to the release of GMOs to the environment, which examines all applications for GM trials. ACRE advises on the basis of the best scientific evidence available and experience gained from previous releases and, for example, by the seeds industry in the use of separation distances to secure specific levels of seed purity amongst conventionally bred plant varieties.

The legislation governing GM crop trials derives from European Union directives, so similar principles are followed in other EU countries.

Wild Animals

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) how many cases of illegal possession of wild animals there have been in each of the last five years; and if she will make a statement; [45437]

(2) what assessment has been made of the effectiveness of procedures for preventing unlicensed possession of wild animals; and if she will make a statement. [45436]

Mr. Morley: There are several pieces of legislation for which my Department is responsible that regulate the possession of wild animals (including wild birds), but details of illegal keeping are not readily available.

The Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976, which regulates the possession of some wild animals, was reviewed last year by independent consultants to examine its effectiveness. The Act is administered and enforced by local authorities and no records are held centrally. However, the consultants report, which has been put on the website, contains some information about prosecutions, though it is not limited to the last five years and is not necessarily comprehensive.

The review highlighted a number of shortcomings, including some relating to enforcement. We have sought views on the report's recommendations from stakeholders and shortly will be preparing our proposals on how we intend to address the shortcomings. The public will be invited to comment.

Laying Hens

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if the enriched cages to be permitted in England under the Welfare of Laying Hens Directive 99/74/EC will need to provide more than 250 cubic centimetres of which shall be usable. [45316]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 26 March 2002]:* Council Directive 99/74/EC lays down minimum requirements for enriched cages, including cage area per hen and usable area. It is intended that the Directive will be implemented in England without being added to in any way. If further changes are proposed, there will be a full public consultation.

Parish Councils

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what information supported the designation of *(a)* Gatcombe parish council and *(b)* Newchurch parish council. [44281]

Alun Michael: Neither Gatcombe parish council nor Newchurch parish council have been classified as "barely active". The work which is being undertaken by the Countryside Agency towards a national indicator of community vibrancy is not a categorisation of parish councils or their effectiveness. The National Indicator uses as a proxy for community vibrancy measures of the opportunities for members of a community to contribute to community activities.

The information used was collected as part of the Agency's Rural Services Survey from parish clerks and comprised the presence of a village hall or similar local meeting place, the presence of a public house, incidence of local traditions and events and contested parish council elections. Full details are set out in the Countryside Agency's State of the Countryside Report 2001 where it was noted that there is a marked relationship between the indicator score and population size. The indicator was reported at the national level.

Livestock Movements

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many drop-offs will be allowed by her Department from a single auction pick-up of cattle moving through market; what checks will be made by divisional veterinary managers on farms seeking qualification for multiple drop-offs; and when she intends to make an announcement. [46385]

Mr. Morley: At present, multiple drop offs are only permitted from a market if (a) stock are being dropped off at slaughterhouses only or (b) for cattle only, if they are moved to no more than five farms.

A Veterinary Inspector will check to ensure that anyone applying for their premises to be a drop off point understands the conditions linked to approval and to ensure that the premises are capable of meeting the standards set. For example, he must be satisfied that suitable cleansing and disinfection facilities are available and that there are sufficient gates and hurdles to prevent animals escaping during the unloading process.

Further details of the conditions that apply to multiple pick-ups and drop offs are available at: www.defra.gov.uk/footandmouth/movements/transport/index.htm.

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will publish the letter of appointment agreed between the Government and Dr. Anderson in relation to his duties as Chairman of the Lessons Learned Inquiry. [38841]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* No. It is not normal practice to publish such letters of appointment.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Gibraltar

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what action Her Majesty's Government have taken to prevent ill-treatment of Gibraltarians at the Gibraltar-Spain border; [43430]

(2) what recent reports he has received about *(a)* the nature and *(b)* the extent of problems experienced by Gibraltarians resulting from Spanish border authorities. [43429]

Peter Hain: Ministers and officials have raised our concerns about border delays on numerous occasions with their Spanish counterparts, including during the Brussels Process talks. We have also raised our concerns with the European Commission on several occasions.

The Commission announced on 19 March the closure of its investigation into restrictions at the border between Gibraltar and Spain, having concluded that

"there was no evidence to legally support claims that the checks carried out by the Spanish authorities . . . are disproportionate and therefore incompatible with Community law".

The Spanish Government also confirmed on 19 March that in response to requests made by the UK during the Brussels Process talks a new second channel would be opened, aimed at significantly speeding up the passage of private vehicles across the border between Spain and Gibraltar. The new channel became operational on 21 March. We welcome this.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions his Department had with the European Commission on its recent investigation into Spanish/Gibraltarian border restrictions. [45472]

Peter Hain *[holding answer of 26 March]:* Ministers and officials have raised our concerns about border delays on numerous occasions with their Spanish counterparts, including during the Brussels Process talks. We have also raised our concerns with the European Commission on several occasions.

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"there was no evidence to legally support claims that the checks carried out by the Spanish authorities . . . are disproportionate and therefore incompatible with community law".

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Saville Inquiry

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what costs have been incurred since 24 January by his Department in connection with the Saville Inquiry; and what his estimate is of the final cost to his Department. [46025]

Peter Hain: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 24 January 2002, *Official Report,* column 999W. This Department has incurred no costs since 24 January 2002.

Departmental Visits

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on what dates Ministers in his Department have visited United States Government military bases and establishments on United Kingdom territory since 1 January 1999; which Ministers were involved; and what facilities were visited. [43475]

Mr. MacShane: We have no record of any Foreign and Commonwealth Minister visiting a military base staffed by US personnel on British territory since 1 January 1999.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Public Guardianship Office

Mr. Burnett: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when she expects to introduce the planned fee increases at the Public Guardianship Office for new applications to the Court of Protection; and whether public consultation will take place beforehand. [45921]

Ms Rosie Winterton: No date has yet been set for the introduction of changes to the fees charged by the Public Guardianship Office, although it is planned to lay statutory instruments before both Houses soon. Proposed changes have been discussed with members of the Public Guardianship Office's Consultative Forum. The Consultative Forum includes representatives from voluntary organisations with an interest in issues

affecting the Public Guardianship Office's clients and from the Law Society. Members of the Consultative Forum are working with my officials to recommend improved guidelines for remission of fees, so that those who would suffer real hardship as a result of having to pay fees will be able to have them remitted.

Court Closures

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many courts he has closed since 7 June 2001. [46175]

Mr. Wills: No county court or Crown Court centre has been closed since this date.

Magistrates' courts committees are not statutorily required to inform the Lord Chancellor's Department of proposed courthouse closures which are not subject to an appeal by its paying authority or authorities.

It is the Government's policy that decisions concerning the number, location and future of magistrates' courts are for each magistrates' courts committee to determine, in consultation with its local paying authority or authorities. 11 magistrates' courthouses have been closed since 7 June 2001.

Adoption Bill

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what representations she has received concerning the Adoption Bill. [46176]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Secretary of State for Health presented the Adoption and Children Bill to the House of Commons. However, I have received 50 representations on the Bill.

Correspondence

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when she expects to reply to the letter of 4 February from the hon. Member for Torbay, regarding Mrs. Skilton of Torquay. [43028]

Ms Rosie Winterton: My Noble Friend, Baroness Scotland, has now replied. I am sorry we were not able to reply to the hon. Member's letter within departmental deadlines.

TREASURY

Vehicle Excise Duty

Chris Grayling: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his policy is on the classification of motorbikes of over 600cc used by courier companies as leisure vehicles for vehicle excise duty. [45859]

Mr. Boateng: The consultation on reforming vehicle excise duty for motorcycles was published alongside the 2001 Pre-Budget Report. The consultation closed on 8 February, the Government are currently carefully considering the responses, which numbered over 12,000. Any changes to taxation policy will be announced in the context of the Chancellor's Budget judgment.

Road Fuel

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will make it his policy to encourage motorists through the tax system to change to use the cleanest available fuels; [45949]

(2) if he will make it his policy to maintain the road fuel duty differential. [45948]

Mr. Boateng *(holding answer 25 March 2002]:* The Government set duty differentials to encourage the production and use of cleaner fuels, and the development of alternative transport fuels. We announced in Budget 2001 that, to provide the stability needed for the merging road fuel gas market, duty on road fuel gases (such as liquefied petroleum gas) would not be increased in real terms until 2004 at the earliest.

Financial Services Industry

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he is taking to ensure that fund manager and stockbroking firms do not levy unjustified charges on their clients. [45784]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Myners review of institutional investment reported that the costs of broking commissions were subject to insufficiently clear scrutiny and control. The Government took forward the recommendations of the review, and following a period of consultation, issued a set of principles of investment for pension funds, and 10 questions for trustees to ask fund managers to ensure that they understand charges. A review of progress will start in March 2003 to decide how successful the principles have been in bringing about change.

For retail investors, CAT standards and stakeholder pensions impose strict limits on charges by financial institutions.

VAT Registration

Mr. Jim Murphy: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what his estimate is of the annual lost revenue due to the illegal use of UK VAT registration numbers; [46112]

(2) what his estimate is of the number of illegally obtained VAT registration numbers in each of the last three years. [46113]

Mr. Boateng: No such estimates exist.

Mr. Jim Murphy: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what consideration he is giving to the tightening of VAT registration procedures for VAT numbers. [46114]

Mr. Boateng: Customs selectively apply extended checks aimed at identifying fraudulent applications, including making visits before registration is granted and applying conditions to the registration, where appropriate. Cases are monitored on an individual basis to ensure a balanced approach between facilitating business and protecting the revenue.

In addition, Customs are working to automate their validation, verification and risk scoring system by September 2002.

Smuggling

Laura Moffatt: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment has been made of the loss of revenue to the South East economy caused by the smuggling of *(a)* alcohol and *(b)* tobacco in the last three years. [46433]

Mr. Boateng: No such estimates are currently available. However, estimates of the tax revenue lost from smuggling of alcohol and tobacco into the UK were set out in "Measuring Indirect Tax Fraud" published by HM Customs and Excise alongside the Pre-Budget Report.

Aggregates Levy

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of *(a)* the increase in recycling of construction and demolition waste and *(b)* the reduction in demand for virgin aggregates as a direct result of the aggregates levy. [45737]

Mr. Boateng: Research suggests that there is significant scope for increased use of recycled construction and demolition waste. The levy is designed to encourage use of this material as an alternative to virgin aggregate, thereby reducing demand for the latter.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the long term impact of the aggregates levy in Northern Ireland once the levy has been fully phased in. [45738]

Mr. Boateng: Phasing in the levy for aggregate used in processed products will allow the industry in Northern Ireland time to adjust, and to use greater amounts of recycled and alternative materials in their products.

Sir Robert Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what criteria he will adopt for setting the rate for the aggregates levy in future years. [46406]

Mr. Boateng: As with all taxes, the aggregates levy will be reviewed at each Budget.

Public Services

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if his Department has commissioned external research into its paper on public services productivity; and if he will make a statement. [46573]

Mr. Andrew Smith: No.

Press Office

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many staff in his Department's press office have received *(a)* termination and *(b)* redundancy payments in each of the last four years. [41072]

Ruth Kelly: None.

HEALTH

Wheelchairs

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures his Department is taking to reduce the number of adverse incidents involving wheelchairs. [45146]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 21 March]:* The Medical Devices Agency (MDA) has specific responsibility on behalf of the Secretary of State to safeguard public health where medical devices are involved. Within this overall remit, MDA has a specific unit responsible for wheeled mobility devices where adverse incidents concerning the safety or quality of wheelchairs are considered.

The MDA unit works with users, manufacturers, trade associations, professional groups, service providers, and other Government departments where appropriate to reduce safety problems for users both in the short and in the longer term. If the unit finds that there is a need for improvement in a wheelchair design, usage instructions or manufacturing process then appropriate action is taken with the manufacturer/ supplier. When necessary Safety Warning notices are widely distributed which incorporate the actions required to reduce specific problems with wheelchairs that are already in use. Advice or written guidance on wider issues relating to the safety of wheelchair users is also given where root cause, or trend, analysis highlights a particular area of concern which requires improvement for the future. Also, if a shortcoming is revealed in an issued British Standard concerning wheelchairs or a need for a new standard the unit works with the British Standards Institute (BSI) to make any necessary revisions or assist with the drafting of any new standard.

Jim Dobbin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to increase the budgets for the provision of electric powered indoor/outdoor wheelchairs to health trusts. [42525]

Ms Blears: Funding for wheelchair services is part of health authorities general allocations. It is for health authorities in partnership with Primary Care Groups/ Trusts and other local stakeholders to determine how best to use their funds to meet national and local priorities for improving health, tackling health inequalities and modernising services. Health authority allocations for 2002–03 were announced on 6 December 2001.

Primary Care Trusts

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which PCTs have delayed planned initiatives and new services *(a)* in 2001–02 and *(b)* for 2002–03. [45934]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer issued 25 March 2002]:* Decisions about local priorities and investment in local services are made by PCTs. The Department does not collect this information centrally.

Delayed Discharges

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average delay for patients with delayed discharges was in the third quarter of 2001–02. [42702]

Jacqui Smith: The Department does not collect information in the detail requested. I refer the hon. Member to the response I gave the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow), on 18 March, *Official Report*, column 160W.

It is not possible to calculate an accurate average length of delay from the information collected.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of all acute beds were occupied due to delayed discharges in each of the last five years. [37484]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 28 February 2002]:* Information on the proportion of acute beds occupied due to delayed discharge is collected centrally once a quarter. The information which is available since June 1997 has been on the basis of the proportion of patients aged over 75 occupying an acute bed whose discharge has been delayed. The table below shows this proportion for each quarter since June 1997.

Delayed Discharge—patients aged 75 and over

Per cent.

Collection	*Proportion of patients over 75 with a delayed discharge*
2001–02 Q3	10.5
2001–02 Q2	12.0
2001–02 Q1	11.1
2000–01 Q4	11.9
2000–01 Q3	11.7
2000–01 Q2	13.0
2000–01 Q1	12.1
1999–2000 Q4	11.3
1999–2000 Q3	11.7
1999–2000 Q2	12.8
1999–2000 Q1	13.4
1998–99 Q4	12.4
1998–99 Q3	12.5
1998–99 Q2	14.3
1998–99 Q1	13.4
1997–98 Q4	13.2
1997–98 Q3	13.9
1997–98 Q2	15.7
1997–98 Q1	13.3

Pharmacists

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received from pharmacists on the global sum dispensing fee *(a)* on his original announcement of fee levels for 2002–03 and *(b)* consequent upon its revision; and if he will make a statement. [42944]

Ms Blears: I have not yet determined the overall level of fees for community pharmacy services for 2002–03. However, pending my decision, the basic dispensing fee from April 2002 will rise from the current level of 91.6p to 94.6p per prescription item.

I agreed in February that officials should work with the Pharmaceutical Services Negotiating Committee (PSNC) to explore ways of improving information about community pharmacy finances as part of a set of measures to inform our discussions on remuneration and on modernising the current NHS contractual framework. This work is under way.

Osteoporosis

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans the Department has to investigate the use of *(a)* ultrasound and *(b)* biochemical tests in combination with Dexa scanning for identifying osteoporosis in (i) the population and (ii) a sub-set of the population. [42972]

Jacqui Smith: We maintain an interest in the development of all technologies for the investigation or monitoring of patients suspected of being at risk of osteoporosis. We work closely with the National Osteoporosis Society. Dual energy x-ray absorptiometry is currently the preferred method for the assessment of bone mineral density in individuals selected to be at high risk of fracture based on clinical risk factor assessment.

Social Services

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the circumstances in which responsibility for social services would be removed from a local authority; and if he will make a statement. [43235]

Jacqui Smith: It is for local councils with social services responsibilities to meet their statutory obligations and achieve best value for the people they serve. We have agreed a protocol on the use of intervention powers with the Local Government Association. This forms Annex D of the (former) Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions Circular 10/99, which has been placed in the Library. The protocol sets out the framework to discuss policy for the use of the intervention powers set out in the Local Government Act 1999. It states

"Except in cases of serious service failure or unless there is a need for urgent intervention the authority will normally be given the opportunity to make the necessary improvements itself."

My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Health would only use the power

"to transfer responsibility to another local authority or third party"

when it was necessary to protect the lives of vulnerable children and adults.

Boarding Schools

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to alter the charges proposed for the welfare inspections of boarding schools. [43817]

Jacqui Smith: The fees in respect of boarding schools are set out in the National Care Standards Commission (Fees and Frequency of Inspection) Regulation 2001 (SI 2001 No. 3980). In response to representations made during consultation, the fee levels are now set as a flat rate £250, £15 for the fourth to twenty-ninth pupil, and £7.50 for each subsequent pupil. These fees will not come into force until 1 September 2002. There are no plans to alter these fee levels at present.

Psychiatric Patients

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment has been made of the influence of outdoor open space on the health of psychiatric patients; and if he will make a statement. [43562]

Jacqui Smith: No assessment has been made on the influence of outdoor open space on the health of psychiatric patients.

Medicinal Control

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 4 March 2002, on Medicinal Control, *Official Report*, columns 130–32W, whether the *(a)* MCA and *(b)* CSM have plans to publish articles relating to the inappropriate or overuse of anti-psychotic medication in care settings. [42629]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 12 March 2002]:* The Medicines Control Agency (MCA) in conjunction with its independent scientific advisory committee, the Committee on Safety of Medicines (CSM) is responsible for monitoring the safety of all marketed medicines to ensure that medicines meet acceptable standards of safety and efficacy. The nature of the clinical setting is not within the scope of CSM advice. However, if the balance of risks and benefits for a medicine when used in a particular indication or population is considered to be unfavourable MCA/CSM will not hesitate to take action to modify its use and to inform prescribers of this action.

For example the balance of risks and benefits for thioridazine in the following indications was considered unfavourable: anxiety, agitation and restlessness in the elderly, moderate to severe psychomotor agitation, violent and dangerously impulsive behaviour, mania/hypomania, and behavioural disorders and epilepsy in children. Upon advice from the CSM, in December 2000 the use of thioridazine was restricted to the second line treatment of schizophrenia in adults. Health professionals were notified of this via a Dear Doctor letter and an article in the drug safety bulletin *Current Problems in Pharmacovigilance*. A copy of this article has been sent to the Library.

Swindon and Marlborough NHS Trust

Ms Drown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the longest time is that a hospital consultant at Swindon and Marlborough NHS Trust has been waiting for determination of an appeal against dismissal. [40017]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 12 March 2002]:* There is currently one consultant appealing against dismissal from Swindon and Marlborough NHS Trust. He was dismissed on 22 March 2001.

Road Accidents

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what duties the medical services have to carry out before an accident site can be cleared from *(a)* an A-road and *(b)* a motorway. [42786]

Ms Blears: The main duties of the emergency medical services would be to assess, treat and remove those patients who were injured in any accident on an A-road or motorway. A decision on when the site may be cleared is usually made by the police.

Alcoholism

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS patients have been treated for *(a)* alcoholism and *(b)* alcohol-related disease in each region in the last five years. [42613]

Ms Blears: The information available is shown in the table.

NHS hospital admissions where there was a primary diagnosis of selected alcohol related disease, by NHS Regional Office area of treatment

England, 1996–97 to 2000–01 *Number of admissions*

Primary diagnosis (ICD10)		*England*	*Northern & Yorkshire*	*Trent*	*Anglia & Oxford*	*North Thames*	*South Thames*	*South West*	*West Midlands*	*North West*
1996–97										
F10	Mental and behavioural disorders due to alcohol	32,500	5,600	2,900	1,900	3,200	4,200	3,600	4,300	6,800
K70	Alcoholic liver disease	7,900	1,200	700	600	1,100	1,000	800	1,000	1,500
T51	Toxic effect of alcohol	2,300	500	200	200	200	300	200	200	500
1997–98										
F10	Mental and behavioural disorders due to alcohol	34,400	5,400	3,700	2,100	4,100	4,900	3,500	4,300	6,500
K70	Alcoholic liver disease	9,000	1,300	800	700	1,200	1,100	1,000	1,200	1,600
T51	Toxic effect of alcohol	2,400	500	200	200	200	300	200	300	400
1998–99										
F10	Mental and behavioural disorders due to alcohol	32,100	5,100	3,300	2,000	4,100	4,500	3,500	3,700	5,900
K70	Alcoholic liver disease	9,200	1,400	800	800	1,100	1,100	1,100	1,300	1,600
T51	Toxic effect of alcohol	2,000	500	200	200	200	200	300	200	300
1999–00										
F10	Mental and behavioural disorders due to alcohol	32,300	5,000	3,100	3,700	6,000	2,100	5,900	3,800	2,700
K70	Alcoholic liver disease	10,100	1,400	1,000	1,300	1,900	800	1,600	1,200	900
T51	Toxic effect of alcohol	2,000	500	100	200	300	200	200	400	200

NHS hospital admissions where there was a primary diagnosis of selected alcohol related disease, by NHS Regional Office area of treatment

England, 1996–97 to 2000–01 *Number of admissions*

Primary diagnosis (ICD10)		England	Northern & Yorkshire	Trent	Anglia & Oxford	North Thames	South Thames	South West	West Midlands	North West
2000–01										
F10	Mental and behavioural disorders due to alcohol	27,300	4,500	2,700	3,300	5,600	1,800	3,800	3,500	2,100
K70	Alcoholic liver disease	10,100	1,500	1,100	1,200	1,900	900	1,400	1,100	1,000
T51	Toxic effect of alcohol	1,700	400	100	100	300	200	100	300	200

Notes:
1. The data include private patients in NHS hospitals.
2. The data do not include patients admitted with a primary diagnosis not related to alcohol (eg an injury).
3. Data in the table have been rounded to the nearest one hundred admissions. Data for 1996–97 to 1999–2000 have been grossed for both coverage and unknown/invalid clinical data.
4. ICD10 = International Classification of Diseases, 10th Revision.

Source:
Department of Health, Hospital Episode Statistics.

St. George's Hospital, Tooting

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the level of service provided to cancer and non-cancer lymphoedema patients at St. George's Hospital, Tooting. [42755]

Mr. Hutton: A clinic was established at St. George's Healthcare NHS Trust in 1997 to treat non-cancer lymphoedema patients (primary lymphoedema) and cancer patients. While there are other clinics in South West London where cancer patients and lymphoedema are treated, the St. George's service also meets the needs of patients with non-cancer lymphoedema. The St. George's service is a specialist service and receives referrals nationally. The Trust is also one of the few places where academic and epidemiological work is progressing related to lymphoedema. This work includes a recent local study run by the Lymphoedema Epidemiology Project Group.

Asian Women

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what statistics he collates on the rates of depression, self-harm and suicide amongst Asian women; and what services and resources have been made available to tackle this issue in the last three years. [42407]

Jacqui Smith: No national statistics are routinely collected centrally on suicide or self-harm of Asian women.

We are developing a national suicide prevention strategy, which we will launch for public consultation in spring 2002. The strategy will consider the commissioning of further research into suicides amongst Asian women. We will also be looking at this issue further in the Black and Ethnic Minority Mental Health Strategy being developed this year.

Rates of depression in people from black and minority ethnic groups are being established through a national survey of ethnic minority psychiatric illness rates in the community (EMPIRIC). The results of this survey will be published in April 2002.

The Department commissioned a study from the Institute of Psychiatry on "Deliberate self-harm in Asian women: An intervention study". The findings of which have been fed into information leaflets.

There are several projects in England addressing suicide and self-harm amongst Asian women, such as the Newham Asian Women's Project highlighted in the national Service Framework for Mental Health.

The Department has also provided the FPA with funding through the Section 64 scheme for their "JINNA" Sexuality and Self-harm project to identify the causes and develop effective preventative interventions for suicide and self-harm among young Asian women.

Mental Health

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent Government research *(a)* has been planned and *(b)* has been conducted into (i) existing mental health services, (ii) take up of existing mental health services by members of Asian, black and ethnic minority communities in the UK and (iii) the future of mental health services. [42394]

Jacqui Smith: The Department has undertaken a number of exercises to inform its future research programme in mental health, in particular to support the National Service Framework (NSF) in mental health. A "Scoping Review of the Effectiveness of Mental Health Services" was conducted by the Centre for Reviews and Dissemination at York University. A thematic review of the National Health Service Research and Development funded mental health research in relation to the NSF for Mental Health was undertaken by the Institute of Psychiatry. The outputs from these reviews will be considered alongside the Strategic Review of NHS R&D on mental health, which is looking at current research in the NHS on this area, to determine future research priorities in mental health.

Further work on mental health services is being commissioned and includes: literature reviews and primary research concerning the effectiveness of post qualification mental health training; occupational outcomes (social inclusion); self help interventions; early intervention in psychosis; services for women;

assertive outreach (particularly for black and ethnic minority groups); suicide prevention; models of services to support carers; rehabilitation of people with severe personality disorder and delivery of forensic services.

Future research priorities include: evaluation of alternative models for the introduction of primary care mental health workers; suicide prevention strategy; evidence based management of people with dual diagnosis; development of prison mental health services and a randomised controlled trial for effective management of sex offenders.

Ongoing research on mental health services funded via the Department's Policy Research Programme includes:

processes of disengagement with assertive outreach for African-Caribbean and white British men—St. Bartholomew's and the London School of Medicine and Dentistry;

National Survey of Links between Social Services and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services—University of Manchester;

a randomised controlled trial to detect benefit from training practice nurses in detection and management of psychiatric morbidity—Institute of Psychiatry (Kings College, London);

expert topic papers in mental health (women only)—University of Birmingham;

expert topic paper in mental health: early intervention—Victoria University, Manchester;

expert topic papers in mental health: Self-help Interventions—University of Bristol;

child and adolescent mental health services in primary care—University of Manchester;

inequalities in mental health: a systematic review—University of Cambridge;

pathways into care for the adult mentally ill from various ethnic communities—Institute of Psychiatry (Kings College London);

development of culturally appropriate child mental health services: perceptions and use of services'—United Medical and Dental School (Kings College London).

The Department's Health Technology Assessment and Service Delivery and Organisation Programmes are also funding a number of projects in mental health, including:

cost utility of the latest anti-psychotics in severe schizophrenia (CUtLASS): a multi-centre, randomised controlled trial;

long-term outcome of cognitive behaviour therapy clinical trials in central Scotland;

a randomised controlled trial to compare the cost-effectiveness of trycyclic antidepressants, selective serotonin re-uptake inhibitors (SSRIs) and lofepramine;

measurement of health related quality of life in people with dementia: the development of a new instrument responsive to change and an evaluation of current methodology;

randomised trial of fluoxetine and cognitive behavioural therapy versus fluoxetine alone in adolescents with persistent major depression;

cognitive behavioural therapy in chronic fatigue syndrome: a randomised controlled trial of an outpatient group programme;

a randomised controlled multi-centre treatment trial of adolescent anorexia nervosa, including assessment of cost effectiveness and patient acceptability;

problem solving by community psychiatric nurses (CPNs) for anxiety, depression and life difficulties among general practice patients;

clinical effectiveness and cost of repetitive transcranial magnetic stimulation versus ECT in severe depression: a multi centre randomised controlled trial and economic analysis;

the clinical effectiveness and cost effectiveness of SSRIs in the treatment of sex offenders;

the clinical effectiveness and cost effectiveness of electro-convulsive therapy;

services to support carers for people with mental health problems;

effectiveness of counselling, cognitive behavioural therapy and GP care for depression in general practice;

a randomised controlled trial to evaluate the efficacy and cost effectiveness of counselling with patients with chronic depression and anxiety;

a systematic review of randomised and non-randomised intervention studies to examine which of the brief psychological treatments used in primary care lead to improved outcomes; and

continuity of care for people with severe mental illness whose needs span primary, secondary and social care.

In July 2001 the National Institute for Mental Health in England (NIMHE) was launched and presents a unique opportunity to reshape services and practice in line with the evidence base. The Institute will bring together the research, development and dissemination functions of the full range of mental health services. NIMHE will be concerned with primary, specialist and tertiary care organisations in both health and social care and recognise the need to integrate service development and mental health legislation. One of the standing programmes of NIMHE will be a mental health research network designed to increase the number of multi-centre research projects in mental health.

The main Government agency for research into the causes of and treatments for disease is the Medical Research Council (MRC) which receives its funding via the Department of Trade and Industry. The MRC are funding a number of research projects looking at mental health services and one project looking specifically at people of Asian origin.

Yellow Card Scheme

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what support his Department has given to Mind in the promotion, operation and analysis of its yellow card scheme. [42393]

Ms Blears: In 1997, the Medicines Control Agency (MCA) performed a detailed analysis of reports received through the Mind patient reporting scheme. Expert advice on this analysis was sought from the Committee on Safety of Medicines. No new drug safety signals were identified, although the results highlighted that patients considered that insufficient information was available to them about their medicines. There was an ongoing programme at that time to ensure that Patient Information Leaflets were authorised for all products and this programme was completed by January 1999.

In March 2001 officials at the MCA met with representatives from Mind to discuss the relaunch of their reporting scheme. MCA will be reviewing the results of Mind's analysis of the reports received through this scheme.

NICE

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many drugs are being assessed by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence; what the timescale is for publishing these assessments; and if he will make a statement. [41599]

Ms Blears: The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) has completed 32 technology appraisals (covering drugs, devices and treatments) and NICE has a further 43 technology appraisals on its work programme. Where NICE has established timescales for individual appraisals, details are given on its website at www.nice.nhs.uk.

Consultants

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his estimate is of the expenditure on external consultants for each year since 1997, in 2001 prices, for his Department and its agencies; and what the quantified annual cost savings are which such expenditure has resulted in. [41701]

Ms Blears: Expenditure by the Department and its Agencies on external consultants, for each year since 1997 and at 2001 prices, is shown in the table.

	FY 1997–98 £ million	*FY 1998–99 £ million*	*FY 1999–2000 £ million*	*FY 2000–01 £ million*	*FY 2001–02* £ million*
Department	12.694	7.332	8.132	6.531	4.400
Agencies	1.634	1.575	3.190	4.047	0.411

* Reported spend as of February 2002, based on information currently available.

The Department does not centrally report or record the quantified annual cost savings resulting from expenditure on consultants therefore the final part of this question could only be answered at disproportionate cost.

Medical Negligence

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his estimate is of the outstanding liabilities of the NHS in respect of medical negligence claims. [41703]

Ms Blears: According to the National Audit Office in their report entitled "Handling Clinical Negligence Claims in England", which was published on 3 May 2001, it was estimated that a total of £3.9 billion represents the outstanding liabilities of the NHS for clinical negligence claims.

This figure includes £2.6 billion for all outstanding claims if they were settled straight away, and £1.3 billion for all incidents that have been incurred but not reported.

Women's Hospitals

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received concerning the proposals to re-locate the maternity services located at Aintree University Hospital to the Liverpool Women's Hospital; and if he will list them. [41407]

Yvette Cooper: Ministers have received one letter in October 2001 about maternity services in Liverpool and Sefton from another hon. Member, as well as this representation from my hon. Friend.

Variant-CJD

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he has taken to produce a new risk model to predict the number of potential exposures to v-CJD through poor decontamination practice before 2001; and if he will publicise the result using this model. [41806]

Yvette Cooper: "Risk Assessment for transmission of vCJD via Surgical Instruments: A Modelling Approach and Numerical Scenarios", published by the Department on 16 March 2001, set out a methodology for assessing the risk of transmission of vCJD through the re-use of surgical instruments. A new risk assessment model is unnecessary since there is no significantly new scientific evidence to warrant revising the structure or assumptions of the current model.

Because of the multiple uncertainties surrounding this issue, it was not considered feasible to make a straightforward prediction of potential secondary infections from surgery. The Risk Assessment therefore did not predict the scale of any secondary epidemic of vCJD, instead, it developed different scenarios to address the various uncertainties—including the standard of decontamination—and gaps in our knowledge about vCJD.

The advice we had from Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee was that good decontamination is key in reducing the risk of person to person transmission of vCJD via surgical instruments. This was confirmed by the Risk Assessment. As a result of the work we did last year on improving decontamination, all NHS hospitals in England have access to decontamination services of an acceptable standard.

Pre-School Services

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much funding has been made available to provide services for under-fives in Liverpool in each year since 1997. [41123]

Jacqui Smith: Data on funding to provide services specifically for children under 5 who are resident in Liverpool is not available. However, the following table provides details of total recurrent contract income and additional cash increases received over the last four years by the Royal Liverpool Children's NHS Trust

from Liverpool Health Authority for the care and treatment of the authority's resident child population. Approximately 30 per cent of the child population in Liverpool are under 5 years old. The figures exclude paediatric intensive care and special assistance funding.

	Total Recurrent Contract	*Recurrent Increase*	*Non-Recurrent Increase*	*Total Increase*
1998–99	21,587,170	731,357	817,360	1,548,717
1999–2000	23,157,553	1,570,383	948,743	2,519,126
2000–01	24,885,218	1,727,665	572,609	2,300,274
2001–02	27,166,523	2,281,305	1,584,990	3,866,295

Teenage Magazines

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what contact his Department has had with the publishers of magazines aimed at teenagers in the past two years. [40876]

Ms Blears: Routine contacts between press and magazines are not recorded centrally by the Department's press office.

In the past two years my Department has worked in partnership with teenage magazines to highlight issues around teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections and provide information about where young people may access further information and professional advice. Advertising has been placed in these magazines to enable those young people who are sexually active to have easy access to high quality contraceptive advice and to provide young people with information and advice to enable them to develop the skills to resist peer pressure to have early sex.

Last autumn, an agency contracted by the Department also contacted journalists at magazines aimed at teenagers to generate coverage for "Smokescreen", the Department's peer to peer youth tobacco education project.

In January, February and March 2001, as part of a campaign designed to raise awareness of the dangers of smoking during pregnancy amongst 16–24 year olds, advertising was placed in magazines aimed at a teenage audience.

Medical Practices Committee

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what advice his Department issues to health authorities and primary care trusts on the arrangements to take effect after the abolition of the Medical Practices Committee on 31 March. [37940]

Mr. Hutton: Advice was issued to Primary Care Trusts and other interested parties on 13 March 2002.

Dental Services

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what criteria are used to decide whether to open dental access centres. [45464]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* Dental access centres (DACs) are pilot schemes established as part of the Personal Dental Services initiative. They provide access to National Health Service dentistry in areas where other sources of treatment do not meet demand. The location of DACs was determined by combining several sources of information on availability and access problems: statistical data, in particular registration figures and expenditure changes; self reporting by health authorities; and the local knowledge of regional offices.

Orthodontists

Gillian Merron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans he has to tackle shortage of orthodontists in *(a)* Lincolnshire and *(b)* England; [42536]

(2) what the shortfall of NHS orthodontists is in *(a)* Lincolnshire and *(b)* England. [42535]

Ms Blears: The number of orthodontists and the amount of orthodontic work in the General Dental Service has increased significantly since 1996–97 in both Lincolnshire and England as a whole. Additional clinics have been set up in Lincolnshire and by the end of March 2002, it is envisaged that there will be no over 26-week waits for orthodontic appointments in Lincolnshire. An additional consultant orthodontist post has been funded and concerted efforts are being made to recruit to this post.

The number of principal dentists performing 100 or more orthodontic claims a year in *(a)* Lincolnshire Health Authority (HA) and *(b)* England is shown in the table for the years 1996–97 and 2000–01 together with the number per 100,000 population.

The table also shows the number of orthodontic appliance claims in 1996–97 and 2000–01. These went up by 28 per cent. for Lincolnshire HA during the period shown, compared to an increase of 14 per cent. for England.

General Dental Service: Number of orthodontists, orthodontists per 100,000 population and total number of orthodontic appliance claims in 1996–97 and 2000–01

	(a) Lincolnshire	*(b) England*[2]
Number of orthodontists		
1996–97	7	679
2000–01	10	869
Number of orthodontists[1] *per 100,000 population*[3]		
1996–97	1.1	1.4
2000–01	1.6	1.7
Number of orthodontic appliance claims		
1996–97	1,200	217,000
2000–01	1,600	247,100

[1] An orthodontist is defined as a principal dentist who submitted one hundred or more orthodontic claims in a year.

[2] Some dentists have contracts in more than one Health Authority. These dentists have been counted only once, in the HA which they hold their main contract.

[3] ONS 1996 and 2000 mid year population estimates based on the 1991 census.

NHS Direct

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what discussions he has had with GP bodies about the safety of advice offered by NHS Direct; [42352]

(2) what representations he has received from general practitioners expressing concern about the standard of advice offered by NHS Direct; [42353]

(3) what plans he has to achieve greater co-operation between NHS Direct and general practitioners. [42354]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* During the implementation of NHS Direct, the Department had regular meetings with general practitioners bodies, including the General Practitioners Committee of the British Medical Association and the National Association of GP Co-operatives, to discuss ways in which NHS Direct and GPs could work collaboratively to improve patient care. Bodies representing GPs are also represented on the NHS Clinical Assessment System Clinical Reference Group, a national group that ensures the system used by NHS Direct is safe and reflects evidence-based best practice.

Independent evaluation by the National Audit Office and Sheffield University found evidence that NHS Direct has a good safety record, is as safe as other entry points into the NHS, and that serious adverse clinical outcomes associated with the service are likely to be rare.

Cancer

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many patients of *(a)* Brighton Health Care NHS Trust and *(b)* Worthing and Southlands NHS Trust have received treatment for cancer of the (i) breast, (ii) uterus, (iii) cervix, (iv) bladder, (v) prostate, (vi) non Hodgkin's lymphoma, (vii) bowel, (viii) all leukaemias, (ix) ovary, (x) stomach, (xi) lung, (xii) pancreas, (xiii) oesophagus and (xiv) other cancers in each of the last five years; and how many patients are currently awaiting these operations; [42271]

(2) how many patients are awaiting referrals to consultants in the oncology department in the Brighton Health Care NHS Trust. [42277]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* Information on the number of patients awaiting referral to Brighton Health Care NHS Trust and the number awaiting operations is not collected centrally. The information collected centrally on cancer waiting times at Brighton Health Care NHS Trust and Worthing and Southlands Hospitals NHS Trust has been placed in the Library.

Patient Complaints

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment has been made about the cost to *(a)* individual NHS trusts and *(b)* his Department of requiring trusts to compile data about the ethnicity of patients making complaints; and how many staff are involved; [42210]

(2) what proportion of patients requested to give details about their ethnicity subsequent to making a complaint about treatment by an NHS trust have returned their survey form having ticked the decline to state box; [42206]

(3) which NHS trusts have been instructed to compile data about the ethnicity of patients making complaints; [42209]

(4) if he proposes to publish the findings of his Department's instructions to NHS trusts to compile data regarding the ethnicity of patients making complaints; [42204]

(5) what the purpose is of the instructions from his Department to NHS trusts requiring complaint departments to compile data about the ethnicity of persons making a complaint since April 2001; [42208]

(6) how he proposes to use the data collected from NHS trusts regarding the ethnicity of patients making complaints. [42205]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* The cost of the implementation of ethnic category data has only been estimated in terms of staff-days. It is estimated that up to two staff-days will be needed in each health authority and trust to extract the information from their existing systems in order to complete the two returns KO41A and B. In addition, it is expected that each Primary Care Trust will require up to two staff-days in total to complete the new KO41C central return.

The collection of ethnic category data on written complaints will be valuable in gauging fair and equal access to health care across ethnic groups. Where monitoring shows unequal outcomes between different minority ethnic groups, public authorities will be required to take action to promote greater equality and to prevent discrimination whether direct or indirect. In the longer term, data collected on written complaints will be used to inform service improvements as well as give practice managers and the service as a whole more qualitative information around access to health care services.

All trusts and health authorities have been asked to complete ethnic category details of complainants and staff complained against for the first time in the 2001–02 annual NHS Complaints Monitoring Collection.

The Department publishes the results of its annual complaints monitoring exercise every year in "Handling complaints: monitoring the NHS complaints procedures". The 2001–02 data, which will include ethnic data, should be published in late autumn 2002.

Stolen Equipment

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 7 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 1160–64W, on stolen equipment, what criminal proceedings have been undertaken for cases of theft against his Department, stating in each case *(a)* whether the proceedings (i) led to a criminal conviction and (ii) were unsuccessful, *(b)* the cost incurred by his Department in pursuing a conviction and *(c)* the value of items recovered; and if he will make a statement. [41508]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 18 March 2002]:* All losses are investigated by the Department and stolen equipment has been recovered on some occasions to the value of about £5,000. Losses over £500 are reported to the police. It has not been possible to bring criminal proceedings in any one case mainly due to a lack of evidence. We have progressively put in place a series of measures to combat our losses from both organised and opportunistic theft. We take seriously the theft and loss of our assets. We recognise the importance of safeguarding our equipment both inside and outside the office.

Special Advisers

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many special advisers were employed by him *(a)* between 1 May and 31 December 1997 and *(b)* in each year from 1998 to 2001 inclusive; and what the total amount spent on special advisers by the Department was in each of those years. [41251]

Ms Blears: The information requested is shown in the tables.

Year	*Numbers*	*Cost (£)*
1997–98	2	see note[1]

Year	*Numbers*	*Cost (£)*
1998–99	2	see note[1]
1999–2000	2	see note[1]
2000–01	2	see note[1]

[1] Details of costs for Special Advisors within the individual departments are not given, in order to protect the privacy of the small number of individuals concerned.

Press Office

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many staff in his Department's press office have received *(a)* termination and *(b)* redundancy payments in each of the last four years. [41078]

Ms Blears: No staff in the Department of Health Press Office have received *(a)* termination and *(b)* redundancy payments in each of the last four years.

Press and Public Relations

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the annual budget for communications activities, including press, public relations, marketing and internal communications, was for his Department for each financial year from 1997–98 to 2001–02. [39916]

Ms Blears: Expenditure on Communications activities comes under two headings as shown in the table below:

£000

Year	*Running costs*	*Programme*
1997–98	4,661	14,954
1998–99	4,806	21,810
1999–2000[1]	6,814	28,995
2000–01[2]	7,969	45,746
2001–02[3]	8,582	49,737

[1] The Department's Press and Publicity Division and NHS Communication Unit amalgamated on 1 April 1999.

[2] The Department took on direct control for a number of public Health Campaigns with the closure of the Health Education Authority on 3 March 2000.

[3] 2001–02 figures are latest estimates.

Correspondence

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will reply to the letter of 9 January from the hon. Member for Fareham, concerning Claire Bayliss. [45803]

Ms Blears: A reply was sent on 27 March.

Free Prescriptions

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what estimate he has made of the number of under-25 year olds residing in England receiving free prescriptions in Wales since 1 April 2001; [41621]

(2) what assessment he has made of the savings made by his Department since 1 April 2001 in relation to under-25 year olds residing in England receiving free prescriptions in Wales. [41622]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 12 March 2002]:* Information about cross-border dispensing does not include information about the age of individual patients. The information available about cross-border dispensing is in the table.

£

	Number of items[1]	*Net Ingredient Cost*
Written in England and dispensed in Wales[2]		
Quarter ended June 2000	50,618	744,721
Quarter ended June 2001	56,644	848,914
Written in Wales and dispensed in England[3]		
Quarter ended June 2000	54,885	1,508,928
Quarter ended June 2001	58,471	1,753,489

[1] Dispensed by community pharmacies and appliance contractors.

[2] *Source:* Prescribing Services Unit of Health Solutions Wales, Bro Taf Health Authority.

[3] *Source:* Prescription Pricing Authority.

Endometriosis

Helen Southworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when national standards will be set for the treatment of endometriosis. [42670]

Yvette Cooper: We have no plans to produce national standards for endometriosis. The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists has produced clinical guidelines on "The Investigation and Management of Endometriosis". These bring together the latest evidence-based knowledge and best practice on the diagnosis and treatment of endometriosis, and examine options for treatment in the light of the presenting symptoms. The guidelines have been distributed to all of the Royal College's Fellows and Members.

Helen Southworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his estimate is of the number of women with endometriosis in *(a)* Warrington, South and *(b)* North Cheshire; and how many women have been diagnosed with endometriosis in those areas in the last five years. [42669]

Yvette Cooper: The information requested is not available centrally in the form requested. However, the table shows the number of consultant episodes for women resident in North Cheshire Health Authority area who were admitted to hospital with endometriosis recorded as their primary diagnosis, for each of the past five years:

	Number
1996–97	129
1997–98	127
1998–99	128
1999–2000	123
2000–01	136

Drug Abuse Services

Gillian Merron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the level of health authority spending was, per 1,000 of the population, on drug abuse services in *(a)* Lincolnshire Health Authority and *(b)* other health authorities in England in the last three years. [42550]

Ms Blears: The level of health authority spending in the last three years in Lincolnshire was, per 1,000 of the population:

£

Health Authority	*Spending on drug abuse services per 1,000 of population* 2001–02	2000–01	1999–2000
Lincolnshire	3,000	2,500	1,750

The following tables provide information allocations to Lincolnshire Health Authority and other Health Authorities in England per 1,000 population in relation to drug treatment services. Information about expenditure by Health Authorities against these allocations is not collected centrally.

(a) Lincolnshire Health Authority

£

Health Authority	*Drugs misuse allocation per 1,000 of population* 2001–02	2000–01	1999–2000
Lincolnshire	1,944	928	826

(b) Other health authorities in England:

£

Health Authority	*Drugs misuse allocation per 1,000 of population* 2001–02	2000–01	1999–2000
Avon	2,065	988	905
Barking and Havering	2,286	1,088	907
Barnet[2]	2,421	1,215	1,019
Barnet, Enfield and Haringey[2]	N/A	N/A	N/A
Barnsley	2,628	1,251	1,081
Bedfordshire	2,093	1,002	951
Berkshire	2,284	1,091	986
Bexley, Bromley and Greenwich[2]	N/A	N/A	N/A
Bexley & Greenwich[2]	2,956	1,410	1,258
Birmingham	2,971	1,402	1,269
Bradford	2,113	1,004	961
Brent & Harrow	2,648	1,301	1,107
Bromley[2]	1,875	897	920
Buckinghamshire	2,082	993	917
Bury & Rochdale	2,138	1,022	948
Calderdale & Kirklees	2,041	967	925
Cambridgeshire	2,608	1,233	1,248
Camden & Islington	8,030	3,913	3,224
Cornwall & Isles of Scilly	1,717	823	779
County Durham	2,546	1,209	1,051
Coventry	2,164	1,018	927
Croydon	2,282	1,094	964
Doncaster	2,355	1,110	998
Dorset	1,723	822	782
Dudley	2,197	1,039	946
Ealing, Hammersmith & Hounslow	3,814	1,895	1,605
East & North Hertfordshire[2]	2,487	1,193	1,041
East Kent	1,953	939	876
East Lancashire	1,737	822	784
East London & The City	6,197	3,053	2,483
East Riding	2,487	1,168	1,020
East Surrey	1,620	778	724
East Sussex Brighton and Hove	1,941	935	902
Enfield & Haringey[2]	2,954	1,439	1,182
Gateshead & South Tyneside	3,184	1,498	1,237
Gloucestershire	2,050	971	955
Herefordshire	2,058	983	915
Hertfordshire[2]	N/A	N/A	N/A
Hillingdon	2,453	1,175	1,032
Isle of Wight[2]	1,397	669	692
Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and South East Hampshire[2]	N/A	N/A	N/A
Kensington, Chelsea & Westminster	7,361	3,783	3,048
Kingston & Richmond	2,575	1,264	1,225
Lambeth Southwark & Lewisham	5,854	2,883	2,314

£

Health Authority	Drugs misuse allocation per 1,000 of population 2001–02	2000–01	1999–2000
Leeds	2,863	1,359	1,211
Leicestershire	2,061	975	921
Liverpool	3,852	1,810	1,648
Manchester	5,205	2,466	2,387
Merton Sutton & Wandsworth	3,368	1,602	1,367
Morecambe Bay	1,691	802	733
Newcastle & North Tyneside	3,391	1,594	1,364
Norfolk	2,077	1,011	N/A
North & East Devon	1,859	896	871
North & Mid Hampshire	2,477	1,182	1,174
North Cheshire	2,325	1,100	1,011
North Cumbria	2,217	1,056	940
North Derbyshire	2,087	987	899
North Essex	1,816	869	761
North Nottinghamshire	2,066	969	905
North Staffordshire	2,116	1,003	926
North West Lancashire	1,614	762	730
North Yorkshire	1,969	939	871
Northamptonshire	2,245	1,078	1,057
Northumberland	2,465	1,169	1,029
Nottingham	2,562	1,214	1,125
Oxfordshire	2,552	1,233	1,090
Portsmouth & South East Hampshire[2]	2,130	1,013	934
Redbridge & Waltham Forest	2,315	1,110	955
Rotherham	2,888	1,369	1,324
Salford & Trafford	3,045	1,441	1,463
Sandwell	2,934	1,399	1,177
Sefton	2,423	1,145	1,330
Sheffield	3,076	1,453	1,261
Shropshire	2,145	1,029	952
Solihull	1,714	816	766
Somerset	1,865	893	832
South & West Devon	2,070	978	942
South Cheshire	1,777	846	785
South Derbyshire	1,925	923	863
South Essex	1,730	827	751
South Humber	2,023	952	974
South Lancashire	1,739	832	846
South Staffordshire	1,909	915	870
Southampton & South West Hampshire	1,979	941	843
St Helen's & Knowsley	2,666	1,267	1,053
Stockport	1,594	764	736
Suffolk	2,104	1,012	906
Sunderland	3,273	1,546	1,286
Tees	2,463	1,168	1,054
Wakefield	2,612	1,248	1,087
Walsall	2,798	1,331	1,144
Warwickshire	1,847	884	852
West Hertfordshire[2]	2,010	968	779
West Kent	1,923	919	898
West Pennine	2,267	1,081	946
West Surrey	1,834	879	784
West Sussex	1,683	812	749
Wigan & Bolton	2,066	985	884
Wiltshire	2,289	1,103	987
Wirral	2,026	962	1,001
Wolverhampton	2,872	1,350	1,191
Worcestershire	1,886	902	871
England total	2,488	1,190	1,073

Notes:

1. Figures for 2000–01 are not comparable with those for later years which are for pooled Department of Health and Home Office funding.
2. N/A denotes data not available due to Health Authority merge.

Gillian Merron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to ensure equal access to treatment and support for drug abusers in England. [42549]

Ms Blears: The National Treatment Agency for Substance Misuse (NTA) is promoting models of service delivery, which will improve the quality of treatment and accessibility to treatment for everyone who wants treatment, irrespective of their background. This will ensure effective access to all services, particularly substitute prescribing and residential rehabilitation services. The NTA are working towards achieving the national target of:

"Increasing the participation of problem drug users in drug treatment programme by 55 per cent. by 2004, 66 per cent. by 2005 and 100 per cent. by 2008."

Gillian Merron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to ensure that drug abusers can access help from general practitioners when necessary. [42548]

Ms Blears: Drug misusers are entitled to access general practitioners (GPs) in the same way that any other member of the population is.

I would refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave her today for information on the specific work that the Department is funding in order to equip GPs with the specialist skills required when working with drug misusers.

Gillian Merron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what investigations he has made into the number of drug abusers refused treatment by general practitioners; and if he will make a statement. [42547]

Ms Blears: Information is not available on the numbers of drug misusers who have been refused treatment by general practitioners (GPs).

However, we do recognise that GPs have a crucial role to play in our overall strategy of increasing the availability of treatment to drug users. The Department made available £1.8 million to the Royal College of General Practitioners for the development and implementation of an accredited training programme to give GPs the skills they need when working with drug misusers. Since its launch in October 2001 more than 400 GPs have taken part in the programme.

Accountancy Contracts

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the contracts agreed by his Department with the five largest accountancy firms since May 1997; and what was the total value of contracts with each. [42102]

Ms Blears: The Department does not centrally hold a record of individual contracts. However our financial records, for the period April 1997 to date, show the Department (excluding Agencies) made highest payments for all professional services (including consultancy and accountancy services) to the following five companies and in the amounts shown:

	FY 1997–98 Value £000	*FY 1998–99 Value £000*	*FY 1999–2000 Value £000*	*FY 2000–01 Value £000*	*FY 2001–02 Value £000*
PWC	143.7	196.8	244.6	1,039.5	308.3
KPMG	331.7	166.9	222.8	33.0	1,147.7
D & T	72.3	45.4	11.0	55.6	342.7
E & Y	26.2	18.2	0.0	30.9	66.6
A Andersen	51.5	7.2	0.0	1.7	0.0

Flexible Working

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many and what proportion of the staff of his Department are *(a)* job sharing, *(b)* term working and *(c)* engaged in another form of flexible working. [42422]

Ms Blears: Employees working on job-share contracts or term-working are recorded as "part-time" workers. It is therefore not possible to identify the number of staff employed specifically on a job-share/term working contract. The Department currently has 496 staff (9.5 per cent.) working part time.

As other forms of flexible working are arranged locally between staff and their managers, we do not centrally record this information.

Staff Numbers

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many staff have been employed by his Department in each of the last 10 years. [42469]

Ms Blears: I refer the hon. Member to the central answer provided by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister.

Energy Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on energy costs incurred by his Department in each of the last 10 years. [42449]

Ms Blears: The hon. Member is referred to the answer provided by my right hon. Friend the Minister for State at the Department of Environment Food and Rural Affairs, the Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Alun Michael) on 19 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 268W, which includes information on energy costs incurred by the Department of Health.

Job Sharing

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the extent of job sharing in his Department. [41040]

Ms Blears: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Twickenham (Mr. Cable) on 28 February 2002.

Gender Pay Gap

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the extent of the gender pay gap amongst staff in his Department. [40996]

Ms Blears: We are committed to review our pay systems in response to the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) Task Force "Just Pay" report, in which the Government has committed departments and agencies to review their pay systems by April 2003 and prepare action plans to close any equal pay gaps.

Relocation Expenses

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his policy is on the payment of relocation expenses to staff in his Department. [41022]

Ms Blears: Payment of relocation expenses is made to staff when their transfer to another location is in the interests of the Department, for example, a compulsory transfer or bulk transfer of work or exceptionally for new recruits on appointment.

Official Visits

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will list the official visits to *(a)* Paris and *(b)* Brussels made by each Minister in his Department in 2001 and the mode of travel used; and what guidance is provided to Ministers in his Department on the choice of mode of travel for such visits; [38150]

(2) if he will list the official visits within the UK outside London made by each Minister in his Department in 2001, giving for each *(a)* the origin and destination and *(b)* the mode of travel used; and what guidance is provided to Ministers in his Department on choice of mode of travel for official visits. [38186]

Ms Blears: All travel is undertaken fully in accordance with the rules set out in the Ministerial Code and Travel by Ministers, copies of which are available in the Library.

The additional detailed information requested in respect of UK travel is not held centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Policing Costs (Commonwealth Games)

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with the Greater Manchester Police in respect of the policing costs of the 2002 Commonwealth Games; what estimate he has made of the costs of *(a)* policing and *(b)* other security measures related to the Commonwealth

Games; and what proposals he has made to ensure that the policing and other security costs are appropriately funded. [27126]

Mr. Denham: I have had discussions with the Chief Constable of Greater Manchester Police (David Wilmot) about the policing costs of the games. On 30 January 2002, I announced that my right hon. Friend, the Home Secretary (Mr. Blunkett) had approved a special grant of £3 million. We have asked officials with Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary to look closely at the total additional costs estimated by the Chief Constable. On the basis of their further assessment we will consider whether any further grant would be justified.

Other security costs fall to the organisers of the Commonwealth Games, who are confident that they can be met from existing budgets.

Class A Drugs

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent analysis his Department has made of the number of offenders whose offences were related to their addiction to Class A drugs who had previously taken cannabis. [44976]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth *[holding answer 21 March 2002]:* On 23 October last year, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary (Mr. Blunkett) asked the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs to review the scientific literature on cannabis, including the so-called "gateway theory". Their analysis of this theory can be found in section 4.6 of their Report, "The classification of cannabis under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971", which was published on 14 March 2002. The Report says that it is not possible to state, with certainty, whether or not cannabis use predisposes users to dependence on Class A drugs. Nevertheless, the risks (if any) are small and less than those associated with the use of tobacco or alcohol.

There is a link between Class A drugs and crime. Preliminary findings from the drug testing programme, currently being piloted in Staffordshire, Nottingham and Hackney, show that 55 per cent. of offenders arrested for trigger offences (property crime, robbery and Class A drugs offences) tested positive for heroin and/or cocaine (including crack cocaine). The number who previously used cannabis is not known.

Correspondence

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when his Department intends to reply to the letter of 6 December 2001 from the hon. Member for Aylesbury about case reference B 1087668. [45143]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 21 March 2002]:* I wrote to the hon. Member on 26 March 2002. I am sorry for the delay in replying.

Visas (Slovakia)

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will remove the visa requirement for residents visiting the UK from Slovakia. [45147]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 21 March 2002]:* I have no plans at present to lift the visa requirement for Slovakian nationals.

Rami Mehsen

Mr. Colman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will make a decision on the case of Mr. Rami Mehsen (ref. GAT/37568), a constituent of the hon. Member for Putney. [45261]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* I wrote to my hon. Friend on 26 March 2002 about this matter.

Human Rights Act Compliance

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what training has been provided by the Government to assist *(a)* charitable organisations and *(b)* Citizens Advice Bureaux in ensuring that their activities comply with the Human Rights Act 1998. [45385]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* No training has been provided by the Home Office to assist *(a)* charitable organisations and *(b)* Citizens Advice Bureaux (CAB) with the Human Rights Act 1998.

Fair Trade

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 16 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 970W, on fair trade goods, if he will review and increase the amount of fairly traded goods purchased by her Department during Fair Trade Fortnight. [35922]

Angela Eagle: We fully support ethical trading in mainstream business and fair trade products will be purchased where they meet the criteria on Procurement of Goods and Services.

The Home Department will be raising awareness of fair trade products through:

publishing an article in the department's purchasing periodical "Purchasing Matters";

holding a purchasing symposium on fair trade on 15 April 2002.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what fairly traded products, other than tea and coffee, have been purchased by his Department in each of the last five years; and what was their value. [17563]

Angela Eagle: The Home Department is not aware of any other fairly traded products purchased in the past five years. The department fully supports ethical trading in mainstream business and Fair Trade products will be purchased where they meet the criteria of value for money principles, which includes quality, fitness for purpose and delivery against price.

The Home Office will be publishing an article on fair trade in the next edition of "Purchasing Matters", an internal periodical for all procurement staff which will help raise awareness of fair trade products. In addition the Home Office will be holding a purchasing

symposium on the issue of Fair Trade in April 2002. I hope these measures will enable greater purchasing of fair trade products.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what procedures are in place to take account, when deciding asylum claims, of *(a)* an applicant's treatment in detention abroad and *(b)* medical evidence of torture; and in what proportion of cases such information is actively sought at interview by interviewing officers. [44254]

Angela Eagle: All information provided by an asylum applicant is fully considered in light of the known country situation in the country from which the applicant is claiming asylum. Any claim to have been maltreated whilst in detention abroad is fully considered by the caseworker. Caseworkers have access to various sources of information, including country assessments prepared by the Country Information and Policy Unit (CIPU) of the Home Office which often provide information on the prison conditions in a particular country. CIPU have access to a wide variety of further information and have links with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, as well as other organisations who are able to assist with specific requests.

If, during the course of an interview or in other written representations, an applicant claims to have been tortured, caseworkers ask the applicant whether a medical examination has taken place. If so, the applicant is asked to submit a copy of the report. Where the applicant has raised torture and the caseworker feels it would be useful, the applicant may be invited to submit a medical report.

However, it is for the applicant to decide whether they wish to undertake a medical examination to establish that torture has taken place. The Immigration and Nationality Directorate does not insist that a medical report is submitted when torture has been alleged. Not all forms of torture result in physical scars or injuries which could be identified during a medical examination.

Any medical report provided is fully considered in the light of the country situation and alongside any other information provided by the applicant. Information on the number of medical reports sought is not routinely collected.

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if, when an applicant for asylum has provided evidence of torture, he will ensure that any letter of refusal states whether the evidence has been accepted. [44256]

Angela Eagle: The Immigration and Nationality Directorate's Asylum Policy Instructions state that where a caseworker has decided to refuse an application for which a medical report has been submitted, the Reasons for Refusal Letter (RFRL) should explain how the medical report has been considered, and whether this evidence has been accepted or not.

Any other evidence of torture which might be provided by the applicant would be considered in accordance with guidance issued to caseworkers which states that, following the Court of Appeal case of Karanakaran, caseworkers are generally expected to set out in any RFRL what they accept as true, what they reject as untrue and what elements of a persons claim they are uncertain about.

These instructions were issued in July 2001 and are available on the Home Office Immigration and Nationality Directorate website.

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average time taken from application to the final decision for asylum applications has been in the last 12 months for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [44729]

Angela Eagle: The average time between application and initial decision was 13 months for initial decisions made in the 12 months to December 2001, compared with 20 months for April 1997. This has been calculated using all cases for which data are available, including older cases decided as part of the reduction of the backlog, as well as new cases (see table).

Average time[1] between application and initial decision, for cases decided in 2001

	Average time in months[2]	*Number of cases*[2,3]
All Applications	13	119,190
of which		
Application pre 1996[4]	87	1,835
Application 1996	59	1,685
Application 1997	46	3,015
Application 1998	32	9,975
Application 1999	21	21,715
Application 2000	9	32,335
Application 2001	2	48,630

[1] Calculated using all available data from the date the application is lodged to the date of the initial decision.

[2] These data are still subject to revision following quality checking.

[3] Figures are provisional and rounded to the nearest five. The number of cases quoted differs from published figures due to uncertainty concerning date of application in a small minority of cases.

[4] Cases decided as part of the backlog clearance exercise, as part of measures outlined in the July 1998 White Paper entitled "Fairer, Faster and Firmer—A Modern Approach to Immigration and Asylum".

Information on final decisions is not readily available and would only be obtained by examination of individual case files to obtain information on the outcomes of inital decisions, of subsequent appeals to the Immigration Appellate Authority and the Tribunal, and of cases which have been reconsidered, which would incur disproportionate cost.

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to increase the numbers of asylum-seeking families and children in detention; and if he will make a statement. [45476]

Angela Eagle: Our White Paper "Secure Borders, Safe Haven" made it clear that there are occasions when it is necessary to hold families, including those with children, in removal centres. As part of our expansion programme for removal centres we shall consider what additional provision for family accommodation might be needed. No decisions have been taken as yet.

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions about the suitability of siting an Accommodation Centre on the A631. [44640]

Angela Eagle: We have had no discussions with the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions about the suitability of any potential accommodation centre sites. Site specific issues are local issues which we will take into account as part of the planning process. At every site a range of factors, including transport links, will be taken into account before final decisions are made.

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consultations took place with the relevant local authorities, the Intervention Board the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs and the Ministry of Defence before the announcement that Hemswell Cliff was a proposed site for an Asylum Seekers Accommodation Centre. [44650]

Angela Eagle: No consultation took place with these bodies prior to the announcement of the potential sites for trial Accommodation Centres. A range of factors, including environmental, health and safety issues, will be taken into account at every site before final decisions are made.

Yarl's Wood

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the Riot Act 1881 was read at Yarl's Wood Remand Centre on the evening of 14 February. [38780]

Angela Eagle: I understand that it was not read.

INDEX TO THE

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

SIXTH SERIES — **VOLUME 382**

SESSION 2001–2002

18th March—3rd April 2002

Printed indexes to Hansard

The volume index is one of three printed indexes to Commons Hansard produced from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Indexing Service (POLIS). It contains references to material in the bound volumes of Hansard. The other indexes produced are:

- The fortnightly index to Hansard. This covers the same date range as the volume index but references are to the column numbering in the daily parts and weekly edition of Hansard.
- The sessional index to Hansard. This contains references to material in the bound volumes for a whole session.

Indexes on the Parliamentary website

Fortnightly, volume and sessional indexes covering material from the beginning of the 1999/2000 session will also appear on the Parliamentary website at http://www.parliament.uk with links to the full text of Hansard.

SCOPE

The indexes include entries covering:

- The content of all material recorded in Hansard, including debates, procedural motions and questions.
- The names of all Members contributing to the Parliamentary business recorded in Hansard.
- The names of some types of Parliamentary business whenever they occur in Hansard. These are 'Ministerial statements', 'Business statements', 'Opposition days' and 'Estimates days'.

ARRANGEMENT

- All headings are in one word-by-word alphabetical sequence, with Members' contribution entries distinguished from other entries by italics.
- Where a Member contributes to Parliamentary business and is the subject of Parliamentary business there are separate contribution and subject entries, the subject entry coming first.
- Entries beginning 'Mac' and 'Mc' are sorted in one sequence as 'Mac'.
- 'St', when abbreviated for Saint, is filed as 'Saint'.
- Numbers are filed as if spelt out, e.g. '10 Downing Street' as if 'Ten Downing Street'.

HEADINGS

Choice of headings

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- *Subject headings*—Subject headings are assumed to refer to the whole of England, Great Britain or the United Kingdom unless otherwise stated.
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- *Material about Parliament*—This is indexed under 'Parliament', the names of the two Houses, the 'Palace of Westminster' and parts of the Parliamentary estate (such as 'Portcullis House').
- *Committees*—Material about committees is indexed under 'Committees', types of committee (such as 'Select committees') and the names of individual committees (such as 'Home Affairs Select Committee').
- *Parliamentary proceedings/procedures*—Material discussing these is indexed under the specific type of proceeding (such as 'Parliamentary questions' or 'Oral questions'), procedure (such as 'Calling of Members') or issue (such as 'Unparliamentary expressions').
- *Legislation*—Entries for Parliamentary proceedings on bills and statutory instruments are entered under their titles. Where the lead word of the bill or statutory instrument does not provide a full or clear indication of the subject there are additional subject entries when the bill or instrument is debated. For example, debates on the 'Child Support Pensions and Social Security Bill' have entries under 'Pensions' and 'Social security benefits' as well as under the title of the Bill.
- *Members' names*—These are given in the form by which the Member prefers to be known.
- *Speaker and Chair*—Contributions by the Speaker and deputies are brought together under the heading 'Speaker and deputies'. Contributions from the chair during Committees of the Whole House are brought together under 'Chairman of Committee of the Whole House'. Significant rulings and statements (as opposed to routine comments) are indicated by the sub-heading 'Rulings and statements' in both cases.

Guidance on headings

- *Cross references*—'See' references indicate all the material has been entered under another heading. 'See also' references indicate that additional information may be found under another heading.
- *Concept thesaurus*—A copy of the subject thesaurus to POLIS, listing the concept entries used in the index, is available on the Parliamentary website. A hard copy is available from the Head of the POLIS Unit, House of Commons Library, 1 Derby Gate, London, SW1A 2DG (020 7219 6456).

REFERENCES

- References in the indexes are to columns rather than pages.
- References to debates, but not questions, are accompanied by the date of the item.
- There are separate sequences in Hansard for the material taken on the floor of the House, Westminster Hall sittings and written questions:
  - References consisting of a number by itself indicate material taken on the floor of the House.
  - References ending in 'wh' indicate Westminster Hall sittings.
  - References ending in 'w' indicate written questions.
- References under all headings except the names of Members contributing to Parliamentary business and the titles of legislation are listed in one numerical sequence irrespective of whether the material is taken on the floor of the House, is discussed at a Westminster Hall sitting or is a written question.
- References under the names of Members contributing to Parliamentary business and the titles of legislation are listed in numerical sequence under the following headings:
  - *Debates etc.* (which includes interventions and points of order as well as significant contributions to debates);
  - *Sittings in Westminster Hall* (covering all debates held as part of the Westminster Hall sittings); and
  - *Questions* (which includes written, oral and private notice questions).

ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations are used in connection with the progress of bills:

- 1R=First reading
- 2R=Second reading
- Com=Committee stage
- Rep=Report stage
- 3R=Third reading
- res=resolution
- amendt(s)=amendment(s)
- *=matter taken formally without debate or division.

Parliamentary background

- The Parliamentary website at http://www.parliament.uk contains a range of information about Parliament and the full text of some Parliamentary papers and proceedings including Hansard.
- Information on current Parliamentary business is provided in the House of Commons Information Office *Weekly Information Bulletin*, available on the website and from The Stationery Office (020 7873 8499).
- Further information on Parliamentary proceedings and procedures is available from the House of Commons Information Office (020 7219 4272).

A1
Scotland 177w

A21
Accidents 227w

A303
Stonehenge 357–8w

Abandoned vehicles
268w, 666w

Abbott, Ms Diane
Questions
Central Office of Information, Advertising 431w

Aborigines
Australia 808w

Accenture
Northern Ireland Office 788w

Accident and emergency departments
Princess Royal Hospital Telford 441w
Royal Shrewsbury Hospital 441w
St Bartholomew's Hospital 762w
Solihull Hospital 694–5

Accidents
A21 227w
Chinook helicopters 1016w
Fishing vessels 346–7w
Helicopters 850–1w
Roads 30w, 161w, 285w, 399w, 405w, 483w, 1040w
Schools 501–2w
Submarines 552w

Accountancy
Cabinet Office 589w
Dept for Culture Media and Sport 505w
Dept of Health 1057w
Home Office 274–5w
Occupational pensions 650w
Scotland Office 465w

Action Aid
Patent Office 244w

Active Community Unit
Buckingham 477–8w

Acute beds
1037w

Adams, Mrs Irene
Questions
Aerospace industry, Government assistance 691–2w
Aerospace industry, Manpower 791w
Debts 466–7w
Developing countries, Literacy 867–8w
Developing countries, Loans 467w
Minimum wage, Paisley 736w
New deal schemes, Paisley 989–90w
Pensioners, Income support 426w
Poverty, Children 329w
Smuggling, Alcoholic drinks 213w
Television, Licensing 509w

Addresses to the Crown
Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother (03.04.02) 799–828

Adoption
see also Intercountry adoption
Personal records 529w

Adoption and Children Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
Programme motion and Rep (20.03.02) 374–408
Questions
529w, 1033w

Advantage West Midlands
EC regional policy 459w

Advertising
Cabinet Office 587w
Central Office of Information 431w
Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 823w
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 980–1w
Dept for Work and Pensions 149w, 423–4w
Employee share ownership schemes 854–5w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 197w, 804–5w
Government departments 817–8w
Prime Minister 883–4w
Scottish Office 462–3w

Advocate General for Scotland
Cost effectiveness 179w

Aerials
(26.03.02) 734–9
Planning permission 30w, 80w

Aerospace industry
Government assistance 691–2w
Manpower 791w
Research 415–7

Afghanistan
Armed conflict 56w, 207–8w, 297–8
Armed forces 546–7w
Detainees 609w, 809w
Emergency debates (20.03.02) 328–73
Hercules aircraft 558w
International assistance 15–6w, 864–5w
International cooperation 208–9w
Mines 468w
Ministerial statements (18.03.02) 37–48
Peace keeping operations 7–8, 15–6, 208–9w
Standing order no 24 applications (19.03.02) 169
Turkey 209w

Africa
AIDS 368–9w
International assistance (19.03.02) 26–49wh
Overseas aid 203w

Age Discrimination Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
1R (19.03.02) 172–4

Agency nurses
761w

Aggregates
Scotland 176w

Aggregates levy
326–7w, 329–30w, 748w, (26.03.02) 761–5, 798w, 856w, 1035w
Northern Ireland 1035w
Scotland 176w

Agricultural products
Balance of trade 258–61w
Prices 114–6w

Agricultural shows
377w

Agriculture
see also Farmers and Farming
Industrial health and safety 967w
Somerset (25.03.02) 678–84
Subsidies 115–7w, 261–2w, 824w

AIDS
Africa 368–9w

Ainsworth, Bob, Parliamentary Secretary, Home Office
Debates etc.
Football (Disorder) (Amendment) Bill, Lords amendts (26.03.02) 717–9, 723

Ainsworth, Bob—continued
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Cars, Theft (20.03.02) 118–22wh
Questions
Airports, South East region 712w
Cannabis 92w
Crime prevention, Licensed premises 93–4w
Drugs, Crime 407–8w, 1059w
Drugs, Rehabilitation 291w
Firearms Consultative Committee, Annual reports 290–1w
Police, Protection 97w
Roads, Accidents 405w
Steroid drugs, Prosecutions 92w
UK Anti-Drugs Coordinator, USA 892–3w

Ainsworth, Mr Peter
Questions
Agricultural products, Balance of trade 258–61w
Agriculture, Subsidies 824w
Beef, France 256–7w
Beef, Imports 718w
Beef, Trade promotion 826–7w
BioSafety Protocol 113w
Common agricultural policy, Reform 715–6w
Construction, Certification 694w
Farmers, Internet 1024w
Food, Imports 713w
Foot and mouth disease 131w
Foot and mouth disease, Compensation 130w
Foot and mouth disease, Publications 375w
Genetically modified organisms, Crops 1029w
Meat, Smuggling 257w, 373w
Members, Correspondence 1031w
Organic farming 722w
Packaging, Confectionery 371w
Packaging, EC law 718–9w
Pain, Medical treatments 438w
Pigs, Wiltshire 728w
Special areas of conservation 264w
Waste disposal, Health hazards 271w
Written questions, Administrative delays 711w

Air ambulance services
165w
Finance 305w

Air conditioning
Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 125w
Government Communications Headquarters 607w
Government departments 712–3w

Air force
Deployment 65w
Iraq 56w, 554w
Manpower 5

Air pollution
715w
Fees and charges 834–5w

Air routes
Inverness 942w

Air traffic
351w

Air traffic control
230w
Prestwick 668w
Tanzania 471w

Aircraft
Safety 230–1w

Aircraft carriers
558w

Airlines
Government assistance 231w

Airports
Administrative delays 230w
Fees and charges 351–3w
France 942w
Landing rights 491w
St Helena 470w
Scotland 862w
South East region 712w, 942w
Southend (26.03.02) 773–6

Alcoholic drinks
Measurement 75w
Misuse 435w
Smuggling 213w

Alcoholism
1040–2w

Alexander, Mr Douglas, Minister for E-commerce and Competitiveness, Dept of Trade and Industry
Questions
Aerials, Planning permission 80w
Broadband 88w, 419–22, 454–5w
Broadband, Monmouthshire 798–9w
Broadband, Small businesses 87–8w
Civil service agencies, South West region 961w
Community development 451w
Electronic government 790w
Post offices 454w
Post offices, Bank services 76w, 800–1w
Post offices, Rural areas 88w, 454w
Post offices, Urban areas 246w, 454w
Post offices, Wales 88w
Postal rates 798w
Postal services, Competition 361w, 797w
Postal services, Licensing 246w
Postal Services Commission 797–8w
Radiocommunications Agency, Standards 803–4w
Roads, Tolls 77–8w
Telephone systems 88w
Textiles, Government assistance 792w

Allan, Mr Richard
Questions
Broadband 421–2

Allen, Mr Graham
Debates etc.
Public expenditure, Parliamentary scrutiny (26.03.02) 756–61
Questions
Abandoned vehicles 666w
Faith schools 896w

Allowances
Passenger transport executives 660w

Alternative dispute resolution
622w

Alternative energy
Wales 699–700w

Alternative medicine
EC action 914–5w

Ambulance services
Midlothian 529–30w
Standards 910w

Amec
Turkey 876–7w

Amess, Mr David
Debates etc.
Police (26.03.02) 773–6
Sittings in Westminster Hall
USA, Terrorism (19.03.02) 66–7wh, 71wh
Questions
International Women's Day 461w

Amess, Mr David—continued
Legal aid scheme, Fees and charges 181w

Ammunition
Standards 444w

Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Debates etc.
Ministerial statement intervention (18.03.02) 26
Zimbabwe (21.03.02) 447–9
Questions
Israel, Army 50w
USA, Official visits 613w
Zimbabwe, Diplomatic relations 611–2w

Anderson, Rt Hon Donald
Debates etc.
Zimbabwe (21.03.02) 452

Anderson, Janet
Questions
Driving, Cellular phones 359–60w
Tourism 571w
World Tourism Organisation 567–8w

Angola
Arms trade 53w
Overseas aid 875w

Animal experiments
396–8w, 597w
Labelling 457–8w
Porton Down 57w

Animal feed
Imports 118–9w

Animal welfare
Dogs 121w
Poultry 126–7w
Quarantine 374w

Anniversaries
Queen Elizabeth II 43w, 183w, 255–6w, 302–3, 318w, 349w, 394w, 448w, 450–1w, 506–8w, 557, 571w, 597w, 665w, 1024w

Annuities
420w, 739w, 746w

Anti-Drugs Co-ordinator
see UK Anti-Drugs Coordinator

Antisocial behaviour orders
278–80w

Anti-Terrorism Crime and Security Act 2001
Questions
482w

Apache AH-64 helicopter
552w, 846w

Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Debates etc.
Chinook helicopters (19.03.02) 248, 255–9, 267, 273

Archaeology
Finance 567w
Seas and oceans 903w

Areas of outstanding natural beauty
31–2w

Armagh
Helicopters 850–1w

Armed conflict
878–81w
Afghanistan 56w, 207–8w, 297–8
Iraq 294w, 324w, 467w, 613w, 748–9w
Middle East 608w
Sudan 196–7w

Armed forces
Afghanistan 546–7w
British overseas territories 551w

Armed forces—continued
Deployment 63–4w, 851–2w, 1015–6w
Disciplinary proceedings 62w, 318w
Education 550w
Engineers 210–1w
Females 210–1w, 850w
Festivals and special occasions 448w
Food 205w
Housing 68w, 71w, 447w, 554–5w, 846–8w
Injuries 315–6w, 559w
Manpower 5–7
Medals 302–3
Middle East 63–4w
Monuments 311w, 448–9w
North West region 18–9
Northern Ireland 851–2w
Overseas residence 68w
Pensions 207w
Training 66–7w, 1015w

Armed Forces Act 1996
Questions
63w

Arms trade
9, 695w, (26.03.02) 746–51
Angola 53w
Corruption 451w
Export controls 452w
India 700w
Pakistan 700w
USA 848–9w

Army
Deployment 559w
Engineers 210w
Israel 50w
Londonderry 64–5w
Manpower 53–4w

Army Base Repair Organisation
842w

Arrest warrants
British Transport Police 660w

Art works
391–2w
EC law 509–10w
Export controls 388w

Arthritis
Drugs 305–6w

Arthur Andersen
Dept of Trade and Industry 788w
KPMG 687w
Northern Ireland Office 788w

Arts
Education 565w
North West region 566w

Asbestos
32–3w
Compensation 967w
Hospitals 299w
Industrial injuries disablement benefit 429w
Scotland (19.03.02) 58–65wh, 861w

Ash Moor
Environmental impact assessment 1021w

Ashford and St Peter's Hospital NHS Trust
Finance 782–3w
Nurses 783w
Public appointments 783w
Waiting lists 938–9w

Asians
Mental health 1041–2w

Assisted prison visits scheme
283w

Astra Windows
Company liquidations 801w

Astrophysics
Monitoring 796w

Asylum
Administrative delays 1062w
Appeals 410w
Applications 594–6w, 1061–2w
Bicester 590w
Burma 810–1w
Deportation 595–6w
Detainees 410w
Domestic violence 891–2w
Education 410w, 500w
Hemswell Cliff 720w, 889–91w, 1063–4w
Housing 95–6w, 281w, 408–10w, 590w, 1062–3w
Lincolnshire 595w
Liverpool 596w
Oakington Detention Centre 594w
Petitions (19.03.02) 276
RAF Turnhouse 95w
Rural areas 891w
Scotland 410–1w
Transport 590w
Voucher schemes 594–5w

Atherton, Ms Candy
Debates etc.
Education (19.03.02) 217
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Age, Discrimination (20.03.02) 97–100wh, 105wh, 107wh, 109wh, 112wh
Questions
Mundic blocks 678–9w
Seasonal workers, Cornwall 284–5w

Atkins, Charlotte
Debates etc.
Education (21.03.02) 488, 495, 521–3
Questions
Local authorities, Disclosure of information 485–6w

Atkinson, Mr Peter
Questions
Mink, Farms 729w

Attendance allowance
999–1000w
Patients 155w

Attorney General
Standards 199–200w

Auld Review
see Criminal Courts Review

Australia
Aborigines 808w

Autism
757w
Research 438w

Automated credit transfer
Social security benefits 638–9w

Aviation
EC action 230w, (19.03.02) 274, 491w
Freight 942w
Government assistance 943w
Redundancy 634w
Standards 943–4w

Avon
Orthopaedics 299–300w

AWE Aldermaston
58w

Aylesbury Young Offender Institution
Fire prevention 93w

Azinghur barracks
70w

Bacon, Mr Richard
Questions
National Audit Office 580w

Badgers
see also Bovine tuberculosis
1025w

BAE Systems
Public appointments 804w

Bail
Young offenders 403w

Bailey, Mr Adrian
Questions
Afghanistan, Detainees 809w
Wembley Stadium 573w

Baird, Vera
Questions
House of Lords, Judiciary 162
Select committees 165–6
World War I, Capital punishment 16–7

Baker, Norman
Debates etc.
Business motions (18.03.02) 51
Hunting (18.03.02) 63–7, (21.03.02) 460–1
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Parliamentary questions (21.03.02) 145wh, 160wh, 163–70wh, 176–7wh, 179wh
Questions
Birt, Lord 883w
British Petroleum, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 671w
British Petroleum, Dept of Trade and Industry 799–800w
British Petroleum, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 807w
British Petroleum, Treasury 746w
Cendent Relocation (UK), Foreign and Commonwealth Office 805w
Customs and Excise, Newhaven 855–6w
Government, Policy 617–8w
Government bills 514w
Livestock, Transport 140w
London Underground, Rolling stock 946w
Porton Down, Animal experiments 57w
Sheep, Exports 118w

Balance of trade
Agricultural products 258–61w

Baldry, Tony
Debates etc.
Afghanistan (18.03.02) 44–5
Corporate manslaughter (19.03.02) 277–81
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Africa, International assistance (19.03.02) 29–31wh
Questions
Asylum, Bicester 590w
Select committees 167

Ballistic missile defence
844w

Baltic sea
Chemical weapons 70w

Bank for Reconstruction and Development of Europe
see European Bank for Reconstruction and Development

Bank of England
Public appointments 521w
Treasury 332w

Bank services
Post offices 76w, 639w, 697w, 800–1w

Banks, Mr Tony
Debates etc.
Consignia (25.03.02) 579

Banks, Mr Tony—continued
Hunting (18.03.02) 82–4, 97, (21.03.02) 466
Questions
Hunting 560

Barcelona Summit (EC)
Ministerial statements (18.03.02) 21–36

Barker, Gregory
Debates etc.
Hunting (18.03.02) 66, 77, 79–80
Hunting, Points of order (21.03.02) 471
Railtrack (25.03.02) 588
Questions
Cancer, Health education 157w
Crime 482–3w
Police, Finance 287w
Radiotherapy, East Sussex 301–2
Territorial Army 12

Barnes, Mr Harry
Debates etc.
Zimbabwe (21.03.02) 453
Questions
Business questions 443–4
Direct selling 690w
Select committees 167–8
Terrorism, Northern Ireland 292

Barnet Primary Care Trust
Chinese community 780w

Barnsley Primary Care Trust
Finance 907w

Baron, Mr John
Questions
Hospitals, Waiting lists 178w
Organised crime, Northern Ireland 335w
Sports, Finance 198–9w

Barrett, John
Debates etc.
Zimbabwe (21.03.02) 455
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Age, Discrimination (20.03.02) 100–2wh, 106wh
Questions
Asylum, Housing 95–6w, 409–10w
Asylum, RAF Turnhouse 95w
Asylum, Scotland 410–1w
Business questions 442–3
Correspondence, Dept of Trade and Industry 790w
Liquefied petroleum gas 344–5w
Liquefied petroleum gas, Safety 25–6w
Winter fuel payments, Scotland 176w

Barristers
Ethnic groups 885–6w

Barron, Rt Hon Kevin
Questions
Aerospace industry, Research 416

Barrow in Furness
Hospital beds 785–6w
Institutional care 767w
National Lottery 906w

Battle, Mr John
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Africa, International assistance (19.03.02) 38–9wh
Questions
Afghanistan, International assistance 864–5w
Defence Evaluation and Research Agency, Privatisation 560w
Equal pay, Leeds 77w
Regional planning and development, Urban areas 968–9w
Sentencing 479w
Sleeping rough, West Yorkshire 665w

Battle, Mr John*—*continued
Urban aid 668–9w, 969–70w
Urban aid, Leeds 668w

Bayley, Hugh
Debates etc.
Afghanistan, Armed conflict (20.03.02) 343
Railtrack (25.03.02) 588
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Africa, International assistance (19.03.02) 26–30wh
Questions
Employment rehabilitation 915w
Football 565–6w

BBC
Finance 564w
Office of Communications 389w
Public appointments 389w

BBC News 24 Review
508w

Beard, Mr Nigel
Debates etc.
Afghanistan (18.03.02) 44
Education (19.03.02) 177

Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret*, *Secretary of State for Environment Food and the Regions
Questions
Agricultural products, Balance of trade 258–61w
Agriculture, Subsidies 824w
Airports, South East region 712w
Beef, France 256–7w
Beef, Imports 718w
Beef, Trade promotion 826–7w
BioSafety Protocol 113w
Civil service agencies, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 833–4w
Common agricultural policy, Reform 715–6w
Farmers, Internet 1024w
Food, Imports 713w
Foot and mouth disease 131w
Foot and mouth disease, Compensation 130w
Foot and mouth disease, Publications 375w
Future of Farming and Food Policy Commission 835w
Genetically modified organisms, Crops 1029w
Meat, Smuggling 257w, 373w
Members, Correspondence 1031w
Nuclear fuel reprocessing, Germany 271w
Organic farming 722w
Packaging, Confectionery 371w
Packaging, EC law 718–9w
Pigs, Wiltshire 728w
Sellafield, Republic of Ireland 371–2w
Special areas of conservation 264w
Waste disposal, Health hazards 271w
Written questions, Administrative delays 711w

Bedfordshire
Civil defence 582w

Bedfordshire Police
Yarls Wood Detention Centre 480w

Beef
Exports 718w
France 256–7w, 826w
Imports 718w
Scotland 826w
Trade promotion 826–7w

Beekeeping
Essex 273–4w

Beer
245w

Bees
Diseases 131–2w
Varroasis 118w

Begg, Miss Anne
Debates etc.
Child Support Agency (20.03.02) 320–1
State Pension Credit Bill (HL), 2R (25.03.02) 614, 633, 643–6
Questions
Broadcasting programmes 555–6

Beggs, Mr Roy
Debates etc.
Chinook helicopters (19.03.02) 267
Education (19.03.02) 189
Members' interests (26.03.02) 711–3
Questions
Business questions 439–40
Hearing aids 698
Medical profession, Witnesses 893w

Beith, Rt Hon A J
Debates etc.
Hunting (18.03.02) 53–4, 90–3
Questions
Electoral Commission 579w
Ministerial policy advisors, Cabinet Office 821w
Ministerial policy advisors, Dept for International Development 539w
Ministerial policy advisors, Prime Minister 618w
Ministers, Codes of practice 1w
Political parties, Finance 561
Voting behaviour 560–1
Voting methods 563–4
Voting rights, Young people 557–8

Belize
Debts 367w
Financial services 367w
Guatemala 385w

Bell, Mr Stuart*, *Second Church Estates Commissioner
Debates etc.
Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, Addresses to the Crown (03.04.02) 807–8
Questions
Church of England, Discrimination 558
Church of England, Ethnic groups 471w
Churches, Repairs and maintenance 559
Churches, VAT 581w
Clergy, Conditions of employment 580w
Clergy, Finance 580–1w
Clergy, Pay 562
Clergy, Pensions 580w
Hunting 559–60

Bellingham, Mr Henry
Debates etc.
Chinook helicopters (19.03.02) 269–70
Hunting (18.03.02) 65, 80, 107, 124–6
Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, Addresses to the Crown (03.04.02) 817–8
Questions
Business questions 437–8
Construction 451–2w
Foot and mouth disease, Scotland 177w

Benefits Agency
see Social Security Benefits Agency

Benn, Hilary*, *Parliamentary Secretary, Dept for International Development
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Africa, International assistance (19.03.02) 47–9wh
Questions
Africa, AIDS 368–9w

Benn, Hilary*—*continued
Africa, Overseas aid 203w
Belize, Debts 367w
Belize, Financial services 367w
Botswana, National parks 203w
Burundi, Overseas aid 202w
Commonwealth Development Corporation 201–2w
Councillors, Dept for International Development 471w
Developing countries, Health 369w
Developing countries, Maternal mortality 369w
Iraq, Social conditions 467w
Kalahari game reserve 203w
Magistrates, Dept for International Development 471w
Mittal, Lakshmi 204w, 871–2w
Public private partnerships, Dept for International Development 366–8w
Racial discrimination 202w
St Helena 470w
Territorial Army, Dept for International Development 470w
Wood, Dept for International Development 203–4w
Zimbabwe, Elections 202w

Bennett, Andrew
Questions
Compost, Greater Manchester 707w

Bercow, Mr John
Questions
Accountancy, Scotland Office 465w
Active Community Unit, Buckingham 477–8w
Advertising, Cabinet Office 587w
Advertising, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 823w
Advertising, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 197w
Advertising, Prime Minister 883–4w
Advertising, Scottish Office 462–3w
Agriculture, Subsidies 261–2w
Archaeology, Seas and oceans 903w
Billing, Scotland Office 462–3w
Birds, Conservation 125–6w
Catering, Cabinet Office 496w
Catering, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 1023w
Catering, Dept of Health 297w
Catering, Solicitor-General 516w
Cellular phones, Scotland Office 465w
Central Government Audit and Accountability Review 211–2w
Centre for Management and Policy Studies, Manpower 495w
Children, Day care 629w
Conferences, Dept of Trade and Industry 788–9w
Conferences, Scotland Office 465w
Consultants, Cabinet Office 815–6w
Consultants, Prime Minister 883w
Consultants, Treasury 733w
Contracts, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 390w
Contracts, Dept for International Development 17w
Contracts, Dept of Trade and Industry 84w
Contracts, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 321–2w
Correspondence, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 574w
Correspondence, Dept for International Development 881w
Correspondence, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 977w
Correspondence, Dept of Trade and Industry 791w

Bercow, Mr John—continued
Correspondence, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 805–6w
Correspondence, Ministry of Defence 1019w
Correspondence, President of the Council 863w
Correspondence, Prime Minister 620w
Correspondence, Treasury 743w
Countryside stewardship scheme 262w
Crimes against property, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 573w
Crimes against property, Dept for International Development 883w
Crimes against property, Dept of Trade and Industry 361w
Crimes against property, President of the Council 512w
Crimes against property, Treasury 744w
Degrees, Buckingham 105w
Devolution, Scotland 461–2w
Disabled, Buckingham 525–6w
Discrimination, Cabinet Office 581–2w
Discrimination, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 824–5w
Discrimination, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 345w
Discrimination, Dept for Work and Pensions 1004w
Discrimination, Dept of Trade and Industry 79w
Discrimination, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 511w
Discrimination, President of the Council 513w
Discrimination, Prime Minister 617w
Discrimination, Solicitor-General 545w
Discrimination, Treasury 735w
Dogs, Buckinghamshire 123w
EC law, Cabinet Office 496–7w
EC law, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 198w
EC law, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 961–2w
EC law, Dept of Health 159–60w
EC law, President of the Council 512w
EC law, Solicitor-General 515–6w
Emergency calls, Buckinghamshire 227w
Empty property, Dept for Work and Pensions 637w
Energy, Cabinet Office 495w
Energy, Dept for Education and Skills 636w
Energy, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 266w
Energy, Dept for Work and Pensions 987w
Energy, Dept of Health 1057w
Energy, Dept of Trade and Industry 682w
Energy, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 805w
Energy, Ministry of Defence 844w
Energy, President of the Council 513–4w
Energy, Prime Minister 449w
Equal pay, Dept for Work and Pensions 153w
Equal pay, Dept of Health 1058w
Equal pay, President of the Council 862w
Equal pay, Solicitor-General 9–10w
Equipment, Cabinet Office 588w
Equipment, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 511w
Equipment, President of the Council 189w
Equipment, Prime Minister 616w
Equipment, Solicitor-General 11–2w
Experience Corps, Buckingham 405–6w, 592–3w
Females, Internet 74w
Fire services, Buckinghamshire 226w
Fire stations, Buckinghamshire 27w
Fires, Buckinghamshire 27w

Bercow, Mr John—continued
Flexible working, Cabinet Office 74w
Flexible working, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 389w
Flexible working, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 265–6w
Flexible working, Dept of Health 1057w
Flexible working, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 197–8w
Flexible working, Home Office 395w
Flexible working, President of the Council 615w
Flexible working, Prime Minister 322w
Flexible working, Solicitor-General 539–41w
Government departments, Standards 495w
Historic buildings, Buckinghamshire 569–70w
Hospitals, Waiting lists 755–6w
Hotels, Cabinet Office 497w
Hotels, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 115–6w
Hotels, Dept for Work and Pensions 152w
Hotels, Dept of Health 435w
Hotels, Dept of Trade and Industry 682w
Hotels, President of the Council 189w
Hotels, Solicitor-General 6–8w
Human rights, Cabinet Office 583w
Human rights, Dept for International Development 867w
Human rights, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 977w
Human rights, Dept of Trade and Industry 702w
Human rights, Ministry of Defence 845w
Human rights, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 894w
Human rights, President of the Council 512–3w
Human rights, Prime Minister 884w
Information officers, Cabinet Office 816–7w
Information officers, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 652w
Information officers, Dept for Work and Pensions 418w
Information officers, Dept of Health 1051w
Information officers, Prime Minister 884w
Information officers, Treasury 1035w
Internet, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 320w
Internet, Solicitor-General 5–6w
Legal costs, Cabinet Office 495–6w
Legal costs, Dept for Work and Pensions 425w
Litter 123w
Manpower, Cabinet office 293w
Manpower, Dept of Health 1057w
Manpower, Dept of Trade and Industry 790w
Manpower, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 607w
Manpower, President of the Council 188w
Manpower, Prime Minister 322w
Manpower, Solicitor-General 3–5w
Ministerial policy advisors, Cabinet Office 819–20w
Ministerial policy advisors, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 390–1w
Ministerial policy advisors, Dept for International Development 15w
Ministerial policy advisors, Prime Minister 322–3w
Monetary compensatory amounts 374–6w
National Audit Office 13–4w
National Probation Service for England and Wales, Information technology 403w
New deal for young people 987w, 992w

Bercow, Mr John—continued
New deal for young people, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 725–6w
New deal for young people, Dept for International Development 866w
New deal for young people, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 977w
New deal for young people, Dept of Trade and Industry 701w
New deal for young people, Treasury 744w
New deal schemes, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 726w
New deal schemes, Dept for International Development 866w
New deal schemes, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 977–8w
New deal schemes, Dept of Trade and Industry 700–1w
New deal schemes, Ministry of Defence 1019–20w
New deal schemes, President of the Council 862–3w
New deal schemes, Treasury 744w
"Non-Competitive Procurement in the Ministry of Defence" 67–8w
Nurseries, Cabinet Office 820–2w
Nurseries, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 573w
Nurseries, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 725w
Nurseries, Dept for International Development 882w
Nurseries, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 978w
Nurseries, Dept of Trade and Industry 701w
Nurseries, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 610w
Nurseries, Ministry of Defence 555–6w
Nurseries, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 894w
Nurseries, President of the Council 512w
Nurseries, Treasury 741–2w
Offices, Home Office 275w
Official hospitality, Dept of Trade and Industry 682w
Official hospitality, Scotland Office 465w
Official hospitality, Solicitor-General 541–3w
Open government 461w
Operating costs, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 978–80w
Operating costs, Dept of Health 918w
Operating costs, Treasury 744w
Orders and regulations, Dept of Trade and Industry 681w
Parental leave, Cabinet Office 582w
Parental leave, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 264–5w
Parental leave, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 22w
Parental leave, Dept for Work and Pensions 638w
Parental leave, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 384w
Parental leave, Ministry of Defence 547w
Parental leave, President of the Council 615w
Parental leave, Prime Minister 617w
Parental leave, Solicitor-General 544–5w
Parental leave, Treasury 735w
Pay, Public sector 325w
Pay, Treasury 732–3w
Press, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 824w

Bercow, Mr John—continued
Private finance initiative, Cabinet Office 820w
Private finance initiative, Dept for International Development 539w, 882–3w
Private finance initiative, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 945w
Private finance initiative, Dept for Work and Pensions 142–3w, 987w
Private finance initiative, Dept of Trade and Industry 701–2w
Private finance initiative, Ministry of Defence 845–6w
Private finance initiative, Treasury 856w
Public expenditure 852w
Public libraries, Internet 903w
Public private partnerships 750w
Public private partnerships, Cabinet Office 583w
Public private partnerships, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 390w, 906w
Public private partnerships, Dept for Education and Skills 499w, 631w
Public private partnerships, Dept for International Development 366–8w, 539w
Public private partnerships, Dept of Trade and Industry 81w, 702w
Public private partnerships, Ministry of Defence 68w
Public private partnerships, Scotland Office 681w
Public private partnerships, Treasury 853w, 857w
Public relations, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 320w
Publications, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 822w
Publications, Scotland Office 464w
Publicity, Cabinet Office 587–8w
Publicity, Dept for Education and Skills 894w
Publicity, Dept of Trade and Industry 789w
Publicity, Home Office 89–90w
Publicity, Solicitor-General 513–5w
Railways, Cabinet Office 430w
Railways, Dept for Education and Skills 98–100w
Railways, Dept for Work and Pensions 1011–2w
Railways, Home Office 275w
Railways, Solicitor-General 10w, 517–8w
Recruitment, Cabinet Office 292w
Recruitment, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 113w
Recruitment, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 45–50w
Recruitment, Prime Minister 322w
Regional assistance, Buckingham 81–4w
Regulatory impact assessments 494w
Relocation services, Dept for Work and Pensions 525w
Relocation services, Dept of Health 1058w
Relocation services, Home Office 91w
Relocation services, President of the Council 189w
Relocation services, Solicitor-General 2–3w
Sleeping rough 27–8w
Standards, Attorney General 199–200w
Standards, Cabinet Office 494–5w
Standards, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 390w
Standards, Dept for Education and Skills 342w, 634w
Standards, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 125w, 830w
Standards, Dept for International Development 17w, 882w
Bercow, Mr John—continued
Standards, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 26–7w, 977w
Standards, Dept of Trade and Industry 81w, 702w
Standards, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 806w
Standards, Ministry of Defence 548w
Standards, President of the Council 512w
Standards, Treasury 13w, 331w, 749w
Theft, Dept for Work and Pensions 142w
Women and Equality Unit, Manpower 431w
Women and Equality Unit, Standards 431w
Work sharing, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 388–9w
Work sharing, Dept for Education and Skills 110w
Work sharing, Dept for Work and Pensions 999w
Work sharing, Dept of Health 1058w
Work sharing, Solicitor-General 8–9w
Written questions, Administrative delays 165w
Best value
Police 481w
Bicester
Asylum 590w
Bici, Fahir
72w
Billing
Scotland Office 462–3w
Social Security Contributions Agency 326w
Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention
51w
BioSafety Protocol
113w
Birds
Conservation 125–6w
Birmingham
Census 186w
Council housing 355w
Birt, Lord
883w
Bisham Abbey National Sports Centre
575–6w
Blackpool
Students 634w
Bladder cancer
534–5w
***Blair, Rt Hon Tony**, Prime Minister, First Lord of the Treasury and Minister for the Civil Service*
Debates etc.
Barcelona Summit (EC), Ministerial statements (18.03.02) 21–36
Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, Addresses to the Crown (03.04.02) 799–801
Questions
Advertising, Prime Minister 883–4w
Afghanistan, Armed conflict 297–8
Birt, Lord 888w
Civil servants, Political impartiality 449w
Commonwealth Heads of Government Conference, Climate Change Convention 323–4w
Conditions of employment 297
Consultants, Prime Minister 883w
Correspondence, Prime Minister 620w
Blair, Rt Hon Tony—continued
Disabled, Human rights 618–9w, 885w
Discrimination, Prime Minister 617w
Dogs, Injuries 299–300
Energy, Prime Minister 449w
Equipment, Prime Minister 616w
Flexible working, Prime Minister 322w
Gambling Review Body 298–9
Gibraltar 323w, 620w
Gibraltar, Spain 300–1
Government, Policy 617–8w
Habitual offenders, Sentencing 299
Homicide, Children 295
Hospital beds 299
House of Lords, Reform 303–4
Human rights, Prime Minister 884w
Husaini, Safiya 617w
Information officers, Prime Minister 884w
Institutional care, Closures 295–7
Institutional care, Standards 304
Iraq, Armed conflict 294w, 324w
"Lending Support: Modernising the Governments Use of Loans" 324w
Levy, Lord, Visits abroad 616–7w
Magistrates' courts, Kingston upon Thames 303
Manpower, Prime Minister 322w
Meat, Smuggling 619–20w
Members, Correspondence 885w
Ministerial policy advisors, Prime Minister 322–3w, 618w
Ministers, Codes of practice 1w
Mittal, Lakshmi 884w
NHS, Consultants 303
Office of Surveillance Commissioners, Public appointments 449–50w
Overseas investment, Government assistance 324w
Parental leave, Prime Minister 617w
Peers, Public appointments 884w
Performance and Innovation Unit, Manpower 294w
Petitions, Isle of Wight 885w
Prime Minister's Policy Unit, Strategic Rail Authority 619w
Public appointments, Prime Minister 883w
Queen Elizabeth II, Anniversaries 302–3, 450–1w
Radiotherapy, East Sussex 301–2
Recruitment, Prime Minister 322w
Select committees 616w
Senior Salaries Review Body, Public appointments 2w
Spain, Foreign relations 323w
Sports, Government assistance 301
Stillman, Ian 1–2w
Strikes 295
UK membership of EC 298
USA, Nuclear weapons 323w
Zimbabwe, Politics and government 302
Bleach, Peter
612w
***Blears, Ms Hazel**, Parliamentary Secretary, Dept of Health*
Debates etc.
Hospitals, Consultants (20.03.02) 411–4
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Solihull Hospital (20.03.02) 126–30wh
Questions
Accountancy, Dept of Health 1057w
Air ambulance services 165w
Air ambulance services, Finance 305w
Alcoholic drinks, Misuse 435w
Alcoholism 1040–2w
Alternative medicine, EC action 914–5w
Ambulance services, Midlothian 529–30w
Ambulance services, Standards 910w
Ashford and St Peter's Hospital NHS Trust, Finance 782–3w

Blears, Ms Hazel*—*continued
Ashford and St Peter's Hospital NHS Trust, Nurses 783w
Ashford and St Peter's Hospital NHS Trust, Public appointments 783w
Ashford and St Peter's Hospital NHS Trust, Waiting lists 938–9w
Barnsley Primary Care Trust, Finance 907w
Brighton Healthcare NHS Trust, Cancer 1049w
Cancer, Medical treatments 306–7w
Cannabis, Health hazards 436w
Capita, Dept of Health 434w
Catering, Dept of Health 297w
Committee on Safety of Medicines, Appeals 296w
Community hospitals 306w, 938w
Consultants, Dept of Health 1045w
Correspondence, Dept of Health 784w
Dental services 300–6w, 911–4w, 1047–8w
Dental services, Dorset 911w
Dental services, Manpower 1048w
Dental services, Wiltshire 780–1w
Drugs, Internet 297–8w, 433w, 917–8w
Drugs, Misuse 1053–6w
Drugs, Side effects 1039–40w
Energy, Dept of Health 1057w
Equal pay, Dept of Health 1058w
Flexible working, Dept of Health 1057w
Health, Young people 1047w
Health authorities, Somerset 298–9w
Hospitals, Asbestos 299w
Hospitals, Waiting lists 756–7w
Hotels, Dept of Health 435w
Information officers, Dept of Health 1051w
Manpower, Dept of Health 295w, 297w, 1057w
Medical Devices Agency, Standards 933w
Members, Correspondence 442w, 536w, 1052w
Mental health services, Yellow card scheme 1044–5w
Ministerial policy advisors, Dept of Health 1051w
National Institute for Clinical Excellence, Drugs 1045w
NHS, Accountability 908w
NHS, Complaints 1049–50w
NHS, Email 435w
NHS, Land 298w
NHS, Location 441w
NHS, Negligence 1045–6w
NHS, Standards 784w
NHS Direct 1049w
NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency, Business plans 933w
Non-governmental organisations, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 299w
Occupational therapy, Waiting lists 534w
Operating costs, Dept of Health 918w
Orthopaedics, Waiting lists 299–300w
Pain, Medical treatments 438w
Parliamentary questions, Dept of Health 930w
Pharmacy 309–10w
Pharmacy, Fees and charges 1037w
Portsmouth and South East Hampshire Health Authority, Chiropody 762–3w
Prescriptions, Wales 1052w
Press releases, Dept of Health 434w
Princess Royal Hospital Telford, Accident and emergency departments 441w
Public expenditure, Dept of Health 918–9w
Public relations, Dept of Health 434w, 1051–2w
Relocation services, Dept of Health 1058w

Blears, Ms Hazel*—*continued
Rheumatology, Waiting lists 534w
Roads, Accidents 1040w
Solihull Hospital, Accident and emergency departments 694–5
Stoke Mandeville Hospital NHS Trust, South Buckinghamshire NHS Trust 529w
Swindon and Marlborough NHS Trust, Consultants 1040w
Technology Advisory Group 433–4w
Theft, Dept of Health 1051w
Visits abroad, Dept of Health 1058w
West Surrey Health Authority, Finance 782w
Wheelchairs 1036w
Wheelchairs, Safety 1036w
Work sharing, Dept of Health 1058w
Written questions, Dept of Health 442w

Blind
see Sight impaired

Blizzard, Mr Bob
Debates etc.
Hunting (18.03.02) 92
Questions
Chronic fatigue syndrome, Medical treatments 919w
Hospital beds 692–3

Blood
Donors 765w, 929w

Bloody Sunday Tribunal of Inquiry
787w
Cabinet Office 822w
Costs 787–8w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1032w

***Blunkett, Rt Hon David**, Secretary of State for the Home Dept*
Questions
Commission for Racial Equality, Public appointments 411w
Identity cards 472w
Offices, Home Office 889w
Queen Elizabeth II, Anniversaries 597w

Blunt, Mr Crispin
Debates etc.
Afghanistan, Armed conflict (20.03.02) 348
Chinook helicopters (19.03.02) 245
Trespassers on Land (Liability for Damage and Eviction) Bill, 1R (26.03.02) 705–7
Questions
Assisted prison visits scheme 283w
Bloody Sunday Tribunal of Inquiry 787w
Bloody Sunday Tribunal of Inquiry, Cabinet Office 822w
Bloody Sunday Tribunal of Inquiry, Costs 787w
Bloody Sunday Tribunal of Inquiry, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1032w
Judiciary 331w
Social security benefits, Disabled 425w
Terrorism, Northern Ireland 294

Board of Inland Revenue
see Inland Revenue

Boarding schools
Inspections 1038w

***Boateng, Rt Hon Paul**, Financial Secretary, Treasury*
Questions
Aggregates levy 326–7w, 329–30w, 748w, 856w, 1035w
Aggregates levy, Northern Ireland 1035w
Business, Regulation 738w
Correspondence, Treasury 743w
Customs and Excise, Annual reports 745w

Boateng, Rt Hon Paul*—*continued
Customs and Excise, Newhaven 855–6w
Customs and Excise, Supply estimates 745w
Excise duties, Motorcycles 1033w
Excise duties, Petrol alternatives 1034w
Ministers, Correspondence 214w
"Promoting Sport in the Community Consultation Paper" 742w
Roads, Tolls 857w
Scientists and Engineers Supply Review 212w
Smuggling, Alcoholic drinks 213w
Smuggling, South East region 1035w
Taxation, Whisky 748w
VAT, Fraud 732w
VAT, Internet 518w
VAT, Small businesses 213w, 732w
VAT, Take-away food 732w
VAT, Tax evasion 1034w
Written questions, Treasury 214w

Boats
Floods 829–30w
Navigation 272w

Bomb disposal
Expenditure 468w

Bombings
Lockerbie (26.03.02) 724–5

Borrow, Mr David
Questions
Law Commission, Annual reports 841w

Boswell, Mr Tim
Debates etc.
State Pension Credit Bill (HL), 2R (25.03.02) 628–9, 631–2, 660–4
Questions
Armed forces, Injuries 315–6w
Developing countries, Disabled 873–4w
Employers' Forum on Disability 431–2w
Employment, Disabled 415–6w
Hospital beds 299
Incapacity benefit 641–2w
Maintenance, Children 996w
National Savings and Investments, Administrative delays 854w
New deal for disabled people 643w
Occupational pensions 428w
Pension Service 650w
Pensions 13w, 645–7w
Pensions, Carers 641w
Pensions, Foster care 640w
Pensions, Industrial disputes 89w
Privatisation, Pension rights 88–9w
Quarantine, Animal welfare 374w
State retirement pensions 145w

Botswana
National parks 203w

Bottomley, Peter
Debates etc.
Maharaj, Krishna (26.03.02) 781–5
Members' interests (26.03.02) 716
Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, Addresses to the Crown (03.04.02) 824
Questions
Dizaei, Ali 480w
Elections, Northern Ireland 288

Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Questions
Mental health review tribunals 924–5w
Zambia, Overseas aid 873w

Bovine spongiform encephalopathy
Sheep 257w

Bovine tuberculosis
Disease control 502–3w

Bradford
Sportsgrounds 671w, 904w, 967w

***Bradley, Rt Hon Keith**, Minister of State, Home Office*
Questions
Anti-Terrorism Crime and Security Act 2001 482w
Miscarriages of justice 279–80w
Trials 406w

Bradley, Peter
Questions
Parliamentary procedure 186–7w

***Bradshaw, Mr Ben**, Parliamentary Secretary, Foreign and Commonwealth Office*
Questions
Afghanistan, Detainees 609w, 809w
Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention 51w
Bleach, Peter 612w
British overseas territories 386w
Burma 811–2w
Burma, Asylum 810–1w
Cendent Relocation (UK), Foreign and Commonwealth Office 805w
Chemical and biological warfare 607–8w
Discrimination, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 511w
Entry clearances, Applications 599–606w
Festivals and special occasions, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 510–1w
Flexible working, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 197–8w
Higher civil servants, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 609w
India, Religious freedom 810w
India, UN Security Council 52–3w
Indian subcontinent, Nuclear weapons 196w
Iraq 385w
Iraq, Armed conflict 613w
Iraq, Politics and government 50–1w
Iraq, Terrorism 385w
Iraq, Weapons 196w, 319w
Israel 805w
Israel, Children 384w
Jeans, Simon 195w
Manpower, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 382–3w, 607w
Middle East, Armed conflict 608w
Middle East, Peace negotiations 196w, 384–5w
Nepal 51w
Nurseries, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 610w
Palestinians, International assistance 384w
Parental leave, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 384w
Prisoners, France 194w
Public appointments, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 381–2w
Recruitment, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 45–50w, 382w
St Helena 387w, 808w
Sinnot, Lionel Peter 808w
Stillman, Ian 51–2w, 510w
Territorial Army, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 382w
Terrorism, EC action 383w
Uddin, Jamal 386w
USA 808–9w
Vietnam, Religious freedom 810w
Zimbabwe, Overseas residence 611w

Brady, Mr Graham
Debates etc.
Education (21.03.02) 479, 497, 529–33

***Brady, Mr Graham**—continued*
Questions
Boarding schools, Inspections 1038w
Business questions 440–1
Foreign workers, Private education 279w
Learning and skills councils, Public appointments 108w
Schools, Playing fields 248w
Timetabling of bills 168

Brake, Tom
Questions
Air traffic control, Prestwick 668w
Contracts, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 976w
Health and Safety Executive, Contracts 976w
Land use, Greater London 669–70w
London Underground, Public private partnerships 349w, 945–8w
Navigation, River Humber 666–7w
Ports, Safety 666–7w
Privatisation 962w
Research, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 40–1w, 667w, 976w
Swanwick Air Traffic Control Centre 941–2w

Brazier, Mr Julian
Debates etc.
Adoption and Children Bill, Programme motion and Rep (20.03.02) 380–3, 391–2, 396, 399–402
Railtrack (25.03.02) 593

Breast cancer
Epping 158–9w
North West region 922w

Breed, Mr Colin
Questions
Agricultural products, Prices 114–6w
Animal feed, Imports 118–9w
Complaints, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 122w
EC law, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 1023w
Genetically modified organisms, Crops 707w
Means tested benefits 1011–2w
Winter fuel payments 150w

Brennan, Kevin
Debates etc.
Adoption and Children Bill, Programme motion and Rep (20.03.02) 385
State Pension Credit Bill (HL), 2R (25.03.02) 605, 609, 625, 651–3
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Parliamentary questions (21.03.02) 149wh, 155–9wh, 166wh
Questions
Industry, Higher education 453w
Voting behaviour 560–1

Brent
Transport 966–7w

Brighton Healthcare NHS Trust
Cancer 1049w

Bristol
Drugs 407–8w

British citizenship
(26.03.02) 768–72

British overseas territories
315w, 386w
Armed forces 551w

British Petroleum
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 671w
Dept of Trade and Industry 799–800w

***British Petroleum**—continued*
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 807w
Treasury 746w

British Transport Police
Arrest warrants 660w
Manpower 659–60w

British Underwater Test and Evaluation Centre
see Underwater Test and Evaluation Centre

Brixham
Rescue services 39–40w

Broadband
88w, 419–22, 454–5w, 696–7w
Monmouthshire 798–9w
Small businesses 87–8w

Broadcasting programmes
555–6

Broadspring Wood
Highways Agency 32w

Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Debates etc.
Education (21.03.02) 518
State Pension Credit Bill (HL), 2R (25.03.02) 625–6
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Parliamentary questions (21.03.02) 150wh, 159–61wh
Questions
Antisocial behaviour orders 279w
Crime and disorder partnerships 277–8w
Dental services, Dorset 911w
Prisoners, Courts martial 472w

***Brown, Rt Hon Gordon**, Chancellor of the Exchequer*
Questions
Corporation tax 750w
EC Finance Council 743–4w

***Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas**, Minister for Work, Department for Work and Pensions*
Questions
Advertising, Dept for Work and Pensions 149w, 423–4w
Employment, Discrimination 1005–6w
Empty property, Dept for Work and Pensions 637w
Energy, Dept for Work and Pensions 987w
Eyesight, Dept for Work and Pensions 637–8w
Incapacity benefit 641–2w
Incapacity benefit, Medical examinations 416–8w
Industrial injuries disablement benefit, Asbestos 429w
Information officers, Dept for Work and Pensions 418w
Jobcentre Plus, Closed circuit television 151–2w
Jobcentre Plus, Crimes of violence 148w
Jobcentre Plus, Industrial disputes 418–9w
Jobcentre Plus, Security 148w
Jobcentre Plus, Working conditions 419w
Jobcentres, Crimes of violence 148w
Legal costs, Dept for Work and Pensions 425w
Long term unemployed, Literacy 637w
New deal for disabled people 643w
New deal for long term unemployed, Vocational training 985w
New deal for young people 987w, 990w, 992w
New deal schemes 148–9w, 425–6w
New deal schemes, Paisley 989–90w
Occupational pensions 428w, 1002w

Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas—continued
Occupational pensions, Accountancy 650w
Older workers 643–4w
Older workers, Dept for Work and Pensions 427w
Older workers, Lanarkshire 427w
Parental leave, Dept for Work and Pensions 638w
Pension Service 649–50w
Pensioners, Income 1003–4w
Pensioners, Income support 426w, 642–3w, 986w, 988w, 991w
Pensioners, Means tested benefits 990w
Pensioners, Tooting 418w
Pensioners, Winter fuel payments 1004w
Pensions 644–5w, 1003w, 1011w
Poverty 1006–12w
Private finance initiative, Dept for Work and Pensions 142–3w
Redundancy, Aviation 634w
Social Security Benefits Agency, Slough 990w
Social Security Contributions Agency, Computers 738w
State retirement pensions 647w, 1003w, 1005w
State second pension 993w
Winter fuel payments, Telford 991w

Browne, Mr Desmond
Questions
Bloody Sunday Tribunal of Inquiry 787w
Bloody Sunday Tribunal of Inquiry, Costs 787–8w
Elections, Northern Ireland 287–8, 336–7w
Police, Northern Ireland 537w
Terrorism, Northern Ireland 337–8w
Victims' Liaison Unit 336w

Browning, Mrs Angela
Debates etc.
Aerials (26.03.02) 734–9
Barcelona Summit (EC) (18.03.02) 30
Easter adjournment debate intervention (26.03.02) 727–8
Hunting (18.03.02) 59, 66
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Dunkeswell airfield (19.03.02) 50–3wh, 55wh
Questions
Veal 124w

Bruce, Malcolm
Questions
Air pollution 715w
Brucellosis, Disease control 729–30w
Electronic government 790w
Environment protection 267w, 721w
Foot and mouth disease, Cumbria 710w
Foot and mouth disease, Disease control 128–9w
Foot and mouth disease, North Yorkshire 730–1w
Hazardous materials, Industrial health and safety 835w
Hazardous materials, Pollution control 1021w
International Conference on Financing for Development 870–1w
Livestock, Transport 830–1w
Meat, Imports 119–20w
Military exercises, Eskmeals 445–6w
Overseas aid 469–70w, 832–3w
Packaging, EC law 1022w
Pollution control 825–6w
Rural areas, Employment 713–4w
Rural areas, Tourism 378w, 835–6w
Rural areas, Transport 24–5w
Soil, Surveys 724w
Sustainable development 721–2w
Uranium 312–3w

Bruce, Malcolm—continued
Waste disposal, EC law 708–9w
Wood, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 391w
Wood, Dept for International Development 203–4w
Wood, Dept of Trade and Industry 361–2w
Wood, Treasury 331w

Brucellosis
Disease control 729–30w

Bryant, Mr Chris
Debates etc.
Oral question time intervention (25.03.02) 555
Questions
Digital broadcasting 547
House of Lords, Reform 163–4

Buck, Ms Karen
Questions
Children, Day care 624–30w
Greater London Authority, Transport 348w
Neighbourhood management pathfinders programme 666w
Revenue support grant, City of Westminster 220–2w

Buckingham
Active Community Unit 477–8w
Degrees 105w
Disabled 525–6w
Experience Corps 405–6w, 592–3w
Regional assistance 81–4w

Buckinghamshire
Dogs 123w
Emergency calls 227w
Fire services 226w
Fire stations 27w
Fires 27w
Historic buildings 569–70w
Railways (26.03.02) 751–6

Burden, Richard
Questions
Israel 805w
Israel, Children 384w
Middle East, Armed conflict 608w
Sudan, Armed conflict 196–7w

Burglar alarms
477w

Burgon, Colin
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Parish councils (19.03.02) 17–8wh
Questions
Radioactive wastes, Irish Sea 372w
Sports, Government assistance 301
Terrorism 57w

Burma
811–2w
Asylum 810–1w
Overseas aid 864w

Burnett, Mr John
Debates etc.
Agriculture, Somerset (25.03.02) 683
Questions
Ash Moor, Environmental impact assessment 1021w
Public Guardianship Office, Fees and charges 1032–3w

Burnham, Andy
Questions
Industrial diseases, Compensation 799w
National Lottery 555
Rugby 565w

Burns, Mr Simon
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Walsgrave Hospital (20.03.02) 88–91wh

Burns, Mr Simon—continued
Questions
Acute beds 1037w
Hearing aids 697–8
Hospital beds, Barrow in Furness 785–6w
Institutional care, Barrow in Furness 767w
Institutional care, Fees and charges 786w
Institutional care, Greater London 307w
Maintenance, Children 996w
Members, Correspondence 442w
Ministers, Codes of practice 1w

Burnside, David
Debates etc.
Consignia (25.03.02) 578–9
Members' interests (26.03.02) 714–5
Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, Addresses to the Crown (03.04.02) 822–3
Questions
Drugs, Northern Ireland 333w

Burstow, Mr Paul
Debates etc.
Age Discrimination Bill, 1R (19.03.02) 172–4
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Age, Discrimination (20.03.02) 102–5wh, 107wh, 109wh, 114wh
Questions
Age, Discrimination 526w
Drugs, Side effects 1039–40w
Family practitioner services 926–8w
Government Office for London, Manpower 293–4w
Home care services 930–2w
Home care services, Elderly 936w
Home energy efficiency scheme 828w
Hospital beds 158w, 693
Hospitals, Admissions 172–3w
Institutional care 308w, 530–1w, 920w
Institutional care, Construction 307w
Institutional care, Fees and charges 170–1w, 308w, 536w, 935–6w
Institutional care, Nurses 308w
Institutional care, Standards 169w, 307–8w, 936w
Institutional care, Young people 170w
Manpower, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 568w
Manpower, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 267w
Manpower, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 18w
Manpower, Dept of Health 297w
Manpower, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 382–3w
Manpower, Lord Chancellor's Dept 526–7w
Medical profession, Foreign workers 161w
Mentally incapacitated, Protection 936w
National vocational qualifications, Grants 896–7w
NHS, Fees and charges 931w
NHS, Recruitment 161w
Nurses, Recruitment 925–6w
Older workers, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 387w
Pharmacy, Elderly 935w
Social services, Codes of practice 935w
Technology Advisory Group 433–4w
Written questions, Dept of Health 173–4w, 442w

Burt, Alistair
Debates etc.
Education (19.03.02) 220–4, (21.03.02) 481–91, 498
Questions
Higher education, Finance 633–4w
National Lottery 561w

Burt, Alistair—continued
Yarls Wood Detention Centre, Bedfordshire Police 480w
Yarls Wood Detention Centre, Civil disorder 1064w
Yarls Wood Detention Centre, Insurance 281w, 479–80w

Burundi
Overseas aid 202w

Bus lanes
M4 957w

Bus services
Crimes of violence 358–9w

Buses
Insurance 744–5w

Business
Regulation 738w

Business links
Telephone services 704–5w

Business motions
(18.03.02) 50–1, (19.03.02) 275

Business plans
Criminal Records Bureau 598w
NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency 933w
United Kingdom Passport Agency 597w

Business statements
433–45

Byers, Rt Hon Stephen, Secretary of State for Transport Local Government and the Regions
Debates etc.
Railtrack, Ministerial statements (25.03.02) 581–95
Questions
British Transport Police, Manpower 659–60w
Civil servants, Disciplinary proceedings 23w
Civil servants, Resignations 979w
Council housing, Empty property 492w
Disclosure of information, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 653w, 975w
Electoral systems 23w
European Parliament, Electoral systems 23w
Fire services 238–40w
Global Crossing 488w
Heathrow Airport, Railway network 657w, 945w
Homelessness 492–3w
Information officers, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 217–8w, 483–4w, 979w
Jones, Ian 652w, 980w
Local government finance 237w
M4 672w
Management consultants, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 345w
Moore, Jo 979w
Multiple occupation 236w
National Air Traffic Services, Finance 351w
Office of the Rail Regulator 20w, 653w
Official engagements, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 976w
Planning, Inquiries 970–1w
Railtrack 485–6w
Railtrack, Finance 486–7w, 654–5w
Railways 659w
Railways, Finance 233–5w, 486w
Railways, Franchises 952w
Speed limits, Cameras 677w
Sportsgrounds, Bradford 671w, 967w

Byers, Rt Hon Stephen—continued
Sportsgrounds, Planning permission 671w
Starter home initiative 972–3w
Strategic Rail Authority 653w
Strategic Rail Authority, Assets 20w
Tinsley Viaduct 655–6w
Wembley Park Station, Repairs and maintenance 235–6w
West coast railway line 657w

Cabinet Office
Accountancy 589w
Advertising 587w
Bloody Sunday Tribunal of Inquiry 822w
Catering 496w
Consultants 815–6w, 818w
Contracts 817–20w
Disclosure of information 821–2w
Discrimination 581–2w
EC law 496–7w
Employment tribunals 292–3w
Energy 495w
Equipment 588w
Fair trade initiative 430w
Flexible working 74w
Hotels 497w
Human rights 583w
Information officers 816–7w
Legal costs 495–6w
Manpower 293w
Ministerial policy advisors 819–21w
Nurseries 820–2w
Open government 821w
Parental leave 582w
Private finance initiative 820w
Public appointments 584–7w
Public private partnerships 583w
Public relations 587–9w
Publicity 587–8w
Railways 430w
Recruitment 292w
Secondment 582w
Standards 494–5w
Theft 583w

Cable, Mr Vincent
Debates etc.
Consignia (25.03.02) 570–1
Questions
Arms trade 9
Conditions of employment 418–9
Contracts, Cabinet Office 820w
Contracts, Dept for International Development 16–7w
Contracts, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 609w
Contracts, Treasury 214w
Devereux, Nigel 457w
Eyesight, Dept for Work and Pensions 637–8w
Methicillin resistant staphylococcus aureus 907w
National Physical Laboratory 795w
Planning (Hazardous Substances) Act 1990, Appeals 38w
Post offices, Rural areas 88w
Postal services, Licensing 246w
Secondment, Cabinet Office 582w
Working hours, Scotland Office 465–6w

Caborn, Rt Hon Richard, Minister of State for Sport, Dept for Culture Media and Sport
Sittings in Westminster Hall—
USA, Terrorism (19.03.02) 69–72wh
Questions
Bisham Abbey National Sports Centre 575–6w
Commonwealth Games, Manchester 41–2w
Community Fund 43w

Caborn, Rt Hon Richard—continued
Correspondence, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 574w
EC law, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 198w
Football 565–6w
Gambling 549–50
Hyde Park, Festivals and special occasions 388w
Leisure facilities 575w
Licensing laws 394w
National Lottery 43–4w, 554, 561–3w
National Lottery, Barrow in Furness 906w
National Lottery, Grants 199w
National Lottery, Sales 561w
National Lottery, Tewkesbury 562–3w
Playgrounds, Safety 40w
Rugby 565w
Scottish Land Fund 577–80w
Sports 43w
Sports, Clubs 564–5w
Sports, Facilities 43w
Sports, Finance 198–9w
Sports, Publicity 566w
Sports, Schools 905w
Sports, Voluntary work 567–8w
Sportsgrounds, Bradford 904w
Swimming 579w
Wembley Stadium 573w
Wembley Stadium, Finance 572–3w

Cairns, David
Debates etc.
State Pension Credit Bill (HL), 2R (25.03.02) 606, 611, 645, 650, 655–7
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Downie, Gordon (20.03.02) 131–3wh
Questions
Guardians' allowances 986w
Organised crime, Northern Ireland 335w
Select committees 165–6
Social security benefits, Standards 984–6w
Type 45 destroyers 59–60w

Calton, Mrs Patsy
Questions
Breast cancer, North West region 922w
Health services, Elderly 308–9w
Local government, Ringfenced funding 222w
Mobile homes 38w
Social services, Elderly 174w
Stepping Hill Hospital, Hearing aids 916w
Transport, Manchester 672w

Cambridge
Museums and galleries 564w

Cambridgeshire
Day care 629w

Cameras
Speed limits 677w, 975–6w, 981–2w

Cameron, Mr David
Debates etc.
Hunting, Points of order (21.03.02) 471–2
Morgan, Gerard, Petitions (25.03.02) 677
Railtrack (25.03.02) 595
Questions
Air force, Manpower 5
Judiciary, Complaints 837w
Solicitors 527w
Solicitors, Complaints 527w

Campbell, Mrs Anne
Questions
Burma, Asylum 810–1w
Children, Day care 629w
Museums and galleries, Cambridge 564w

Campbell, Mr Gregory
Debates etc.
Members' interests (26.03.02) 713–4

Campbell, Mr Gregory—continued
Questions
Terrorism, Northern Ireland 293

Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies
Debates etc.
Afghanistan, Armed conflict (20.03.02) 345–8, 372
Chinook helicopters (19.03.02) 239, 250–3
Zimbabwe (21.03.02) 450–1
Questions
Iraq, Weapons 613w
Theft, Cabinet Office 583w
Theft, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 42w, 395w
Theft, Dept for Education and Skills 341w, 501–2w
Theft, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 379–80w
Theft, Dept for International Development 16w
Theft, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 38w, 345w
Theft, Dept for Work and Pensions 154–5w, 416w
Theft, Dept of Health 1051w
Theft, Dept of Trade and Industry 246–7w, 363–6w
Theft, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 50w, 385–6w
Theft, Home Office 274w
Theft, Ministry of Defence 71w, 319w
Theft, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 2w, 321w
Theft, Scotland Office 53w, 387w
Theft, Solicitor-General 543–4w
Theft, Treasury 12w, 325w
Wild ducks 121–2w

Campbell, Mr Ronnie
Debates etc.
Afghanistan, Armed conflict (20.03.02) 336, 348–9
Hunting (18.03.02) 55

Cancer
Brighton Healthcare NHS Trust 1049w
Essex 908w
Health education 157w
Medical treatments 306–7w
Waiting lists 908–9w
Worthing and Southlands Hospitals NHS Trust 1049w

Cannabis
92w
Health hazards 436w

Capita
Dept for Education and Skills 247w
Dept of Health 434w
Home Office 98w, 275w
Scotland Office 859w

Capital allowances
Small businesses 745w

Capital punishment
World War I 16–7

Carbon dioxide
Pollution control 705w

Care Standards Act 2000
Questions
157–8w, 766–7w

Career structure
Doctors 759w

Carers
Pensions 641w

Carmichael, Mr Alistair
Questions
Carbon dioxide, Pollution control 705w

Carmichael, Mr Alistair—continued
Cost effectiveness, Advocate General for Scotland 179w
Crew relief costs scheme 348w
Radioactive wastes, Storage 791w
Shipping, Conditions of employment 346w
Shipping, EC grants and loans 347w, 941w
Shipping, Government assistance 347–8w, 940w
Shipping, Tax allowances 348w, 854w
Shipping, Training 345w, 940w
Shipping, Work permits 598w
Terrorism 58w

Cars
Theft (20.03.02) 116–22wh

Casale, Roger
Questions
EC Finance Council 743–4w
NHS, Accountability 908w

Cash, Mr William
Questions
Magistrates, Manpower 159–60

Cash incentive scheme
Council housing 971w

Castlereagh
Theft 306–14, 338w

Catering
Cabinet Office 496w
Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 1023w
Dept of Health 297w
Solicitor-General 516w

Caton, Mr Martin
Questions
Asylum, Appeals 410w
Cuba, Overseas aid 17w
Shellfish, Compensation 126w
Shellfish, Poisoning 126w

Cawsey, Mr Ian
Debates etc.
Hunting (18.03.02) 84, 111–4
Questions
Future of Farming and Food Policy Commission 835w
Iron and steel, USA 423–4

Cellular phone masts
see Aerials

Cellular phones
Driving 359–60w
Scotland Office 465w

Cendent Relocation (UK)
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 805w

Census
Birmingham 186w
Public Record Office 186w, 411–2w, 836w

Central America
Exports 366w

Central Asia
Drugs 609–10w

Central Data Management Authority
548w

Central Government Audit and Accountability Review
211–2w

Central Office of Information
Advertising 431w

Central Railway
227–8w, 948w

Central Railway—continued
Freight 658–9w

Centre for Management and Policy Studies
Manpower 495w

Cereals
373w
Disease control 117w

Certification
Construction 694w

Cervical cancer
Screening 165w

Challen, Mr Colin
Debates etc.
Hunting (18.03.02) 57, 72

Chancellor of the Exchequer
see Treasury

Channel tunnel
Freight 229w, 659w, 951w
Illegal immigrants 96–7w

Chapman, Mr Ben
Questions
Clergy, Conditions of employment 580w
Climate Change Convention 714w
Elections, Northern Ireland 336–7w
Magistrates, Social class 412w
Passenger transport executives, Allowances 660w
Public transport 348–9w
Times of sittings 189w
Zimbabwe 510w

Chapman, Sir Sydney
Questions
Clergy, Pay 562
Edgware Hospital 700
National Lottery 551–2

Charities
Human Rights Act 1998 1060w
Proscribed organisations 596w

Chaytor, Mr David
Debates etc.
Education (19.03.02) 181–2, 191, 193–4
Questions
Commonwealth Games, Police 1058–9w
Iraq, Politics and government 50–1w
Redundancy, Aviation 634w

Chemical and biological warfare
607–8w
Research 443–4w, 550w

"Chemical Defence Establishment Technical Paper 137"
314w

Chemical weapons
842–3w
Baltic sea 70w
World War II 69–70w

Cheshire
Endometriosis 1053w

Chief of Defence Logistics
see Defence Logistics Organisation

Child benefit
Complaints 1000w
Washington Tyne and Wear 1000w

Child Support Agency
994w
Departmental responsibilities 996w
Ministerial statements (20.03.02) 315–24

Children
Abuse 838–9w
Day care 624–30w
Health services 1046–7w

Children—continued
Homicide 295, 839w
Hospitals 764w
Israel 384w
Maintenance 992w, 994–6w
Poverty 329w, 983w
Protection 291–2w

Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service
621w, 840w
Information technology 621–2w
Standards 183w

Children in care
General certificate of secondary education 436w
Offences against children 481–2w

Children's tax credit
741w

Chinese community
Barnet Primary Care Trust 780w

Chinook helicopters
Accidents 1016w
Inquiries 851w
Opposition days (19.03.02) 235–73

Chiropody
Portsmouth and South East Hampshire Health Authority 762–3w

Chope, Mr Christopher
Debates etc.
Railtrack (25.03.02) 587
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Parish councils (19.03.02) 4wh, 16–7wh
Parliamentary questions (21.03.02) 139wh, 141–6wh, 156–7wh, 177–8wh, 180wh
Questions
Annuities 746w
Council housing, Standards 662–3w
Early retirement, Ministry of Defence 546w
Equitable Life Assurance Society 212w, 746–7w
Equitable Life Independent Inquiry 747w
Incapacity benefit, Appeals 146–8w
Incapacity benefit, Medical examinations 416–8w
Internet, Treasury 733w
Manpower, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 267w
Manpower, Dept of Health 295w
Ministers, Codes of practice 1w
NHS, Email 435w
Pensioners, Income support 153w
Public expenditure 751w
Road traffic 672w
Roads, Accidents 285w
Schools, Buildings 630w
Social rented housing, Standards 663w
Teachers, Manpower 632w
Transport 955w

Chronic fatigue syndrome
Medical treatments 919w

Church of England
Discrimination 558
Ethnic groups 471w

Churches
(26.03.02) 726–30
Repairs and maintenance 559
VAT 581w

Circulars
Dept for Education and Skills 624w
Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 824w
Education 106–7w
Learning and Skills Council for England 107–8w

Citizens' advice bureaux
Human Rights Act 1998 1060w

City of London Corporation
Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 112w

City of London (Ward Elections) Bill 1998/99
Debates etc.
Order for further consideration read (21.03.02) 415, (26.03.02) 685

City of Westminster
Revenue support grant 220–2w

Civil defence
581w, 960–1w
Bedfordshire 582w
Finance 812–5w
Local authorities 679w
Northern Ireland 211w

Civil Defence (Grant) Act 2002
Questions
582w

Civil disorder
Yarls Wood Detention Centre 1064w

Civil Jurisdiction and Judgments Act 1982
Questions
180–1w

Civil proceedings
Legal aid scheme 650–1w
Legal representation 621w

Civil servants
Disciplinary proceedings 23w
Political impartiality 449w
Resignations 979w
Sick leave 432–3w
Treasury 213w

Civil service agencies
Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 833–4w
South West region 961w
Telecommunications 961w

Claims Direct
Inquiries 458–9w

Clapham, Mr Michael
Questions
Afghanistan, Peace keeping operations 8

Clappison, Mr James
Questions
Children's tax credit 741w
Jobcentre Plus, Closed circuit television 151–2w
New deal schemes 148–9w
Post offices 422
Poverty, Children 983w
Working families tax credit 740w
Working families tax credit, Abuse 852–3w

Clark, Mrs Helen
Questions
Departmental reorganisation, Dept for Work and Pensions 239–41w
Folic acid 162–3w
Institutional care, Fees and charges 157–8w
New deal schemes 425–6w
Sexual offences, Probation and aftercare 283–4w
Vitamin B12 163–4w

Clark, Dr Lynda, Advocate General for Scotland
Questions
Cost effectiveness, Advocate General for Scotland 179w

Clark, Dr Lynda—continued
Devolution, Scotland 156–7
Inland Revenue 157–8
Nuclear power stations, Scotland 680–1w

Clark, Paul
Questions
Tourism, Euro 566w

Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth
Debates etc.
Barcelona Summit (EC) (18.03.02) 27–8
Hunting (18.03.02) 84–7

Clarke, Rt Hon Tom
Questions
Disabled, Human rights 885w

Clarke, Mr Tony
Debates etc.
Consignia (25.03.02) 571–2
Questions
Organised crime, Northern Ireland 335w
Terrorism, Northern Ireland 292–3

Class sizes
Primary education 100–4w

Clergy
Conditions of employment 580w
Finance 580–1w
Pay 562
Pensions 580w

Cleveland Constabulary
Inquiries 477w

Clifton-Brown, Mr Geoffrey
Debates etc.
Hunting (18.03.02) 117, 119–21
Questions
Air traffic control 230w
Electoral register 858w, 962w
Excise duties, Petrol alternatives 1034w
Exhaust emissions 958–9w
Government Car and Despatch Agency, Petrol 817w
National Air Traffic Services, Computers 232–3w
National Air Traffic Services, Industrial health and safety 232w
National Air Traffic Services, Interest charges 232w
National Lottery 551
Petrol alternatives 957–8w
Roads, Noise 959–60w
Swanwick Air Traffic Control Centre 231w
Written questions, Administrative delays 39w

Climate Change Convention
714w
Commonwealth Heads of Government Conference 323–4w

Climate change levy
Manufacturing industries 456w

Closed circuit television
Jobcentre Plus 151–2w

Clothing
USA 455w

Clubs
Sports 564–5w

Clwyd
Pensioners 986w

Clwyd, Ann
Questions
Coalfields Regeneration Trust, Cynon Valley 614w
Disadvantaged, Cynon Valley 320w
MMR vaccine, Cynon Valley 442w
Yusufeli dam 80–1w

Clyde Shipyards Task Force
176–7w

Coaker Mr Vernon
Questions
Construction, Self-employed 746w
Equal Pay Act 1970 460w
Habitual offenders, Sentencing 299
Overseas residence, Zimbabwe 996–8w
Post offices 454w
Social workers 919–20w
Young offenders, Police custody 414w, 622–3w

Coal
Pollution control 455w

Coal Industry Social Welfare Organisation
793w

Coalfields Regeneration Trust
Cynon Valley 614w
Merseyside 40w

Coffey, Ms Ann
Questions
Armed forces, North West region 18–9
Criminal Records Bureau, Business plans 598w
United Kingdom Passport Agency, Business plans 597w

Cohen, Harry
Questions
Arms trade, Corruption 451w
Breast cancer, Epping 158–9w
British Transport Police, Arrest warrants 660w
Contraceptives 779–80w
Defence, Israel 448w
Industrial injuries, Greater London 970w

Colchester
Military bases 557w

Coleman, Mr Iain
Questions
Asylum, Voucher schemes 594–5w
Council housing, Rents 28w

Colerne airfield
70–1w

Collins, Mr Tim
Questions
Ministerial policy advisors, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 383w
Visits abroad, Treasury 734w

Colman, Mr Tony
Questions
Gas and Electricity Markets Authority, Public appointments 681–2w
Members, Correspondence 1060w

Commemorative coins
Queen Elizabeth II 571w

Commission for Racial Equality
Public appointments 411w

Commission on Future of Farming and Food
see Future of Farming and Food Policy Commission

Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis
288w

Committee Examining Radiation Risks of Internal Emitters
370w

Committee on Safety of Medicines
Appeals 296w

Commodities
Developing countries 866–7w

Common agricultural policy
Reform 715–6w

Common customs tariffs
696w

Common fisheries policy
Corruption 15w
Reform 715–6w

Common land
Access 377–8w

Commonwealth
Overseas aid 874–6w

Commonwealth Development Corporation
201–2w
Public private partnerships 865w

Commonwealth Games
Manchester 41–2w, 1058–9w
Police 1058–9w

Commonwealth Heads of Government Conference
Climate Change Convention 323–4w

Communications Bill (Draft)
Questions
509w

Community care
440w
Mentally ill 528–9w

Community development
451w

Community Fund
43w

Community health services
915–6w

Community hospitals
306w, 938w

Community Legal Service
Disadvantaged 182w
North West region 72–3w

Community police consultative groups
481w

Community Punishment and Rehabilitation Service
see National Probation Service for England and Wales

Community service orders
Enforcement 413–4w

Companies (Competent Authority) (Fees) Regulations 2002
Debates etc.
(19.03.02) 274

Companies House
Standards 800w

Companies (Particulars of Usual Residential Address) (Confidentiality Orders) Regulations 2002
Debates etc.
(19.03.02) 275

Company law
695w

Company liquidations
Astra Windows 801w

Competition
Legal profession 160–1
Postal services 361w, 797w
Water supply 262–4w

Competition Act 1998
Questions
572w

Compost
Greater Manchester 707w

Comptroller and Auditor General
see National Audit Office

Compulsorily detained mental patients
775w

Compulsory purchase
Torquay 272w

Computers
Ministry of Defence 847w
National Air Traffic Services 232–3w
Social Security Contributions Agency 738w

Computers within reach programme
254–5w

Conditions of employment
297, 417–9
Clergy 580w
Shipping 346w

Confectionery
Packaging 371w

Congo (Kinshasa)
see Democratic Republic of Congo

Connarty, Mr Michael
Questions
Companies House, Standards 800w
Maintenance, Scottish courts 180–1w
Terrorism, Northern Ireland 337w
Winter fuel payments, Scotland 176w

Connexions Service
Standards 896w

Conservation
Birds 125–6w
Energy 141w
Whales 728w

Consignia
794w
Ministerial statements (25.03.02) 565–80
Profits 793–4w

Consolidated Fund (No 2) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
Royal Assent (19.03.02) 149

Constituencies
Shropshire 842w

Consultants
Cabinet Office 815–6w, 818w
Defence Evaluation and Research Agency 547w
Dept of Health 1045w
Education 895w
Government departments 816w
Hospitals (20.03.02) 409–14, 761–2w, 764–5w, 916w
NHS 303
Prime Minister 883w
Scotland Office 861w
Swindon and Marlborough NHS Trust 1040w
Treasury 733w

Consumers
Protection 795w

Contact orders
183w

Contamination
Hospitals 532–3w

Contraceptives
779–80w

Contracts
Cabinet Office 817–20w
Dept for Culture Media and Sport 390w
Dept for International Development 16–7w
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 976w
Dept of Trade and Industry 84w

Contracts—continued
Electronic government 214–6w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 383–4w, 511–2w, 609w
Health and Safety Executive 976w
Local authorities 672w
Ministry of Defence 1019w
Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 321–2w
Treasury 214w

Contributions Agency
see Social Security Contributions Agency

Convention on the Future of Europe
Expenditure 193w
Scotland 152–5

Cook, Frank
Debates etc.
Chinook helicopters (19.03.02) 242
Questions
Cleveland Constabulary, Inquiries 477w
Mines, Falkland Islands 806–7w
Mines, Transport 806w

Cook, Rt Hon Robin, President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons
Debates etc.
Business statements, Points of order (21.03.02) 471
Members' interests (26.03.02) 709, 711
Questions
Business statements 433–45
Correspondence, President of the Council 863w
Crimes against property, President of the Council 512w
Discrimination, President of the Council 513w
EC law, President of the Council 512w
Energy, President of the Council 513–4w
Equal pay, President of the Council 862w
Equipment, President of the Council 189w
Flexible working, President of the Council 615w
Government bills 514w
Hotels, President of the Council 189w
House of Commons, Reform 615w
House of Commons sessional orders, Road traffic 188w
House of Lords, Reform 163–5, 187–8w
Human rights, President of the Council 512–3w
Manpower, President of the Council 188w
New deal schemes, President of the Council 862–3w
Nurseries, President of the Council 512w
Parental leave, President of the Council 615w
Parliament, Visits 863w
Relocation services, President of the Council 189w
Select committees 165–8
Standards, President of the Council 512w

Cooper, Ms Yvette, Parliamentary Secretary, Dept of Health
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Walsgrave Hospital (20.03.02) 91–3wh
Questions
Bladder cancer 534–5w
Blood, Donors 765w, 929w
Breast cancer, Epping 158–9w
Cancer, Health education 157w
Cancer, Waiting lists 908–9w
Cervical cancer, Screening 165w
Contraceptives 779–80w
Coventry Warwickshire Herefordshire and Worcestershire Health Authority, Public appointments 755w

Cooper, Ms Yvette—continued
Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, Risk assessment 1046w
Dental services, Leicestershire 910–1w
EC law, Dept of Health 159–60w
Endometriosis 1052–3w
Endometriosis, Cheshire 1053w
Folic acid 162–3w
Folic acid, Flour 921w
Fruit, Schools 910w
Homeopathy 160–1w
Hospices 533–4w
Hospitals, Children 764w
Hospitals, Travel 440w
Leukaemia, Drugs 160w, 295–6w
Leukaemia, Medical treatments 533w
Leukaemia, Transplant surgery 767–8w
Maternity services 440w, 528w, 688–90, 775–6w
Maternity services, Liverpool 1046w
Members, Correspondence 536w
Methicillin resistant staphylococcus aureus 907w
MMR vaccine 441–2w
MMR vaccine, Side effects 162w
National Radiological Protection Board 436–7w
NHS, Finance 909w
NHS trusts, Screening 922–4w
Perinatal mortality 915w
Respiratory syncytial virus 768w
Roads, Accidents 161w
Slaughterhouses 766w
Slaughterhouses, Location 731w
Smoking 702
Tuberculosis, Vaccination 433w
Vitamin B12 163–4w
Written questions, Administrative delays 165w
Written questions, Dept of Health 173–4w

Corbyn, Jeremy
Debates etc.
Afghanistan, Armed conflict (20.03.02) 339
Questions
St Bartholomew's Hospital, Accident and emergency departments 762w

Cormack, Sir Patrick
Debates etc.
Consignia (25.03.02) 580
Hunting (18.03.02) 81–2
Oral question time intervention (26.03.02) 701
Oral questions, Points of order (26.03.02) 704
Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, Addresses to the Crown (03.04.02) 813–4
Questions
Voting rights, Young people 558

Cornish language
225w

Cornwall
EC grants and loans 268w
Seasonal workers 284–5w

Corporate manslaughter
(19.03.02) 277–86

Corporation tax
750w

Corruption
Arms trade 451w
Common fisheries policy 15w

Corston, Jean
Questions
Elections, Northern Ireland 336–7w
Film 391w

Cosmetics
EC action (18.03.02) 140–1

Cotter, Brian
Debates etc.
Barcelona Summit (EC) (18.03.02) 36
Questions
Autism 757w
Autism, Research 438w
Beer 245w
Business links, Telephone services 704–5w
Non-domestic rates 664w
Orthopaedics, Waiting lists 299–300w
Post offices 423
Post offices, Bank services 76w, 639w
Post offices, Urban areas 224–5w, 246w
Social security benefits, Automated credit transfer 638–9w

Coucher, Ian
976w

Council housing
975w
Birmingham 355w
Cash incentive scheme 971w
Empty property 492w
Finance 966w
Property transfer 222–4w, 971–2w
Rents 28w, 664w
Standards 662–3w
Tenants incentive scheme 663–4w
Walsall 22w

Council tax
(26.03.02) 742–6, 761–5
Mentally ill 639–40w
Newcastle upon Tyne 222w
Pensioners 993w

Council tax benefits
416w, 521–2w, 640w, 988–9w, 997w
Abuse 991–2w
Pensioners 982–3w

Councillors
Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 720w
Dept for International Development 471w
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 665–6w
Treasury 736w

Counterfeit manufacturing
Northern Ireland 334–5w

Countryside
Access 378w

Countryside Agency
Public appointments 1024–5w

Countryside Alliance
114w

Countryside stewardship scheme
262w

Court of Protection
Preston 179w

Courts
Closures 1033w
Northern Ireland 518w
Working hours 413w, 622w

Courts martial
60–3w
Prisoners 472w

Cousins, Mr Jim
Debates etc.
Consignia (25.03.02) 577
State Pension Credit Bill (HL), 2R (25.03.02) 615–6, 618–21, 624
Questions
Afghanistan, Detainees 609w
Alcoholism 1040–2w

Cousins, Mr Jim—continued
Annuities 420w
Arms trade 695w
Central Asia, Drugs 609–10w
Council tax, Newcastle upon Tyne 222w
Floods, Insurance 135–6w
Hospitals, Private finance initiative 531w
Identification friend foe systems 1016–7w
Invalid care allowances 152w
Noise, Pollution control 972w
Pension credit 145w, 1000w
Pensions 644–5w
Postal services, Competition 361w
Poverty 1006–12w
Shipping, Proof of identity 228–9w
State retirement pensions 1001–2w

Coventry Warwickshire Herefordshire and Worcestershire Health Authority
Public appointments 755w

Cox, Mr Tom
Questions
Asylum, Applications 594w
Badgers 1025w
Church of England, Ethnic groups 471w
Disadvantaged 213–4w
European Convention on the Exercise of Children Rights 605w
Fishing vessels 830w
Health authorities, Greater London 760w
Immobilisation of vehicles 596w
Imports, Forced labour 867w
Industrial health and safety, Agriculture 967w
Industrial injuries disablement benefit, Asbestos 429w
Metropolitan Police, Ethnic groups 593w
Metropolitan Police, Manpower 287–8w
Metropolitan Police, Racial discrimination 596w
Overseas aid 867w
Pensioners, Tooting 418w
Pensions 1003w
Prison accommodation 399w
Prisoner escapes 400w
Public appointments, Age 584w
Robbery, Firearms 593–4w
Whales, Conservation 728w

Cranston, Ross
Questions
Immigration and Nationality Directorate, Postal services 96w
Joint strike fighter aircraft 14
Mining, Subsidence 796–7w
Stop now orders 244–5w

Crausby, Mr David
Debates etc.
Magistrates' courts, Petitions (25.03.02) 676
Questions
Armed forces, Manpower 6
Exservicemen 54w

Crawley
State Veterinary Service 257w

Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease
Risk assessment 1046w

Crew relief costs scheme
348w

Crime
482–3w
Drugs 407–8w, 1059w
Firearms 399w

Crime and disorder partnerships
277–8w

Crime prevention
Greater London 289w

Crime prevention—continued
Licensed premises 93–4w
Retail trade 473–7w

Crimes against property
Dept for Culture Media and Sport 573w
Dept for International Development 883w
Dept of Trade and Industry 361w
President of the Council 512w
Treasury 744w

Crimes of violence
Bus services 358–9w
Jobcentre Plus 148w
Jobcentres 148w, 649w
Prison sentences 401w

Criminal Courts Review
886w
Magistrates' courts 180w

Criminal investigation
Insolvency Service 685–6w

Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001
Questions
Prosecutions 286w

Criminal proceedings
Young offenders 402–3w

Criminal Records Bureau
Business plans 598w
Rents 478w

Crops
Genetically modified organisms 707w, 1029w

Cryer, John
Debates etc.
Consignia (25.03.02) 574

Cuba
Overseas aid 17w

Cultural heritage
Rolling stock 949w

Cumbria
Foot and mouth disease 710w
Mountains 564w

Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack
Questions
Fisheries 127w
Pensions, Foster care 640w

Cunningham, Mr Jim
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Walsgrave Hospital (20.03.02) 73–5wh
Questions
Animal experiments 396–8w
Anti-Terrorism Crime and Security Act 2001 482w
Civil proceedings, Legal representation 621w
Disability living allowance 648w
Disability living allowance, Medical examinations 648–9w
Farms, Hedges and ditches 124–5w
Hedges and ditches 38–9w
Inland waterways 714–5w
Labelling, Animal experiments 457w
National Lottery 550–1
Pharmacy 309–10w
Recycling 269–70w
Trade, USA 455w

Cunningham, Tony
Debates etc.
Education (19.03.02) 189, 195, 218–20
Questions
Civil servants, Sick leave 432–3w
Dairy Crest 321w
Females, Employment 460w
Future of Farming and Food Policy Commission 136w

Cunningham, Tony—continued
Mountains, Cumbria 564w

Curry, Rt Hon David
Questions
Poultry, EC law 127–8w

Curtis-Thomas, Ms Claire
Questions
Armed forces, Engineers 210–1w
Armed forces, Females 210–1w
Army, Engineers 210w
Capital allowances, Small businesses 745w
Engineers, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 267w
Engineers, Dept for International Development 200–1w
Engineers, Dept of Trade and Industry 365–6w
Females, Engineering 694–5w
Further education, Engineering 100w
Higher education, Science 633w
Offences against children, Children in care 481–2w
Overseas trade, India 703w
Performance and Innovation Unit, Manpower 294w
Regulatory impact assessments 582w
Science, Professional organisations 365w
Scientists and Engineers Supply Review 212w
Small Business Service 361w
Specialist schools, Engineering 256w
Sustainable development 378–9w
Tax allowances, Pensions 330–1w
Taxation, Small businesses 734w, 741w
Teachers, Information technology 256w
Technology, Dept of Trade and Industry 458w
Women and Equality Unit, Science 429

Customs and Excise
Annual reports 745w
Newhaven 855–6w
Supply estimates 745w

Cynon Valley
Coalfields Regeneration Trust 614w
Disadvantaged 320w
MMR vaccine 442w

Cystic fibrosis
173w

Czech Republic
320–1w, 614–5w

Dairy Crest
321w

Dalyell, Mr Tam
Debates etc.
Afghanistan, Armed conflict (20.03.02) 331
Child Support Agency (20.03.02) 318
Chinook helicopters (19.03.02) 244–5, 256–7
Lockerbie, Bombings (26.03.02) 724–5
Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, Addresses to the Crown (03.04.02) 804–5
Railtrack (25.03.02) 587
Questions
Aggregates, Scotland 176w
Devolution, Scotland 156–7
Iraq, Armed conflict 324w
Smallpox, Terrorism 937w
Trade, Philippines 455–6w
Voting rights, Young people 558

Darling, Rt Hon Alistair, Secretary of State for Work and Pensions
Debates etc.
Child Support Agency, Ministerial statements (20.03.02) 315–24

Darling, Rt Hon Alistair—continued
State Pension Credit Bill (HL), 2R (25.03.02) 597–609, 617, 626–7
Questions
Departmental reorganisation, Dept for Work and Pensions 239–41w
Land use, Dept for Work and Pensions 149–50w
Private finance initiative, Dept for Work and Pensions 987w
Social security benefits, Standards 984–6w

Data protection
837w
Members' constituency work 413w

Data Protection Act 1998
Questions
186w, 440–1

Davey, Mr Edward
Questions
Courts, Working hours 413w
Magistrates' courts 179–80w
Magistrates' courts, Greater London 412–3w
Magistrates' courts, Kingston upon Thames 303
Magistrates' courts, Standards 414–5w

Davey, Mrs Valerie
Questions
Information technology, Dept for Education and Skills 255w

David, Mr Wayne
Questions
Schools, Governing bodies 633w

Davidson, Mr Ian
Debates etc.
Barcelona Summit (EC) (18.03.02) 30–1
Questions
Armed forces, Education 550w
Convention on the Future of Europe, Scotland 153–4
Higher civil servants, Education 816w
Higher civil servants, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 609w
National Lottery 552
Recruitment, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 382w
Strokes 939w

Davies, Rt Hon Denzil
Debates etc.
Barcelona Summit (EC) (18.03.02) 28
Questions
Police, Protection 97w

Davies, Geraint
Questions
English Partnerships Review 353–4w

Davies, Mr Quentin
Debates etc.
Castlereagh, Points of order (19.03.02) 170
Questions
Theft, Castlereagh 306–8
Weapons, Northern Ireland 290

Davis, Rt Hon David
Debates etc.
Chinook helicopters (19.03.02) 235–43, 247
Questions
Dental services, East Riding 438–9w
Hearing aids 766w
Surgery, Waiting lists 530w

Dawson, Mr Hilton
Debates etc.
Adoption and Children Bill, Programme motion and Rep (20.03.02) 377, 381, 385, 387, 394, 400

Day care
Cambridgeshire 629w
Children 624–30w

Deaf
see Hearing impaired

Debts
466–7w
Belize 367w
Local authorities 963–5w
NHS 768–72w

Dec2001/1411/EC
(19.03.02) 274

Defamation
Local government 962–3w

Defence
Israel 448w

Defence Analytical Services Agency
Standards 843w

Defence Aviation Repair Agency
549w

Defence equipment
Procurement 1–3, 64w, 67w, 206w

Defence Estates
55–6w

Defence Evaluation and Research Agency
560–1w
Consultants 547w
Privatisation 560w

Defence Housing Executive
Fraud 447–8w
Managers 1018w

Defence Logistics Organisation
206–7w

Defence Medical Services
559w

Defence Procurement Agency
64w

Degrees
Buckingham 105w

Delivery services
Freight 960w

Democratic Republic of Congo
Overseas aid 875–6w

Demonstrations
Rulings and statements (18.03.02) 49

Denham, Rt Hon John, Minister of State, Home Office
Questions
Antisocial behaviour orders 278–80w
Burglar alarms 477w
Children, Protection 291–2w
Cleveland Constabulary, Inquiries 477w
Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis 288w
Commonwealth Games, Police 1058–9w
Community police consultative groups 481w
Crime 482–3w
Crime, Firearms 399w
Crime and disorder partnerships 277–8w
Crime prevention, Greater London 289w
Crime prevention, Retail trade 473–7w
Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001, Prosecutions 286w
Criminal Records Bureau, Rents 478w
Dizaei, Ali 480w, 592w
Immobilisation of vehicles 596w
Metropolitan Police, Ethnic groups 593w
Metropolitan Police, Football Association 398w
Metropolitan Police, Inquiries 592w

Denham, Rt Hon John—continued
Metropolitan Police, Manpower 287–8w
Metropolitan Police, Racial discrimination 596w
Metropolitan Police, Right to buy 398–9w
Metropolitan Police, Standards 288w
Metropolitan Police Authority 288w
Metropolitan Police Independent Advisory Group 592w
Offences against children, Children in care 481–2w
Police, Best value 481w
Police, Diabetes 598w
Police, Finance 287w
Police, Health insurance 480–1w
Police, Pay 286–8w
Police, Pensions 287w
Police, Standards 888–9w
Police stations 90w
"Policing a New Century White Paper" 286w
Roads, Accidents 285w, 399w, 483w
Robbery, Firearms 593–4w
Robinson, Anne 98w
Security Industry Authority 285–6w
Special constables 290w
Travelling people 284w
Yarls Wood Detention Centre, Bedfordshire Police 480w

Dental services
300–6w, 911–4w, 1047–8w
Dorset 911w
East Riding 438–9w
Leicestershire 910–1w
Manpower 1048w
Wiltshire 780–1w

Departmental expenditure limits
Dept for Education and Skills 502w

Departmental reorganisation
Dept for Work and Pensions 239–41w

Departmental responsibilities
Child Support Agency 996w
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 217w
Females 460w
Scottish Office 859–60w

Depleted uranium
see Uranium

Deployment
Air force 65w
Armed forces 63–4w, 851–2w, 1015–6w
Army 559w

Deportation
Asylum 595–6w

Dept for Culture Media and Sport
Accountancy 505w
Contracts 390w
Correspondence 574w
Crimes against property 573w
EC law 198w
Festivals and special occasions 42w, 508w
Flexible working 389w
Magistrates 505w
Manpower 568w
Ministerial policy advisors 390–1w
Non-governmental organisations 299w
Nurseries 573w
Older workers 387w
Press releases 392w
Public private partnerships 390w, 906w
Regulatory Impact Unit 390w
Sponsorship 568w
Standards 390w, 903w
Territorial Army 392w
Theft 42w, 395w
Wood 391w
Work sharing 388–9w

Dept for Education and Skills
Capita 247w
Circulars 624w
Departmental expenditure limits 502w
Energy 636w
Festivals and special occasions 895w
Health insurance 500w
Information technology 255w
Public private partnerships 499w, 631w
Publicity 894w
Railways 98–100w
Secondment 254w
Standards 342w, 634w
Theft 341w, 501–2w
Work sharing 110w

Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs
Advertising 823w
Air conditioning 125w
Catering 1023w
Circulars 824w
City of London Corporation 112w
Civil service agencies 833–4w
Complaints 122w
Councillors 720w
Discrimination 824–5w
EC law 1023w
Energy 266w
Engineers 267w
Festivals and special occasions 1024w
Flexible working 265–6w
Hotels 115–6w
Land use 112–3w
Manpower 267w
New deal for young people 725–6w
New deal schemes 726w
Non-governmental organisations 112w
Nurseries 725w
Parental leave 264–5w
Press 824w
Public appointments 120w
Publications 822w
Railways 380w
Recruitment 113w
Regulatory Impact Unit 122w
Standards 125w, 830w
Territorial Army 718w
Theft 379–80w
Travel 273w
Visits abroad 273w

Dept for International Development
Contracts 16–7w
Correspondence 881w
Councillors 471w
Crimes against property 883w
Engineers 200–1w
Festivals and special occasions 883w
Human rights 867w
Magistrates 471w
Ministerial policy advisors 15w, 539w
New deal for young people 866w
New deal schemes 866w
Nurseries 882w
Open government 882w
Private finance initiative 539w, 882–3w
Public private partnerships 366–8w, 539w, 882–3w
Secondment 882w
Standards 17w, 882w
Territorial Army 470w
Theft 16w
Wood 203–4w

Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions
Advertising 980–1w
British Petroleum 671w
Contracts 976w
Correspondence 977w
Councillors 665–6w

Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions—continued
Departmental responsibilities 217w
Disclosure of information 653w, 975w
Discrimination 345w
EC law 961–2w
Festivals and special occasions 237–8w, 665w
Human rights 977w
Information officers 217–8w, 483–4w, 652w, 979w
Management consultants 345w
Manpower 18w
New deal for young people 977w
New deal schemes 977–8w
Nurseries 978w
Official engagements 976w
Operating costs 978–80w
Parental leave 22w
Press releases 19w, 975–6w
Private finance initiative 945w
Public appointments 236w
Public private partnerships 945w
Public relations 484w, 652w
Publications 962w
Research 40–1w, 667–8w, 976w
Standards 26–7w, 977w
Supply estimates 221w, 652w
Territorial Army 217w
Theft 38w, 345w
Visits abroad 484w

Dept for Work and Pensions
Advertising 149w, 423–4w
Departmental reorganisation 239–41w
Discrimination 1004w
Dorset 998w
Empty property 637w
Energy 987w
Equal pay 153w
Eyesight 637–8w
Festivals and special occasions 988w
Hotels 152w
Information officers 418w
Land use 149–50w
Legal costs 425w
Manpower 153–4w
Older workers 427w
Parental leave 638w
Private finance initiative 142–3w, 987w
Public appointments 154w
Railways 1011–2w
Relocation services 525w
Retirement 982w
Theft 142w, 154–5w, 416w
Work sharing 999w

Dept of Health
Accountancy 1057w
Capita 434w
Catering 297w
Consultants 1045w
Correspondence 784w
EC law 159–60w
Energy 1057w
Equal pay 1058w
Flexible working 1057w
Hotels 435w
Information officers 1051w
Manpower 295w, 297w, 1057w
Ministerial policy advisors 1051w
Operating costs 918w
Parliamentary questions 784w, 930w
Press releases 434w
Public appointments 929–30w
Public expenditure 918–9w
Public relations 434w, 1051–2w
Relocation services 1058w
Theft 1051w
Travel 1058w
Visits abroad 1058w
Work sharing 1058w

Dept of Health—continued
Written questions 173–4w, 442w, 751–4w

Dept of Trade and Industry
79w
Arthur Andersen 788w
British Petroleum 799–800w
Conferences 788–9w
Contracts 84w
Correspondence 790–1w
Crimes against property 361w
Discrimination 79w
Employment tribunals 77w
Energy 682w
Engineers 365–6w
Environment protection 456w
Equal opportunities 80w
Festivals and special occasions 683w
Hotels 682w
Human rights 702w
Internet 796w
Magistrates 693w
Manpower 790w
New deal for young people 701w
New deal schemes 700–1w
Non-governmental organisations 362w
Nurseries 701w
Official hospitality 682w
Orders and regulations 681w
Private finance initiative 701–2w
Public private partnerships 81w, 701–2w
Publicity 789w
Science 457w
Standards 81w, 702w
Technology 458w
Territorial Army 691w
Theft 246–7w, 363–6w
Travel 682–3w
Visits abroad 682–3w
Wood 361–2w

Dept of Transport Local Government and the Regions
see Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions

Derelict land
354–5w
Stoke on Trent 796–7w

Detainees
Afghanistan 609w, 809w
Asylum 410w

Developing countries
see also Heavily indebted poor countries initiative
Commodities 866–7w
Disabled 873–4w
Health 369w
HIV infection 863–4w
Literacy 867–8w
Loans 467w
Maternal mortality 369w
Poverty 466–7w, 878w

Devereux, Nigel
457w

Devolution
Scotland 156–7, 461–2w, 681w

Devon
Livestock 140w

Dhanda, Mr Parmjit
Questions
Community Fund 43w
National Forest Company 503w

Diabetes
924w
Health education 776–7w
Manpower 777w
Police 598w
Research 777w

Diabetes—continued
Screening 777–8w
Sight impaired 777w

Digital broadcasting
546–8

Dioxins
Incinerators 134w

Diplomatic relations
Zimbabwe 611–2w

Dir94/62/EC
718–9w

Dir99/74/EC
127–8w, 720–1w

Dir2000/60/EC
264w, 716w

Direct selling
690w

Disability aids
Hearing impaired 917w
Sight impaired 76w

Disability Discrimination Act 1995
Questions
76w, 89w

Disability living allowance
648w
Medical examinations 648–9w
Patients 155w

Disabled
Access 89w
Buckingham 525–6w
Developing countries 873–4w
Employment 415–6w
Human rights 618–9w, 885w
Office of Communications 572w
Playgrounds 670w
Railways 486w
Social security benefits 146w, 425w

Disabled facilities grants
344w

Disabled person's tax credit
740w

Disadvantaged
213–4w
Community Legal Service 182w
Cynon Valley 320w
Health services 687–8, 700–2

Disciplinary proceedings
Armed forces 62w, 318w
Civil servants 23w
NHS 929w

Discrimination
Age (20.03.02) 94–115wh, 526w
Cabinet Office 581–2w
Church of England 558
Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 824–5w
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 345w
Dept for Work and Pensions 1004w
Dept of Trade and Industry 79w
EC action 380–1w
Employment 1005–6w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 511w
Islam 91–2w
President of the Council 513w
Prime Minister 617w
Solicitor-General 545w
Treasury 735w

Disease control
Bovine tuberculosis 502–3w
Brucellosis 729–30w
Cereals 117w

Disease control—continued
Foot and mouth disease 128–9w, 376–7w, 731w

Disease of Fish (Control) (Amendment) (England and Wales) Regulations 2002
Questions
126w

Diseases
Bees 131–2w

Dismore, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
State Pension Credit Bill (HL), 2R (25.03.02) 604, 616, 622, 626–7, 638–41
Questions
Barnet Primary Care Trust, Chinese community 780w
Charities, Proscribed organisations 596w
Claims Direct, Inquiries 458–9w
Edgware Hospital 699–700
Legal profession, Competition 160–1
Prosecutions, Reform 886–8w
World War II, Genocide 195w

Dizaei, Ali
480w, 592w

Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Debates etc.
Adoption and Children Bill, Programme motion and Rep (20.03.02) 378, 382–5, 387, 393, 400, 402–3
Barcelona Summit (EC) (18.03.02) 35–6
Hunting (18.03.02) 61
Questions
Conditions of employment 419

Dobbin, Jim
Questions
Chemical weapons 842–3w
Equal pay, North West region 77w
Sports, Voluntary work 567–8w
Wheelchairs 1036w

Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Questions
Education, Consultants 895w

Dockyards
Flexible working 65w

Doctors
Career structure 759w
Pay 755w
Pensions 442w, 915w

Dodds, Mr Nigel
Questions
Civil defence, Northern Ireland 211w
Gibraltar 69w, 387w, 1031w
Gibraltar, Spain 189–90w
Theft, Castlereagh 314
Weapons, Northern Ireland 289

Dogs
Animal welfare 121w
Buckinghamshire 123w
Injuries 299–300
Licensing 606w

Domestic violence
29w, 73w, 406–7w, 482w
Asylum 891–2w

Donaldson, Mr Jeffrey M
Debates etc.
Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, Addresses to the Crown (03.04.02) 825
Questions
Weapons, Northern Ireland 290

Donors
Blood 765w, 929w

Dorset
Dental services 911w
Dept for Work and Pensions 998w
Hospitals 756–7w
Pensioners 153w

Double glazing
Small businesses 704w

Doughty, Sue
Questions
Common land, Access 377–8w
Kalahari game reserve, Ethnic groups 807w
Seabed, Environment protection 374w

Downie, Gordon
(20.03.02) 131–6wh

"Draught Beer and Cider Consultation Paper"
78w

Drew, Mr David
Debates etc.
Education (21.03.02) 476
Questions
Aggregates levy 326–7w
Housing benefit, Abuse 989w
Invalid care allowances 147–8w
Land use 970w
Mentally ill, Council tax 639–40w
Social security benefits, Disabled 146w
Warships, Repairs and maintenance 559–60w

Drinking water
Schools 253–4w

Driving
Cellular phones 359–60w
Licensing 674–6w
Working hours 40w

Driving offences
Prison sentences 401w

Driving under influence
360w

Drown, Ms Julia
Debates etc.
Arms trade (26.03.02) 746–51
Easter adjournment debate intervention (26.03.02) 734
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Africa, International assistance (19.03.02) 41–2wh
Questions
Arms trade, Export controls 452w
Developing countries, Poverty 878w
Heavily indebted poor countries initiative 855w
Malawi, Poverty 878w
Maternity services 690
NHS, Disciplinary proceedings 929w
Organic farming 268w
Swindon and Marlborough NHS Trust, Consultants 1040w

Drugs
Arthritis 305–6w
Bristol 407–8w
Central Asia 609–10w
Crime 407–8w, 1059w
Health education 337w
Internet 297–8w, 433w, 917–8w
Leukaemia 160w, 295–6w
Misuse 1053–6w
National Institute for Clinical Excellence 1045w
Northern Ireland 333w, 337w
Rehabilitation 291w
Scotland 175w
Side effects 1039–40w
Trade agreements 245–6w

Drugs Czar
see UK Anti-Drugs Coordinator

Dudi, Avni
72w

Dumfries
Intervention stocks 828–9w

Duncan, Mr Alan
Debates etc.
Consignia (25.03.02) 574
Hunting (21.03.02) 465
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Parish councils (19.03.02) 5–8wh, 17wh, 24wh
Questions
Melton Borough Council, Pathfinder projects 19–20w
Members, Correspondence 72w

Duncan, Mr Peter
Questions
Aviation, Freight 942w
British Transport Police, Manpower 660w
Consultants, Scotland Office 861w
Exports, North America 366w
Ferries, Scotland 941w
Foot and mouth disease, Disease control 731w
Football, Scotland 861w
Galileo project 942w
National Air Traffic Services, Finance 943w
Nuclear power stations, Decommissioning 694w
Pensioners, Income support 150, 860w
Post offices, Bank services 800–1w
Scottish Land Fund 577–80w
Terrorism, Northern Ireland 334w
West Freugh airfield 1017–8w
Working families tax credit, Livingston 740w

Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Debates etc.
Barcelona Summit (EC) (18.03.02) 23–5
Ministerial statement intervention (18.03.02) 31, (25.03.02) 584
Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, Addresses to the Crown (03.04.02) 801–3
Questions
Gibraltar, Spain 300–1
Institutional care, Closures 295–7

Dunkeswell airfield
(19.03.02) 50–7wh

Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Debates etc.
Easter adjournment debate intervention (26.03.02) 732, 758
London Underground (26.03.02) 739–41
Railtrack (25.03.02) 584–5
Questions
Aviation, Government assistance 943w
Delivery services, Freight 960w
Insurance, Buses 744–5w
Tachographs 677–8w

***Eagle, Angela**, *Parliamentary Secretary, Home Office*
Questions
Accountancy, Home Office 274–5w
Active Community Unit, Buckingham 477–8w
Animal experiments 396–8w, 597w
Asylum, Administrative delays 1062w
Asylum, Appeals 410w
Asylum, Applications 594–6w, 1061–2w
Asylum, Bicester 590w
Asylum, Detainees 410w
Asylum, Domestic violence 891–2w

***Eagle, Angela**—*continued*
Asylum, Hemswell Cliff 889–91w, 1063–4w
Asylum, Housing 95–6w, 281w, 408–10w, 590w, 1062–3w
Asylum, Lincolnshire 595w
Asylum, Liverpool 596w
Asylum, Oakington Detention Centre 594w
Asylum, RAF Turnhouse 95w
Asylum, Rural areas 891w
Asylum, Scotland 410–1w
Asylum, Transport 590w
Asylum, Voucher schemes 594–5w
Capita, Home Office 98w, 275w
Charities, Proscribed organisations 596w
Criminal Records Bureau, Business plans 598w
Design, Home Office 591–2w
Entry clearances, Poland 94–5w
Entry clearances, Romania 280w
Entry clearances, Slovakia 1059–60w
EU Justice Home Affairs and Civil Protection Council, Scottish Executive 406w
Experience Corps, Buckingham 405–6w, 592–3w
Fair trade initiative, Home Office 589–90w, 1060–1w
Fees and charges, Home Office 472–4w
Flexible working, Home Office 395w
Foreign workers, Private education 279w
Human Rights Act 1998, Charities 1060w
Identity cards 598–9w
Illegal immigrants 408w
Illegal immigrants, Channel tunnel 96–7w
Immigration, Administrative delays 888w
Immigration, Forms 888w
Immigration and Nationality Directorate, Postal services 96w
Islam, Discrimination 91–2w
Members, Correspondence 596w, 1059–60w
Non-departmental public bodies, Home Office 276w
Non-governmental organisations, Home Office 276–7w
Offices, Home Office 275w
Public appointments, Home Office 892w
Public relations, Home Office 395–6w
Publicity, Home Office 89–90w
Racial violence, Internet 97–8w
Railways, Home Office 275w
Regulatory Impact Unit, Home Office 283w
Relocation services, Home Office 91w
Seasonal workers, Cornwall 284–5w
Shipping, Work permits 598w
Theft, Home Office 274w
United Kingdom Passport Agency, Business plans 597w
Yarls Wood Detention Centre 281w, 590–1w
Yarls Wood Detention Centre, Civil disorder 1064w
Yarls Wood Detention Centre, Inquiries 93w
Yarls Wood Detention Centre, Insurance 281w, 479–80w
Yarls Wood Detention Centre, Manpower 889w

***Eagle, Maria**, *Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Work and Pensions*
Debates etc.
State Pension Credit Bill (HL), 2R, (25.03.02) 616, 664–7
Questions
Age, Discrimination 526w
Annuities 420w
Attendance allowance 999–1000w
Attendance allowance, Patients 155w

***Eagle, Maria**—*continued*
Disability Discrimination Act 1995 89w
Disability living allowance 648w
Disability living allowance, Medical examinations 648–9w
Disability living allowance, Patients 155w
Disabled, Access 89w
Disabled, Buckingham 525–6w
Disabled, Employment 415–6w
Hotels, Dept for Work and Pensions 152w
Incapacity benefit, Appeals 146–8w
Invalid care allowances 147–8w
Invalid care allowances, Patients 155w
Members, Correspondence 986w
Pensioners, Income 143–4w, 428–9w
Pensioners, Income support 144w, 153w, 427w
Relocation services, Dept for Work and Pensions 525w
Social security benefits, Disabled 146w, 425w
Social security benefits, Forms 428w
Social security benefits, Mental patients 422–3w
Social security benefits, Patients 986–7w
State retirement pensions 145w, 1001–2w
Written questions, Administrative delays 1004w

Early day motions
Rulings and statements (20.03.02) 305

Early retirement
Ministry of Defence 546w

East London line
657–8w

East of England Development Agency
Finance 683–4w
Pay 673w

East Riding
Dental services 438–9w

East Sussex
Radiotherapy 301–2

EC accession
Malta 827–8w
Poland 827–8w

EC action
Alternative medicine 914–5w
Aviation 230w, (19.03.02) 274, 491w
Cosmetics (18.03.02) 140–1
Discrimination 380–1w
Foot and mouth disease 131w
Industrial health and safety 966w
Terrorism 383w
Transport 954–5w

EC Agriculture Council
Scottish Executive 121w

EC aid
Middle East 871w

EC budget
855w

EC common foreign and security policy
9–12

EC countries
Medical treatments 532w, 917w
Rapid deployment forces 56w

EC defence policy
56w, 58w

EC enlargement
(19.03.02) 274

EC Environment Council
Scottish Executive 711–2w

EC external relations
Fishery agreements 1023w

EC Finance Council
743–4w

EC Foreign Affairs Council
191–3w
Scottish Executive 190–1w

EC grants and loans
37w
Cornwall 268w
English Heritage 505–6w
Flood control 135w, 723–4w
Ports 940w
Regional planning and development 347w
Shipping 347w, 941w

EC law
Art works 509–10w
Cabinet Office 496–7w
Dept for Culture Media and Sport 198w
Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 1023w
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 961–2w
Dept of Health 159–60w
Employment 803w
Industrial health and safety 802–3w
Packaging 718–9w, 1022w
Parental leave 801w
Part-time employment 802w
Poultry 127–8w, 720–1w, 1030w
Pregnant women 802w
President of the Council 512w
Solicitor-General 515–6w
Trade marks 697w
Waste disposal 708–10w
Water 264w, 716w
Working hours 802w

EC regional policy
Advantage West Midlands 459w

EC Research Council
84w

EC transport policy
(18.03.02) 140

Economic and monetary union
750w

Edgware Hospital
699–700

Edinburgh Airport
Railway network 862w

Education
(21.03.02) 473–535
Armed forces 550w
Arts 565w
Asylum 410w, 500w
Circulars 106–7w
Consultants 895w
Higher civil servants 816w
Liverpool 248–9w
Occupied territories 877w
Opposition days (19.03.02) 175–234
Public participation 631w
Wales 342w

Education (Information About Individual Pupils) (England) Regulations 1999
Questions
109w

Education of children at home
108–9w

Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999
Questions
253w

Educational maintenance allowance
630w

Edwards, Mr Huw
Questions
Broadband, Monmouthshire 798–9w
Church of England, Discrimination 558
Hospitals, Consultants 916w
Iron and steel, USA 688w
"Lending Support:Modernising the Governments Use of Loans" 324w
NHS, Consultants 303
Nurses, Training 629w
Prisons, Pay 478w
Roads, Accidents 30w

"Effects of a Chemical Agent on the Eyes of Aircrew"
314w

Elderly
Health services 308–9w
Home care services 936w
Mental health services 439w
Mentally ill 771w
Pharmacy 935w
Residential and nursing care see Institutional care
Social services 174w

Elections
Northern Ireland 287–8, 336–7w
Scottish Parliament 861w
Zimbabwe 202w

Electoral Commission
579w

Electoral register
858w, 962w

Electoral systems
23w
European Parliament 23w
Scottish Parliament 175–6w

Electric cables
85w

Electric shock
Television 678w

Electricity
792–3w

Electricity Act 1989
Questions
680–1w

Electricity and Gas (Determination of Turnover for Penalties) Order 2002
Debates etc.
(18.03.02) 141

Electrification
Railways 953w

Electromagnetic fields
Health hazards 437w

Electronic equipment
Waste disposal 121w, 689w

Electronic government
790w, 974–5w
Contracts 214–6w

Electronic publishing
Legal deposit 576w

"Eliminating Hunger Consultation Paper"
17w

Ellman, Mrs Louise
Debates etc.
Barcelona Summit (EC) (18.03.02) 31–2
Consignia (25.03.02) 573
Railtrack (25.03.02) 589
Questions
Asylum, Liverpool 596w
Education, Liverpool 248–9w
Health services, Children 1046–7w
Local government, Liverpool 963w

Email
NHS 435w

Emergency calls
Buckinghamshire 227w

Emergency debates
Afghanistan (20.03.02) 328–73

Emergency services
Medals 508w

Employee share ownership schemes
Advertising 854–5w

Employers' Forum on Disability
431–2w

Employment
Disabled 415–6w
Discrimination 1005–6w
EC law 803w
Females 460w
Mothers 431–2, 461w
North West region 519–22w
Regulation 87w
Rural areas 713–4w
Young people 803w

Employment Bill 2001/02
Questions
Small businesses 428–9

Employment rehabilitation
915w

Employment tribunals
Cabinet Office 292–3w
Dept of Trade and Industry 77w
Lord Chancellor's Dept 623–4w

Empty property
Council housing 492w
Dept for Work and Pensions 637w

Endometriosis
1052–3w
Cheshire 1053w

Energy
Cabinet Office 495w
Conservation 141w
Dept for Education and Skills 636w
Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 266w
Dept for Work and Pensions 987w
Dept of Health 1057w
Dept of Trade and Industry 682w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 805w
Ministry of Defence 844w
President of the Council 513–4w
Prime Minister 449w
Research 689–90w
Sales methods (26.03.02) 765–8

Engineering
Females 694–5w
Further education 100w
Higher education 633w
Professional organisations 365w
Specialist schools 256w

Engineers
Armed forces 210–1w
Army 210w
Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 267w
Dept for International Development 200–1w
Dept of Trade and Industry 365–6w

English Heritage
EC grants and loans 505–6w

English Partnerships Review
353–4w

Enterprise Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
1R (26.03.02) 703

Enterprise Bill 2001/02—continued
Questions
433–6

Entry clearances
Applications 599–606w
Poland 94–5w
Romania 280w
Slovakia 1059–60w

Environment Agency
370–1w

Environment protection
267w, 721w
Dept of Trade and Industry 456w
Ministry of Defence 843w
Seabed 374w
Transport 697–8w

Environmental impact assessment
Ash Moor 1021w

Epilepsy
778–9w

Epping
Breast cancer 158–9w

Equal opportunities
Dept of Trade and Industry 80w
Health services 765–6w
Non-departmental public bodies 293w
Treasury 332w

Equal pay
461w
Dept for Work and Pensions 153w
Dept of Health 1058w
Leeds 77w
North West region 77w
President of the Council 862w
Solicitor-General 9–10w
Stevenage 77w

Equal Pay Act 1970
Questions
460w

Equitable Life Assurance Society
212w, 746–7w

Equitable Life Independent Inquiry
747w

Eskmeals
Military exercises 445–6w

Essex
Beekeeping 273–4w
Cancer 908w

Estuaries
Navigation 31w

Etherington, Bill
Debates etc.
Hunting (18.03.02) 93–5

Ethnic groups
Barristers 885–6w
Church of England 471w
Kalahari game reserve 807w
Metropolitan Police 593w

EU Employment and Social Policy Council
342–3w
Scottish Executive 997–8w

EU Internal Market Consumer Affairs and Tourism Council
Scottish Executive 243w

EU Justice Home Affairs and Civil Protection Council
Scottish Executive 406w

EU Transport and Telecommunications Council
Scottish Executive 237w

Euro
Tourism 566w

European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
361w

European Capital of Culture
Scotland 178–9w

European Communities
see also EC and EU headings
Publicity 194w

European Convention on the Exercise of Children Rights
605w

European Parliament
Electoral systems 23w

Evans, Mr Nigel
Questions
Alternative energy, Wales 699–700w
Correspondence, Scotland Office 858w
Czech Republic 320–1w
Foot and mouth disease, Wales 130w
Livestock, Transport 830w
Local government, North West region 219w
Milk, Prices 711w
North West Regional Assembly, Finance 968w
Post offices, Wales 88w
Regional assemblies 973w
Regional assemblies, Finance 973w

Evesham
Magistrates' courts 179w

Evictions
Social rented housing 29w
Tenants 972w

Ewing, Annabelle
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Asbestos, Scotland (19.03.02) 62wh
Questions
Animal experiments 597w
Asbestos, Scotland 861w
Beef, France 826w
Devolution, Scotland 156–7
Equitable Life Independent Inquiry 747w
Insurance companies, Regulation 747w
Labelling, Animal experiments 458w
Nuclear power stations, Scotland 680–1w
Police, Scotland 861w
Social security benefits, Patients 986–7w
Taxation, Whisky 748w

Excise duties
Motorcycles 1033w
Petrol alternatives 1034w

Exhaust emissions
958–9w

Experience Corps
Buckingham 405–6w, 592–3w

Explosions
Natural gas 670–1w

Explosives
444–5w

Export controls
Arms trade 452w
Art works 388w

Exports
Beef 718w
Central America 366w
North America 366w
Sheep 118w
Sustainable development 459w

Exservicemen
19–20, 54–5w

Exservicemen—continued
Nuclear weapons 54w
Radiation exposure 548–9w

Eyesight
Dept for Work and Pensions 637–8w

Fabricant, Michael
Debates etc.
Afghanistan, Armed conflict (20.03.02) 338
Barcelona Summit (EC) (18.03.02) 34
Oral question time intervention (21.03.02) 419
Questions
Armed forces, Deployment 63–4w
Broadband 420
Females, Departmental responsibilities 460w
Maternity services 683–9
Members, Correspondence 19w
World War I, Capital punishment 17

Facsimile transmission
Unsolicited goods and services 459w

Fair trade initiative
Cabinet Office 430w
Home Office 589–90w, 1060–1w
Northern Ireland Office 537w
Scotland Office 466w, 679–80w

Faith schools
896w

Falkland Islands
Mines 806–7w

Fallon, Mr Michael
Questions
Astra Windows, Company liquidations 801w

Family Law Act 1996
Questions
73w

Family practitioner services
926–8w

Fares
Railways 21w, 654w, 953w

Farmers
see also Agriculture
Internet 1024w
Markets 717–8w
South Africa 807w
Supermarkets 117–8w

Farming and Food for England Policy Commission
see Future of Farming and Food Policy Commission

Farms
Hedges and ditches 124–5w
Mink 729w
Non-domestic rates 23–4w
Tenants 831–2w

Farrelly, Paul
Questions
Defence Analytical Services Agency, Standards 843w
Organised crime, Northern Ireland 335w
Schools, Private finance initiative 901–2w

Females
Armed forces 210–1w, 850w
Departmental responsibilities 460w
Employment 460w
Engineering 694–5w
General practitioners 762w
Government departments 815w
Internet 74w
Mental health 1041–2w
Pensions 615–6w

Females—continued
Public appointments 430–1

Fences
Railways 29–30w

Ferries
Northern Ireland 941w
Scotland 941w

Festivals and special occasions
Armed forces 448w
Dept for Culture Media and Sport 42w, 508w
Dept for Education and Skills 895w
Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 1024w
Dept for International Development 883w
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 237–8w, 665w
Dept for Work and Pensions 988w
Dept of Trade and Industry 683w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 510–1w
Home Office 597w
Hyde Park 388w
Ministry of Defence 318w, 547w
Prime Minister 583–4w
Public transport 349w
Tourism 394w
Treasury 735–6w

Field, Rt Hon Frank
Debates etc.
Chinook helicopters (19.03.02) 259–60
State Pension Credit Bill (HL), 2R (25.03.02) 634–6
Questions
Legal aid scheme, Civil proceedings 650–1w
Occupational pensions 1012–4w
Pensions, Public sector 1001w
Primary care trusts, Wirral 931w
Relatives and Residents Association, Finance 157w
State second pension 993w

Field, Mr Mark
Questions
BBC, Public appointments 389w
Housing benefit, Reform 147w
Hyde Park, Festivals and special occasions 388w
Moore, Jo 979w
Sixsmith, Martin 19w
World Economic Forum 76–7w

Film
391w

Financial institutions
Fees and charges 1034w

Financial services
Belize 367w

Financial Services and Markets Act 2000
Questions
76w

Finchley Memorial Hospital
(26.03.02) 772–3

Fines
Parking offences 956–7w

Fire prevention
Aylesbury Young Offender Institution 93w
Grants 670w
Shoreham 27w
Warehouses (18.03.02) 142–8

Fire services
225–6w, 238–40w
Buckinghamshire 226w
Terrorism 960w

Fire stations
Buckinghamshire 27w

Firearms
Crime 399w
Northern Ireland 209–10w
Robbery 593–4w

Firearms (Amendment) (No 2) Act 1997
Questions
399w

Firearms Consultative Committee
Annual reports 290–1w

Fires
Buckinghamshire 27w

Fireworks
Petitions (25.03.02) 676

Firing ranges
Shoeburyness 848w

Fish farming
126w

Fisheries
127w
Compensation 79–80w
Orkney 373–4w
Quotas 503–4w
Shetland 373–4w

Fishery agreements
EC external relations 1023w

Fishing vessels
830w
Accidents 346–7w
Decommissioning 128w

Fitzsimons, Lorna
Debates etc.
Hunting (18.03.02) 57–8
Questions
Community Legal Service, Disadvantaged 182w
Queen Elizabeth II, Anniversaries 450–1w
Transport, Manchester 490–1w

Flexible working
Cabinet Office 74w
Dept for Culture Media and Sport 389w
Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 265–6w
Dept of Health 1057w
Dockyards 65w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 197–8w
Home Office 395w
President of the Council 615w
Prime Minister 322w
Productivity 460w
Solicitor-General 539–41w

Flight, Mr Howard
Debates etc.
Railtrack (25.03.02) 590
State Pension Credit Bill (HL), 2R (25.03.02) 632–4
Questions
Annuities 739w
Business, Regulation 738w
National insurance contributions 738w
NHS, Finance 751w
Public finance 750–1w
Tax burden 751w

Flint, Caroline
Questions
Hearing aids 697, 916w
Organised crime, Northern Ireland 294–5

Flood control
268w
EC grants and loans 135w, 723–4w
Finance 135w

Floods
725w
Boats 829–30w
Hullbridge 724w
Insurance 135–6w
Shropshire 135w
Somerset 831w

Flook, Mr Adrian
Debates etc.
Agriculture, Somerset (25.03.02) 679–80
Questions
Entry clearances, Poland 94–5w
Local education authorities, South West region 250–2w

Flour
Folic acid 921w

Fluoride
123w
Imports 372w

Flynn, Paul
Debates etc.
Football (Disorder) (Amendment) Bill, Lords amendts (26.03.02) 722–3
State Pension Credit Bill (HL), 2R (25.03.02) 601, 610, 629–32
Questions
Business questions 439
International Film School 566w

Folic acid
162–4w
Flour 921w

Follett, Barbara
Questions
Aggregates levy 329–30w
Electronic government 974–5w
Equal pay, Stevenage 77w
Invest to save budget 328–9w
Tax Law Rewrite Project 739w
Valuation Office, Standards 853–4w

Food
Armed forces 205w
Import controls 827w
Imports 713w
Prices 504–5w

Foot and mouth disease
131w, 503w
Compensation 130w
Cumbria 710w
Disease control 128–9w, 376–7w, 731w
EC action 131w
Inquiries 130w, 177–8w
North Yorkshire 130–1w, 730–1w
Powys 129w
Publications 375w
Scotland 177–8w, 731w
Wales 129–30w
Waste disposal 129w, 257–8w

Football
565–6w
Scotland 861w

Football Association
Metropolitan Police 398w

Football (Disorder) (Amendment) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
Lords amendts (26.03.02) 717–23

Forced labour
Imports 867w

Foreign and Commonwealth Office
Advertising 197w, 804–5w
Bloody Sunday Tribunal of Inquiry 1032w
British Petroleum 807w
Cendent Relocation (UK) 805w
Contracts 383–4w, 511–2w, 609w

Foreign and Commonwealth Office*—*continued
Correspondence 805–6w
Discrimination 511w
Energy 805w
Equipment 511w
Festivals and special occasions 510–1w
Flexible working 197–8w
Global Crossing 606–7w
Higher civil servants 609w
Manpower 382–3w, 607w
Ministerial policy advisors 383w
Nurseries 610w
Official visits 809w
Parental leave 384w
Public appointments 381–2w
Recruitment 45–50w, 382w
Standards 806w
Territorial Army 382w
Theft 50w, 385–6w
Travel 511w
Visits abroad 511w, 809w

Foreign investment in UK
695–6w, 794–5w

Foreign relations
Spain 323w

Foreign workers
Medical profession 161w
Private education 279w

Forest Enterprise
Sports 120w

Forests
Sustainable development 124w

Forms
Immigration 888w
Social security benefits 428w

Forth, Mr Eric
Debates etc.
Business questions, Points of order (21.03.02) 472
Easter adjournment debate intervention (26.03.02) 762
Enterprise Bill, Points of order (21.03.02) 471
Members' interests (26.03.02) 710–1
Oral question time intervention (20.03.02) 291
Recess motions (26.03.02) 788–92
Questions
Bleach, Peter 612w
Business statements 433–6
Public appointments, Cabinet Office 584–7w
Public appointments, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 381–2w
Public appointments, Prime Minister 883w

Foster, Mr Don
Debates etc.
Easter adjournment debate intervention (26.03.02) 764
Railtrack (25.03.02) 585–6
Questions
Aerials, Planning permission 80w
Driving, Licensing 674–6w
Fire prevention, Grants 670w
Fire services 225–6w
Fire services, Terrorism 960w
Market towns 1026–8w
Motor vehicles, Testing 676–7w
Public transport, Standards 661w
Railtrack, Finance 654w
Railway stations, Information services 20–1w
Railways 21w, 654w, 659w
Railways, Concessions 953w
Railways, Fares 654w, 953w

Foster, Mr Don*—*continued
Railways, Finance 653w, 952w, 955w
Railways, Manpower 21w, 952w, 954w
Railways, Standards 953–4w
Research, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 667–8w
Rolling stock 948–9w
Train operating companies 20w
Transport, Costs 661w
Visits abroad, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 273w
Visits abroad, Dept of Health 1058w
Visits abroad, Dept of Trade and Industry 682–3w
Visits abroad, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 511w
Visits abroad, Ministry of Defence 546w

Foster, Mr Michael Jabez, (Hastings and Rye)
Debates etc.
Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, Addresses to the Crown (03.04.02) 814–5
Questions
Elections, Northern Ireland 336–7w

Foster, Mr Michael John, (Worcester)
Debates etc.
Education (19.03.02) 210
Hunting (21.03.02) 460
Questions
Waste Minimisation and Recycling Fund 833w

Foster care
National insurance credits 597w
Pensions 640w
Vetting 306w

Foulkes, Mr George, Minister of State, Scotland Office
Questions
A1, Scotland 177w
Aggregates, Scotland 176w
Aggregates levy, Scotland 176w
Clyde Shipyards Task Force 176–7w
Football, Scotland 861w
Pensioners, Income support 149–52, 860w
Poverty, Scotland 176w
Railways, Scotland 155
Railways, Strikes 155–6
Tourism, Scotland 178w
Winter fuel payments, Scotland 176w
Working families tax credit, Scotland 178w

Foulness
Uranium 557–8w

Fox, Dr Liam
Questions
Alcoholic drinks, Misuse 435w
Blood, Donors 765w
Cervical cancer, Screening 165w
Children in care, General certificate of secondary education 436w
Health, Young people 1047w
Health services, Equal opportunities 765–6w
Healthy living centres, Northumberland 435w
Hospital beds 530w, 693–4
Hospitals, Waiting lists 757w
Institutional care, Registration 766–7w
Mentally ill, Community care 528–9w
Nurses, Recruitment 759w
Public expenditure, Dept of Health 918–9w
Tuberculosis, Vaccination 433w

France
Airports 942w
Beef 256–7w, 826w

France*—*continued
Prisoners 194w

Franchises
Railways 952w
South West Trains 952w

Francois, Mr Mark
Debates etc.
Afghanistan (18.03.02) 46–7
Education (21.03.02) 518, 526–7
Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, Addresses to the Crown (03.04.02) 825–6
Railtrack (25.03.02) 594–5
Sittings in Westminster Hall
USA, Terrorism (19.03.02) 67–70wh, 72wh
Questions
Afghanistan, Peace keeping operations 8
Cancer, Essex 908w
EC defence policy 58w
Floods, Hullbridge 724w

Fraud
Defence Housing Executive 447–8w
VAT 732w

Freedom of Information Act 2000
Questions
182–3w, 556w

Freight
658w
Aviation 942w
Central Railway 658–9w
Channel tunnel 229w, 659w, 951w
Delivery services 960w
Railways 28–9w, 658w, 951–2w

Fruit
Schools 910w

Fuels
Prices 689w

Functions
Local authorities 651–2w

Fur Trade Act 1973
Questions
572w

Further education
Engineering 100w

Future large aircraft
15, 801w

Future of Farming and Food Policy Commission
136–40w, 835w, 1024w

Gale, Mr Roger
Debates etc.
Castlereagh, Points of order (19.03.02) 171
Hunting (18.03.02) 105–6
Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, Addresses to the Crown (03.04.02) 824

Galileo project
690–1w, 942w

Gambling
549–50, 905w

Gambling Review Body
298–9

Gapes, Mike
Questions
Music 556
Voting methods 564

Gardiner, Mr Barry
Questions
Commonwealth Games, Manchester 41–2w
Maternity services 689
Sports 43w
Sports, Facilities 43w

Gardiner, Mr Barry—continued
Summertime 703w
Wembley Park Station, Repairs and maintenance 235–6w

Garnier, Mr Edward
Debates etc.
Afghanistan, Armed conflict (20.03.02) 334, 338, 349
Barcelona Summit (EC) (18.03.02) 34–5
Hunting (18.03.02) 78–9, 107, (21.03.02) 467

Gas and Electricity Markets Authority
Codes of practice 710–1w
Public appointments 681–2w

Gas fired power stations
694w

Gas supply
see Natural gas

Gaza Strip
Midwives 876w

Gender impact assessment
Treasury 213w

General Agreement on Trade in Services
Higher education 693w

General certificate of secondary education
Children in care 436w
Standards 895w

General practitioners
760w
Females 762w
Part-time employment 759–61w

Genetically modified organisms
Crops 707w, 1029w

Genocide
World War II 195w

George, Andrew
Questions
Cornish language 225w
EC grants and loans, Cornwall 268w
Languages, Minorities 193w

George, Rt Hon Bruce
Debates etc.
Afghanistan, Armed conflict (20.03.02) 349–51

Germany
Nuclear fuel reprocessing 271w

Gerrard, Mr Neil
Questions
Asylum, Detainees 410w
Asylum, Oakington Detention Centre 594w
Members, Correspondence 596w
Social services 159w

Gibb, Mr Nick
Questions
Business questions 444–5
South Africa, Farmers 807w

Gibraltar
69w, 323w, 387w, 612–3w, 620w, 1031–2w
Overseas investment 190w
Spain 189–90w, 300–1, 612w

Gibson, Dr Ian
Debates etc.
Education (21.03.02) 480
Hunting (18.03.02) 117–9
Questions
Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, Risk assessment 1046w
Drugs, Internet 297–8w, 433w, 917–8w
Exservicemen, Radiation exposure 548–9w
Foot and mouth disease, Inquiries 130w

Gidley, Sandra
Debates etc.
Adoption and Children Bill, Programme motion and Rep (20.03.02) 377, 383–4, 392
Questions
Equal opportunities, Dept of Trade and Industry 80w
Equal opportunities, Non-departmental public bodies 293w
Equal opportunities, Treasury 332w
Gender impact assessment, Treasury 213w
Government departments, Females 815w
Prisoners, Lone parents 400w
Statistics, Treasury 212–3w
Women and Equality Unit, Science 430

Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Debates etc.
Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, Addresses to the Crown (03.04.02) 821–2

Gilroy, Linda
Debates etc.
Afghanistan, Armed conflict (20.03.02) 337
State Pension Credit Bill (HL), 2R (25.03.02) 600
Questions
Energy, Conservation 141w
Public Guardianship Office, Standards 183–5w

Glasgow Airport
Railway network 862w

Global Crossing
488w, 806w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 606–7w

Gloucestershire
Hearing aids 162w
Social security benefits 146w

Goggins, Paul
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Africa, International assistance (19.03.02) 34–6wh
Questions
Hearing aids 696
Social Fund 642w

Golden Jubilee 2002
see Queen Elizabeth II, Anniversaries

Goodhead Committee
see Committee Examining Radiation Risks of Internal Emitters

Goodman, Mr Paul
Debates etc.
State Pension Credit Bill (HL), 2R (25.03.02) 603, 641–3, 665
Questions
Arms trade, India 700w

Governing bodies
Schools 633w

Government
Policy 617–8w

Government bills
514w

Government Car and Despatch Agency
Petrol 817w

Government Communications Headquarters
Air conditioning 607w

Government departments
Advertising 817–8w
Air conditioning 712–3w
Consultants 816w

Government departments—continued
Disclosure of information 817w
Females 815w
Refrigeration 133–4w, 712–3w
Repairs and maintenance 684w
Standards 495w
Wood 723w

Government Office for London
Manpower 293–4w

Government Resources and Accounts Act 2000
Questions
211–2w

Gray, Mr James
Debates etc.
Afghanistan, Armed conflict (20.03.02) 336
Chinook helicopters (19.03.02) 270–2
Hunting (18.03.02) 53, 83, 104
Questions
Afghanistan, Hercules aircraft 558w
Armed forces, Manpower 6–7
Colerne airfield 70–1w
Dental services 1047–8w
Dental services, Wiltshire 780–1w
Inland Revenue Regulation Act 1890, Payments 325–6w
Military bases, Disclosure of information 551–2w
RAF Lyneham 849–50w

Grayling, Chris
Debates etc.
Education (19.03.02) 180, (21.03.02) 517, 524–5
Railtrack (25.03.02) 590
Questions
Airports, South East region 942w
Aviation, EC action 230w
Civil defence 960–1w
Civil defence, Local authorities 679w
Coucher, Ian 976w
Excise duties, Motorcycles 1033w
Great Central Railway 228w
Information officers, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 217w
Institutional care, Fees and charges 527–8w
Institutional care, Planning permission 967–8w
Local authorities, Functions 651–2w
Local government finance 22w
London Underground, Public private partnerships 17–8w
Metropolitan Police, Right to buy 398–9w
New Millennium Experience 389w
NHS, Land 298w
Pensions 1011w
Ports, EC grants and loans 940w
Ports, Government assistance 940w
Railtrack, Finance 18w, 655w, 949–51w
Railways, Electrification 953w
Railways, Fares 21w
Railways, Finance 955w
Railways, Standards 953w
Railways, West Midlands 21w
Roads, Tolls 857w
Rolling stock, Cultural heritage 949w
St George's Hospital Tooting 1041w
Social security benefits, Widowed people 984w
South West Trains, Franchises 952w
State retirement pensions 647w
Supply estimates, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 221w, 652w
Teachers, Resignations 633w
Transport, EC action 954–5w
Transport, Finance 19w

Grayling, Chris*—*continued
Visits abroad, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 484w
Working families tax credit 740–1w

Great Central Railway
228w

Greater London
Crime prevention 289w
Health authorities 760w
Industrial injuries 970w
Institutional care 307w
Land use 669–70w
Magistrates' courts 412–3w, 415w
Nurses 685–6, 910w
Postal services 77–8w
Right to buy 357w
Roads 341–2w
Schools 501w
Sentencing 401–2w
Subsidence 355–6w
Tenants' incentive scheme 664w

Greater London Authority
Transport 348w

Greater Manchester
Compost 707w

Green, Mr Damian
Debates etc.
Education (19.03.02) 175–85, 190
Questions
General certificate of secondary education, Standards 895w
Hearing impaired, Disability aids 917w
Higher education, Finance 249–50w

Green, Matthew
Questions
Poultry, EC law 720–1w

Green Howards Regiment
207w

Greenway, Mr John
Debates etc.
Consignia (25.03.02) 577–8
Questions
Physical education 631w
Tourism 546

Grieve, Mr Dominic
Debates etc.
Afghanistan, Armed conflict (20.03.02) 342
Football (Disorder) (Amendment) Bill, Lords amendts (26.03.02) 718–20
Questions
Community service orders, Enforcement 413–4w
Courts, Working hours 622w
Driving offences, Prison sentences 401w
Highways Agency, Broadspring Wood 32w
Probation and aftercare 404–5w
Young offenders, Bail 403w
Young offenders, Criminal proceedings 402–3w

***Griffiths, Nigel**, Parliamentary Secretary, Dept of Trade and Industry*
Questions
Arms trade 695w
Arms trade, Angola 53w
Arms trade, Corruption 451w
Arms trade, Export controls 452w
Arms trade, India 700w
Business links, Telephone services 704–5w
Employment Bill 2001/02, Small businesses 428–9
Exports, North America 366w
Exports, Sustainable development 459w
Females, Internet 74w

Griffiths, Nigel*—*continued
Fisheries, Compensation 79–80w
Fluoride, Imports 372w
Overseas trade, India 703w
Overseas trade, Macedonia 702w
Small Business Service 361w
Small Business Service, Pilot schemes 242w
Stillman, Ian 692w
Trade Partners UK 692w

Griffiths, Mr Win
Debates etc.
Barcelona Summit (EC) (18.03.02) 34
Questions
Exports, Sustainable development 459w

Grogan, Mr John
Questions
Council housing, Rents 664w
Roads, Accidents 399w

Guardians' allowances
986w

Guatemala
Belize 385w

Guided weapons
204–5w

Guillotine motions
see Timetabling of bills

Gummer, Rt Hon John
Debates etc.
Hunting (18.03.02) 74–6

Gypsies
343–4w

Habitual offenders
Police custody 622–3w
Sentencing 299

Hackney
Housing benefit 640–1w

Hague, Rt Hon William
Debates etc.
Hunting (18.03.02) 69–72
Questions
Non-domestic rates, Farms 23–4w

Hain, Rt Hon Peter, Minister for Europe, Foreign and Commonwealth Office
Questions
Bloody Sunday Tribunal of Inquiry, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1032w
Convention on the Future of Europe, Expenditure 193w
EC Foreign Affairs Council 191–3w
EC Foreign Affairs Council, Scottish Executive 190–1w
European Communities, Publicity 194w
Gibraltar 387w, 612–3w, 1031–2w
Gibraltar, Overseas investment 190w
Gibraltar, Spain 189–90w, 612w
Macedonia 613w
World War II, Genocide 195w

Hall, Mr Mike
Questions
Queen Elizabeth II, Anniversaries 557

Hall, Patrick
Questions
Local government, Defamation 962–3w

Hamilton, David
Debates etc.
Consignia (25.03.02) 573–4
Questions
Ambulance services, Midlothian 529–30w
Industrial diseases, Compensation 693w

Hamilton, David*—*continued
Pensioners, Tax credit 418w
Solicitors, Fees and charges 791–2w

Hamilton, Mr Fabian
Questions
Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001, Prosecutions 286w

Hammond, Mr Philip
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Age, Discrimination (20.03.02) 97wh, 101wh, 104–13wh
Questions
BBC, Office of Communications 389w
Broadband 88w, 421
Broadband, Small businesses 87–8w
Central Railway 948w
Central Railway, Freight 658–9w
Millennium Bridge 575w
Office of Communications 553–4
Telephone systems 88w
VAT, Small businesses 213w
VAT, Take-away food 732w

Hampshire
Pigs 728w

Hancock, Mr Mike
Debates etc.
Navy, Points of order (25.03.02) 596
Questions
Air force, Iraq 554w
Apache AH-64 helicopter 846w
Armed forces, Females 850w
Armed forces, Housing 68w, 447w, 554–5w, 846–8w
Armed forces, Overseas residence 68w
Armed forces, Pensions 207w
Children, Abuse 838–9w
Children, Homicide 839w
Community care 440w
Computers, Ministry of Defence 847w
Correspondence, Ministry of Defence 1019w
Defence equipment, Procurement 67w
Defence Housing Executive, Fraud 447–8w
Defence Housing Executive, Managers 1018w
Disclosure of information, Ministry of Defence 556w
Drugs, Rehabilitation 291w
Harrier aircraft 850w
HMS Sheffield, Decommissioning 550w
HMS Sheffield, Inquiries 1018w
Institutional care, Fees and charges 296w
Land, Ministry of Defence 445–7w
Leukaemia, Drugs 160w, 295–6w
Leukaemia, Medical treatments 533w
Leukaemia, Transplant surgery 767–8w
Mental health services, Elderly 439w
Mentally ill 1039w
Millennium landmark projects 574w
Millennium landmark projects, Portsmouth 574w
Ministers, Correspondence 214w
National Institute for Clinical Excellence, Drugs 1045w
NHS, Finance 532w
Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty 844–5w
Parliamentary questions, Dept of Health 930w
Pensions 1001w
Railways, Repairs and maintenance 950w
Railways, Safety 350w
Sentencing 399–400w
Television, Licensing 905w
Training, Ministry of Defence 317w
Trials 406w
War pensions 207w
War pensions, Appeals 317–8w

Hancock, Mr Mike—continued
Warships, Repairs and maintenance 319w, 554w
Wild animals, Pets 1029–30w
Written questions, Ministry of Defence 550w
Written questions, Treasury 214w

Haringey
Playing fields 248w

Harman, Rt Hon Harriet, Solicitor-General
Questions
Barristers, Ethnic groups 885–6w
Catering, Solicitor-General 516w
Courts, Northern Ireland 518w
Criminal Courts Review 886w
Discrimination, Solicitor-General 545w
EC law, Solicitor-General 515–6w
Equal pay, Solicitor-General 9–10w
Equipment, Solicitor-General 11–2w
Flexible working, Solicitor-General 539–41w
Hotels, Solicitor-General 6–8w
Internet, Solicitor-General 5–6w
Maddison, Ronald 200w
Manpower, Solicitor-General 3–5w
Non-governmental organisations, Solicitor-General 539w
Official hospitality, Solicitor-General 541–3w
Parental leave, Solicitor-General 544–5w
Prosecutions, Reform 886–8w
Public appointments, Solicitor-General 515w, 543w
Publicity, Solicitor-General 513–5w
Railways, Solicitor-General 10w, 517–8w
Relocation services, Solicitor-General 2–3w
Standards, Attorney General 199–200w
Theft, Solicitor-General 543–4w
Visits abroad, Solicitor-General 885w
Work sharing, Solicitor-General 8–9w

Harrier aircraft
558w, 850w

Harris, Dr Evan
Debates etc.
Adoption and Children Bill, Programme motion and Rep (20.03.02) 377
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Walsgrave Hospital (20.03.02) 85–8wh
Questions
Asylum, Housing 1062w
Cancer, Waiting lists 908–9w
Dental services 300–6w
Hospitals, Contamination 532–3w
Hospitals, Repairs and maintenance 298w
NHS, Standards 784w
NHS, Vacancies 534w
NHS Professionals 757–8w
Osteoporosis, Screening 1038w
Respiratory syncytial virus 768w

Harris, Mr Tom
Questions
Terrorism, Northern Ireland 337–8w

Harvey, Nick
Questions
Art works, Export controls 388w
Children, Protection 291–2w
Digital broadcasting 547
Flood control 268w
Future of Farming and Food Policy Commission 1024w
Medical Practices Committee 1047w
National Lottery 43–4w, 561–2w
National Lottery, Barrow in Furness 906w
Objects in lieu of tax 903–4w

Harvey, Nick—continued
Queen Elizabeth II, Anniversaries 255–6w, 318w, 349w, 394w, 448w, 506–8w, 571w, 665w, 1024w
Sponsorship, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 568w
Tourism, Statistics 904w

Harwich
Winter fuel payments 1004w

Havard, Mr Dai
Questions
Blood, Donors 929w

Hawkins, Mr Nick
Debates etc.
Railtrack (25.03.02) 589
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Africa, International assistance (19.03.02) 44–6wh
Questions
Civil defence 581w
Drugs, Crime 1059w
Gambling 550
Gibraltar, Spain 612w
VAT, Internet 518w

Hayes, Mr John
Debates etc.
Easter adjournment debate intervention (26.03.02) 758

Hazardous materials
Industrial health and safety 835w
Pollution control 1021w
Refrigeration 134w
Shoreham 270w
Tipping of waste 707–8w

Heald, Mr Oliver
Debates etc.
Afghanistan, Armed conflict (20.03.02) 341
Oral question time intervention (26.03.02) 694
Questions
Agency nurses 761w
Compulsorily detained mental patients 775w
Consultants, Dept of Health 1045w
Defence Medical Services 559w
Hospitals, Consultants 761–2w
Mental health services 775w
Mental health services, Expenditure 771–6w
Mental health services, Finance 439–40w, 771–2w
Mentally ill, Elderly 771w
NHS, Debts 768–72w
NHS, Finance 781w, 939w
NHS, Negligence 1045–6w
NHS, Standards 781w
NHS Professionals 758–9w
Primary care trusts 1036w
Primary care trusts, Finance 937–8w
Surgery, Private sector 699

Healey, John, Parliamentary Secretary, Dept for Education and Skills
Debates etc.
Education (19.03.02) 224–7
Questions
Computers within reach programme 254–5w
Education, Liverpool 248–9w
Individual learning accounts 497–9w
Individual learning accounts, Take-up 247–8w
Literacy 635–6w
Schools, Buildings 250w, 630w
Schools, Drinking water 253–4w

Healey, John—continued
Schools, Playing fields 248w, 251–2w, 632w
Schools, Pornography 247w
Schools, Private finance initiative 901–2w
Schools, Shrewsbury 630w
Teachers, Information technology 256w
Wired up communities initiative 252–3w
Woodmancote School, Land 252w

Health
Developing countries 369w
Young people 1047w

Health and Safety Executive
Contracts 976w

Health authorities
Greater London 760w
North Yorkshire 920–1w
Somerset 298–9w

Health education
565w
Cancer 157w
Diabetes 776–7w
Drugs 337w

Health hazards
Cannabis 436w
Electromagnetic fields 437w
Waste disposal 271w

Health insurance
Dept for Education and Skills 500w
Police 480–1w

Health Professions Council
Public appointments 933–5w

Health services
Children 1046–7w
Disadvantaged 687–8, 700–2
Elderly 308–9w
Equal opportunities 765–6w
Liverpool 1046–7w
Territorial Army 311–2w, 316–7w

Healthy living centres
Northumberland 435w

Hearing aids
162w, 695–8, 766w, 916w
Gloucestershire 162w
Stepping Hill Hospital 916w

Hearing impaired
Disability aids 917w

Heath, Mr David
Debates etc.
Agriculture, Somerset (25.03.02) 681
Council tax (26.03.02) 761–5
Easter adjournment debate intervention (26.03.02) 746–7
Questions
Ambulance services, Standards 910w
EC common foreign and security policy 11–2

Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Debates etc.
Barcelona Summit (EC) (18.03.02) 31

Heathrow Airport
Railway network 657w, 945w

Heavily indebted poor countries initiative
855w

Hedges and ditches
38–9w
Farms 124–5w

Helicopters
Accidents 850–1w
Armagh 850–1w
Repairs and maintenance 1016w

Hemswell Cliff
Asylum 720w, 889–91w, 1063–4w

Henderson, Mr Doug
Debates etc.
Afghanistan, Armed conflict (20.03.02) 354–6

Henderson, Mr Ivan
Debates etc.
Railtrack (25.03.02) 591
Questions
Firing ranges, Shoeburyness 848w
Gambling 905w
Pensioners, Winter fuel payments 1004w
Rwanda, Overseas aid 876w
Television, Licensing 575w

Hendrick, Mr Mark
Debates etc.
Afghanistan, Armed conflict (20.03.02) 328
Education (19.03.02) 201, 210
Questions
Court of Protection, Preston 179w
Drugs, Health education 337w
EC defence policy 56w

Hendry, Mr Charles
Debates etc.
Zimbabwe (21.03.02) 456
Questions
EC defence policy 58w

Hepburn, Mr Stephen
Questions
A1, Scotland 177w
Armed forces, Manpower 6
Individual learning accounts, Take-up 247–8w
Water sports, North East region 1025–6w
Water sports, Publications 1026w

Hercules aircraft
Afghanistan 558w

Hermon, Lady
Debates etc.
Castlereagh, Points of order (19.03.02) 170–1
Chinook helicopters (19.03.02) 249, 261, 264–5, 273
Questions
Aerospace industry, Research 417
Elections, Northern Ireland 288
Helicopters, Accidents 850–1w

Hesford, Stephen
Questions
Learning support units 254w

Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia, Secretary of State for Trade and Industry
Debates etc.
Consignia, Ministerial statements (25.03.02) 565–80
Questions
Aerospace industry, Research 415–7
Alcoholic drinks, Measurement 75w
Arthur Andersen, Dept of Trade and Industry 788w
Arthur Andersen, Northern Ireland Office 788w
Astrophysics, Monitoring 796w
British Petroleum, Dept of Trade and Industry 799–800w
Broadband 696–7w
Clothing, USA 455w
Coal, Pollution control 455w
Common customs tariffs 696w
Company law 695w
Conferences, Dept of Trade and Industry 788–9w

Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia—continued
Consignia 794w
Construction 451–2w
Contracts, Dept of Trade and Industry 84w
Correspondence, Dept of Trade and Industry 790–1w
Crimes against property, Dept of Trade and Industry 361w
Dept of Trade and Industry 79w
Devereux, Nigel 457w
Disability aids, Sight impaired 76w
Discrimination, Dept of Trade and Industry 79w
Discrimination, EC action 380–1w
"Draught Beer and Cider Consultation Paper" 78w
EC Research Council 84w
Engineers, Dept of Trade and Industry 365–6w
Environment protection, Dept of Trade and Industry 456w
Equal opportunities, Dept of Trade and Industry 80w
Equal pay 461w
Equal pay, Leeds 77w
Equal pay, North West region 77w
Equal pay, Stevenage 77w
Equal Pay Act 1970 460w
European Bank for Reconstruction and Development 361w
Females, Departmental responsibilities 460w
Females, Employment 460w
Females, Engineering 694–5w
Females, Pensions 615–6w
Females, Public appointments 430–1
Festivals and special occasions, Dept of Trade and Industry 683w
Flexible working, Productivity 460w
Foreign investment in UK 695–6w, 794–5w
Galileo project 690–1w
General Agreement on Trade in Services, Higher education 693w
Government departments, Repairs and maintenance 684w
Hotels, Dept of Trade and Industry 682w
Human rights, Dept of Trade and Industry 702w
Imports, Standards 75w
Individual voluntary arrangements 366w
Industry, Higher education 453w
Intellectual property, Trade agreements 86–7w
International Women's Day 461w
Internet, Dept of Trade and Industry 796w
Iron and steel 453w
Iron and steel, Manpower 453–4w
Iron and steel, USA 423–7
Iron and steel, Wales 453w
Magistrates, Dept of Trade and Industry 693w
Manpower, Dept of Trade and Industry 790w
Manufacturing industries, Climate change levy 456w
Mittal, Lakshmi 75w, 692w
Mothers, Employment 431–2, 461w
National Physical Laboratory 795w
New deal for young people, Dept of Trade and Industry 701w
New deal schemes, Dept of Trade and Industry 700–1w
Non-governmental organisations, Dept of Trade and Industry 362w
Nurseries, Dept of Trade and Industry 701w
Official hospitality, Dept of Trade and Industry 682w

Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia—continued
Orders and regulations, Dept of Trade and Industry 681w
Post offices 422–3
Post offices, Bank services 697w
Post offices, Profits 793–4w
Postal services, Standards 794w
Private finance initiative, Dept of Trade and Industry 701–2w
Public private partnerships, Dept of Trade and Industry 81w, 702w
Publicity, Dept of Trade and Industry 789w
Rolls-Royce, Public appointments 804w
Science, Dept of Trade and Industry 457w
Science, Professional organisations 365w
Shipbuilding 457w
Small businesses, Loan guarantee scheme 242w
Standards, Dept of Trade and Industry 81w, 702w
Technology, Dept of Trade and Industry 458w
Television, Electric shock 678w
Territorial Army, Dept of Trade and Industry 691w
Theft, Dept of Trade and Industry 246–7w, 363–6w
Trade, Philippines 455–6w
Trade, USA 455w
Trade agreements, Drugs 245–6w
Trade marks, EC law 697w
Trade Partners UK 242–3w
Trade unions 698w
Vibration white finger 456w
Visits abroad, Dept of Trade and Industry 682–3w
Women and Equality Unit, Science 429–30
Wood, Dept of Trade and Industry 361–2w
World Economic Forum 76–7w
Yusufeli dam 80–1w

Higher civil servants
Education 816w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 609w

Higher education
110w, 636w
Complaints 105w
Engineering 633w
Finance 111w, 249–50w, 633–4w
General Agreement on Trade in Services 693w
Industry 453w
Science 633w
Social class 110–1w
Student numbers 111–2w

Highways Agency
Broadspring Wood 32w

Hinchliffe, Mr David
Debates etc.
Rugby, Petitions (20.03.02) 408
Questions
Committee on Safety of Medicines, Appeals 296w
Hospital beds 692
Immigration, Administrative delays 888w
NHS, Redundancy 535–6w

Historic buildings
Buckinghamshire 569–70w
Inheritance tax 734–5w

Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England
see English Heritage

HIV infection
Developing countries 863–4w

HMS Invincible
1019w

HMS Sheffield
Decommissioning 550w
Inquiries 1018w

Hoban, Mr Mark
Debates etc.
Education (21.03.02) 473, 519–20
Questions
Electronic equipment, Waste disposal 121w, 689w
Gambling 549
Manpower, Dept for Work and Pensions 153–4w
Members, Correspondence 906w, 930w, 986w, 1052w
NHS, Per capita costs 929w
Surgery, Private sector 698–9

Hodge, Margaret, Minister of State for Universities, Dept for Education and Skills
Questions
Children, Day care 624–30w
Degrees, Buckingham 105w
Further education, Engineering 100w
Higher education 110w, 636w
Higher education, Complaints 105w
Higher education, Finance 111w, 249–50w, 633–4w
Higher education, Science 633w
Higher education, Social class 110–1w
Higher education, Student numbers 111–2w
Languages 635w
Learning and Skills Council for England, Circulars 107–8w
Learning and skills councils, Public appointments 108w
Medicine, Student numbers 105w, 635w
National vocational qualifications, Grants 896–7w
Nurses, Training 629w
Oxford Brookes University 107w
Students, Blackpool 634w
Veterinary medicine, Wales 105w

Hoey, Miss Kate
Debates etc.
Barcelona Summit (EC) (18.03.02) 29
Consignia (25.03.02) 575
Hunting (18.03.02) 67–9, 77, (21.03.02) 465
Questions
Crime, Firearms 399w
Roads, Tolls 341–2w
Schools, Greater London 501w

Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Debates etc.
Afghanistan, Armed conflict (20.03.02) 333–4
Hunting (21.03.02) 469
Zimbabwe (21.03.02) 452–3
Zimbabwe, Points of order (19.03.02) 234

Holmes, Paul
Questions
Capita, Home Office 98w
Transplant surgery 763–4w

Home care services
930–2w
Elderly 936w

Home energy efficiency scheme
141–2w, 727w, 828w

Home Office
Accountancy 274–5w
Capita 98w, 275w
Design 591–2w
Fair trade initiative 589–90w, 1060–1w
Fees and charges 472–4w

Home Office—continued
Festivals and special occasions 597w
Flexible working 395w
Non-departmental public bodies 276w
Non-governmental organisations 276–7w
Offices 275w, 889w
Public appointments 892w
Public relations 395–6w
Publicity 89–90w
Railways 275w
Regulatory Impact Unit 283w
Relocation services 91w
Theft 274w

Homelessness
492–4w, 665w
North West region 28w

Homeopathy
160–1w

Homicide
Children 295, 839w

Honey
131–2w
Imports 132–3w

Hood, Mr Jimmy
Questions
Child Support Agency, Departmental responsibilities 996w
EC Foreign Affairs Council 191–3w
EC Research Council 84w
EU Employment and Social Policy Council 342–3w

Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey, Secretary of State for Defence
Debates etc.
Afghanistan, Armed conflict (20.03.02) 331–45, 352
Afghanistan, Ministerial statements (18.03.02) 37–48
Chinook helicopters (19.03.02) 237, 240, 243–50
Questions
Afghanistan, Armed conflict 56w, 207–8w
Afghanistan, Armed forces 546–7w
Afghanistan, Hercules aircraft 558w
Afghanistan, International cooperation 208–9w
Afghanistan, Peace keeping operations 7–8, 15–6, 208–9w
Afghanistan, Turkey 209w
Armed forces, Deployment 63–4w
Armed forces, Monuments 311w, 448–9w
Ballistic missile defence 844w
EC common foreign and security policy 9–12
EC defence policy 56w, 58w
Investment Approvals Board 843–4w
NATO, Russia 3–4
Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty 844–5w
Rapid deployment forces, EC countries 56w
Terrorism 20, 57–8w
Terrorism, Iraq 56w
Warships, Repairs and maintenance 559–60w

Hope, Phil
Questions
Connexions Service, Standards 896w
Housing benefit 521–2w
Social security benefits, Abuse 522–4w

Hopkins, Mr Kelvin
Debates etc.
Consignia (25.03.02) 578
Education (21.03.02) 474, 494, 501, 516–9, 522
Railtrack (25.03.02) 590

Hopkins, Mr Kelvin—continued
Questions
Business questions 440
Council housing 975w
Council housing, Property transfer 971–2w

Horam, Mr John
Questions
Home energy efficiency scheme 727w

Hospices
533–4w

Hospital beds
158w, 299, 530w, 690–4, 917w, 1036–7w
Barrow in Furness 785–6w
Isle of Wight 158w
North West region 907w

Hospitals
Admissions 172–3w, 910w, 931–2w
Asbestos 299w
Children 764w
Consultants (20.03.02) 409–14, 761–2w, 764–5w, 916w
Contamination 532–3w
Dorset 756–7w
Mergers 908w
Private finance initiative 531w
Repairs and maintenance 298w
Scotland 178w
Shropshire 931–2w
Travel 440w
Waiting lists 178w, 755–7w

Hotels
Cabinet Office 497w
Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 115–6w
Dept for Work and Pensions 152w
Dept of Health 435w
Dept of Trade and Industry 682w
President of the Council 189w
Solicitor-General 6–8w

House of Commons
Reform 186–7w, 615w

House of Commons sessional orders
Road traffic 188w

House of Lords
Judiciary 162
Reform 163–5, 187–8w, 303–4

"House of Lords Completing the Reform White Paper"
187–8w

Housing
Armed forces 68w, 71w, 447w, 554–5w, 846–8w
Asylum 95–6w, 281w, 408–10w, 590w, 1062–3w
Insulation 972w
Ministry of Defence 317w
Unitary development plans 22w

Housing benefit
416w, 521–2w, 524–5w, 640w, 988–9w, 994w, 997w, 999w
Abuse 147w, 989w, 991–2w
Hackney 640–1w
Lord Chancellor's Dept 999w
Pensioners 982–3w
Reform 147w

Housing investment programmes
971w

Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Debates etc.
Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, Addresses to the Crown (03.04.02) 810–1

Howarth, Rt Hon Alan
Questions
Iron and steel, USA 425

Howarth, Mr George
Debates etc.
Members' interests (26.03.02) 712
Questions
Correspondence, Lord Chancellor's Dept 836–7w
Crime prevention, Licensed premises 93–4w
Hospitals, Travel 440w
Maternity services 440w, 775–6w
Maternity services, Liverpool 1046w
Parish councils, Codes of practice 224w
Theft, Castlereagh 310

Howarth, Mr Gerald
Debates etc.
Afghanistan, Armed conflict (20.03.02) 367–70
Questions
Territorial Army 13

***Howells, Dr Kim**, Parliamentary Secretary, Dept for Culture Media and Sport*
Questions
Accountancy, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 505w
Archaeology, Seas and oceans 903w
Art works 391–2w
Art works, Export controls 388w
BBC, Office of Communications 389w
BBC, Public appointments 389w
Broadcasting programmes 555–6
Communications Bill (Draft) 509w
Contracts, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 390w
Crimes against property, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 573w
Digital broadcasting 546–8
Electronic publishing, Legal deposit 576w
English Heritage, EC grants and loans 505–6w
Film 391w
Flexible working, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 389w
Historic buildings, Buckinghamshire 569–70w
International Film School 566w
King Edward VII Convalescent Home for Servicemen 548–9
Licensing laws 904–5w
Magistrates, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 505w
Manpower, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 568w
Members, Correspondence 199w, 906w
Ministerial policy advisors, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 390–1w
Mountains, Cumbria 564w
Museums and galleries 564w
Music 556–7
New Millennium Experience 389w
New Millennium Experience, Shareholders 576w
Nurseries, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 573w
Objects in lieu of tax 903–4w
Office of Communications 553–4, 572w
Office of Communications, Disabled 572w
Office of Communications, Regional assemblies 571–2w
Older workers, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 387w
Press releases, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 392w
Public libraries, Internet 903w
Public private partnerships, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 390w, 906w
Radio, Languages 392–3w

***Howells, Dr Kim**—continued*
Regulatory Impact Unit, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 390w
Sponsorship, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 568w
Standards, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 390w
Television, Licensing 509w, 575w, 905w
Territorial Army, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 392w
Theft, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 42w, 395w
Tourism 393–4w, 571w, 579w
Tourism, Euro 566w
Tourism, Scotland 903w
Tourism, Statistics 904w
Wood, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 391w
Work sharing, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 388–9w
World Tourism Organisation 567–8w

Hoyle, Mr Lindsay
Debates etc.
Consignia (25.03.02) 576
Gibraltar, Points of order (18.03.02) 49
Questions
Clergy, Pay 562
Defence equipment, Procurement 1–2
Iron and steel, USA 687–8w
Offices, Home Office 889w
Tourism 546

***Hughes, Beverley**, Parliamentary Secretary, Home Office*
Questions
Assisted prison visits scheme 283w
Aylesbury Young Offender Institution, Fire prevention 93w
Domestic violence 406–7w, 482w
Driving offences, Prison sentences 401w
Morris, John 291w
National Probation Service for England and Wales, Information technology 403w
Prison accommodation 399w
Prisoner escapes 400w
Prisoners, Courts martial 472w
Prisoners, Lone parents 400w
Prisons, Finance 92–3w
Prisons, Pay 478w
Probation and aftercare 93w, 404–5w
Probation and aftercare, Standards 282–3w
Sentencing 399–400w, 479w
Sentencing, Greater London 401–2w
Sexual offences, Probation and aftercare 283–4w
Young offenders, Bail 403w

Hughes, Mr Kevin Michael
Questions
Civil servants, Political impartiality 449w

Hughes, Simon
Debates etc.
Football (Disorder) (Amendment) Bill, Lords amendts (26.03.02) 718–22
Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, Addresses to the Crown (03.04.02) 816–7
Questions
Asylum, Domestic violence 891–2w
Cancer, Waiting lists 909w
Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service 621w, 840w
Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service, Information technology 621–2w
Entry clearances, Applications 599–606w
Magistrates, Manpower 158
Prisons, Finance 92–3w
Private Members' bills 187w
Probation and aftercare 93w
Probation and aftercare, Standards 282–3w

***Hughes, Simon**—continued*
Sports, Publicity 566w
Voting behaviour 561
Voting methods 563–4
Yarls Wood Detention Centre 281w, 590–1w
Yarls Wood Detention Centre, Inquiries 93w

Hullbridge
Floods 724w

Human experiments
Porton Down 57–8w, 314–5w

Human rights
Cabinet Office 583w
Dept for International Development 867w
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 977w
Dept of Trade and Industry 702w
Disabled 618–9w, 885w
Local government 966w
Ministry of Defence 845w
Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 894w
President of the Council 512–3w
Prime Minister 884w

Human Rights Act 1998
Questions
164–5w
Charities 1060w
Citizens' advice bureaux 1060w

Humble, Mrs Joan
Debates etc.
Child Support Agency (20.03.02) 323
Questions
Broadband 455w
Dogs, Injuries 299–300
Gambling 550
Hospitals, Children 764w
Public Record Office, Standards 839–41w

Hunter, Mr Andrew
Questions
Aerials, Planning permission 30w
Employment, Regulation 87w
European Communities, Publicity 194w
Theft, Castlereagh 314
Tipping of waste, Hazardous materials 707–8w
Waste disposal, EC law 709–10w

Hunting
(18.03.02) 52–140, 559–60, 831w
Ministerial statements (21.03.02) 457–70

Hurst, Mr Alan
Debates etc.
Local government (26.03.02) 730–4

Husaini, Safiya
611w, 617w

***Hutton, Rt Hon John**, Minister of State, Dept of Health*
Questions
Barnet Primary Care Trust, Chinese community 780w
Community health services 915–6w
Doctors, Career structure 759w
Doctors, Pay 755w
Doctors, Pensions 442w, 915w
Edgware Hospital 699–700
Family practitioner services 926–8w
General practitioners 760w
General practitioners, Females 762w
General practitioners, Part-time employment 759–61w
Health authorities, Greater London 760w
Health services, Equal opportunities 765–6w
Hospitals, Admissions 910w

Hutton, Rt Hon John—continued
Hospitals, Consultants 761–2w, 764–5w, 916w
Hospitals, Contamination 532–3w
Hospitals, Mergers 908w
Hospitals, Private finance initiative 531w
Hospitals, Waiting lists 755–7w
Medical Practices Committee 1047w
Medical profession, Foreign workers 161w
Medical profession, Witnesses 893w
Medical treatments, EC countries 532w
Members, Correspondence 930w
NHS, Debts 768–72w
NHS, Disciplinary proceedings 929w
NHS, Finance 532w, 781w, 920w, 939w
NHS, Lancashire 763w
NHS, Per capita costs 929w
NHS, Recruitment 161w
NHS, Redundancy 535–6w
NHS, Standards 781w
NHS, Vacancies 534w
NHS Professionals 757–9w
Nurses, Greater London 685–6, 910w
Nurses, Recruitment 759w, 925–6w
Nursing and Midwifery Council, Public appointments 933–5w
Out-patients, Attendance 531–2w
Primary care trusts 1036w
Primary care trusts, Finance 937–8w
Primary care trusts, Wirral 931w
Public appointments, Dept of Health 929–30w
St Bartholomew's Hospital, Accident and emergency departments 762w
St George's Hospital Tooting 1041w
Smallpox, Terrorism 937w
Southampton University Hospitals NHS Trust, Medical treatments 917w
Surgery, Private sector 698–9
Surgery, Waiting lists 530w
Transplant surgery 763–4w

Hyde Park
Festivals and special occasions 388w

Iddon, Dr Brian
Questions
Armed forces, North West region 18–9
Commission for Racial Equality, Public appointments 411w
Hospital beds, North West region 907w
Housing investment programmes 971w
Immigration, Forms 888w

Identification friend foe systems
1016–7w

Identity cards
472w, 598–9w

Illegal immigrants
408w
Channel tunnel 96–7w

Illsley, Mr Eric
Questions
Barnsley Primary Care Trust, Finance 907w

Immigration
Administrative delays 888w
Forms 888w

Immigration and Nationality Directorate
Postal services 96w

Immobilisation of vehicles
596w, 956w

Import controls
Food 827w

Imports
Animal feed 118–9w
Beef 718w
Fluoride 372w

Imports—continued
Food 713w
Forced labour 867w
Honey 132–3w
Meat 119–20w, 175w
Plants 119–20w
Standards 75w
Wood 722–3w

Incapacity benefit
641–2w
Appeals 146–8w
Medical examinations 416–8w

Incinerators
832w
Dioxins 134w

Income support
Pensioners 144w, 149–52, 153w, 426–7w, 642–3w, 860w, 986w, 988w, 991w
Telford 429w

India
Arms trade 700w
Overseas aid 869w
Overseas trade 703w
Religious freedom 810w
UN Security Council 52–3w

Indian subcontinent
Nuclear weapons 196w

Individual learning accounts
497–9w
North East region 247–8w
Take-up 247–8w

Individual voluntary arrangements
366w

Industrial diseases
Compensation 85w, 691w, 693w, 799w

Industrial disputes
Jobcentre Plus 418–9w
Lost working days 705–6w
Pensions 89w

Industrial health and safety
Agriculture 967w
EC action 966w
EC law 802–3w
Hazardous materials 835w
National Air Traffic Services 232w
Pregnant women 802w
Small businesses 966w

Industrial injuries
Greater London 970w

Industrial injuries disablement benefit
Asbestos 429w

Industry
Higher education 453w

Information officers
Cabinet Office 816–7w
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 217–8w, 483–4w, 652w, 979w
Dept for Work and Pensions 418w
Dept of Health 1051w
Prime Minister 884w
Treasury 1035w

Information services
Railway stations 20–1w

Information technology
Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service 621–2w
Dept for Education and Skills 255w
Local education authorities 255w
Maritime and Coastguard Agency 488–9w
National Probation Service for England and Wales 403w
Public bodies 853w

Information technology—continued
Scotland Office 463–4w
Teachers 256w

Ingram, Rt Hon Adam, Minister of State, Ministry of Defence
Questions
Air force, Deployment 65w
Air force, Iraq 554w
Air force, Manpower 5
Aircraft carriers 558w
Armed forces, British overseas territories 551w
Armed forces, Deployment 851–2w, 1015–6w
Armed forces, Disciplinary proceedings 62w, 318w
Armed forces, Education 550w
Armed forces, Engineers 210–1w
Armed forces, Females 210–1w, 850w
Armed forces, Manpower 5–7
Armed forces, North West region 18–9
Armed forces, Pensions 207w
Armed forces, Training 1015w
Army, Deployment 559w
Army, Engineers 210w
Army, Londonderry 64–5w
Army, Manpower 53–4w
Army Base Repair Organisation 842w
Bici, Fahir 72w
Chemical weapons 842–3w
Chinook helicopters, Accidents 1016w
Chinook helicopters, Inquiries 851w
Cost effectiveness, Ministry of Defence 205–6w
Courts martial 60–3w
Defence Analytical Services Agency, Standards 843w
Defence Aviation Repair Agency 549w
Defence equipment, Procurement 206w
Defence Logistics Organisation 206–7w
Dockyards, Flexible working 65w
Firearms, Northern Ireland 209–10w
Gibraltar 69w
Green Howards Regiment 207w
Harrier aircraft 558w, 850w
Helicopters, Accidents 850–1w
Helicopters, Repairs and maintenance 1016w
HMS Invincible 1019w
HMS Sheffield, Decommissioning 550w
HMS Sheffield, Inquiries 1018w
Human rights, Ministry of Defence 845w
Identification friend foe systems 1016–7w
Iraq, Air force 56w
Logistics, Ministry of Defence 553–4w
Military aid, Macedonia 849w
Military aircraft 550–1w
Military aircraft, Repairs and maintenance 549w
Military bases, Disclosure of information 551–2w
Military Corrective Training Centre Colchester 558w
Peace keeping operations, Training 556–7w
Peace keeping operations, Yugoslavia 60w
Private finance initiative, Ministry of Defence 845–6w
Research, Ministry of Defence 552–3w
Royal Maritime Auxiliary Service, Training 64w
Service Families Task Force 58–9w
Submarines, Accidents 552w
Theft, Ministry of Defence 71w
USA, Ministry of Defence 559w
Warships, Modernisation 207w
Warships, Repairs and maintenance 71w, 319w, 554w

Inheritance tax
Historic buildings 734–5w

Injuries
Armed forces 315–6w, 559w
Dogs 299–300

Inland Revenue
157–8
Codes of practice 853w
Telephone services 737–8w

Inland Revenue Regulation Act 1890
Questions
Payments 325–6w

Inland waterways
114w, 714–5w

Insolvency
244w, 684w, 687w
North West region 686–8w

Insolvency Act 2000
Questions
686w

Insolvency (Amendment) Regulations 2000
Questions
685w

Insolvency Service
684–6w, 789–90w
Criminal investigation 685–6w
Finance 684w
Manpower 78–9w
Standards 685–6w
Telephone services 78w, 684w

Institutional care
308w, 530–1w, 920w
Barrow in Furness 767w
Closures 295–7
Construction 307w
Fees and charges 157–8w, 167w, 170–1w, 296w, 308w, 527–8w, 536w, 786w, 907–8w, 935–6w
Greater London 307w
Married people 166w
Nurses 308w
Planning permission 967–8w
Registration 766–7w
Shropshire 932w
Standards 164–9w, 171w, 304, 307–8w, 440–1w, 936w
West Midlands 920w
Young people 170w

Insulation
Housing 972w

Insurance
Buses 744–5w
Floods 135–6w
Yarls Wood Detention Centre 281w, 479–80w

Insurance companies
Regulation 747w

Integrated schools
Northern Ireland 335–6w

Intellectual property
Trade agreements 86–7w

Intercountry adoption
Romania 754–5w

Interest charges
National Air Traffic Services 232w

International Conference on Financing for Development
870–1w

International cooperation
Afghanistan 208–9w

International Criminal Court
194–5w

International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia
194w

International Film School
566w

International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance
865w

International Monetary Fund
13w

International Women's Day
461w

Internet
Dept of Trade and Industry 796w
Drugs 297–8w, 433w, 917–8w
Farmers 1024w
Females 74w
Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 320w
Public libraries 903w
Racial violence 97–8w
Small businesses 87–8w
Solicitor-General 5–6w
Treasury 733w
VAT 518w

Intervention Board
Refrigerators 720w

Intervention stocks
Dumfries 828–9w

Invalid care allowances
147–8w, 152w
Patients 155w

Inverness
Air routes 942w

Invest to save budget
328–9w

Investment Approvals Board
843–4w

Iraq
385w
Air force 56w, 554w
Armed conflict 294w, 324w, 467w, 613w, 748–9w
Politics and government 50–1w
Social conditions 467w
Terrorism 56w, 385w
Weapons 196w, 319w, 613w

Irish Sea
Oil 702–3w
Pollution 726–7w
Radioactive wastes 372w

Iron and steel
453w
Manpower 453–4w
USA 423–7, 687–8w
Wales 453w, 688w

Irranca-Davies, Huw
Debates etc.
Hunting (18.03.02) 91, 108, 118

Islam
Discrimination 91–2w

Isle of Wight
Hospital beds 158w
Parish councils 1030w
Petitions 885w
Ports 346w

Israel
805w
Army 50w
Children 384w

Israel—continued
Defence 448w

Israeli–Palestinian conflict
see Middle East

Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Debates etc.
Railtrack (25.03.02) 593
Questions
Employee share ownership schemes, Advertising 854–5w
Refrigeration, Hazardous materials 134w

Jackson, Helen
Questions
Iron and steel, USA 424–5
Police, Northern Ireland 333–4w
Roads, Accidents 483w
Weapons, Northern Ireland 289–90

***Jamieson, Mr David**, Parliamentary Secretary, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions*
Questions
A21, Accidents 227w
A303, Stonehenge 357–8w
Abandoned vehicles 666w
Air routes, Inverness 942w
Air traffic 351w
Air traffic control 230w
Air traffic control, Prestwick 668w
Aircraft, Safety 230–1w
Airlines, Government assistance 231w
Airports, Administrative delays 230w
Airports, Fees and charges 351–3w
Airports, Landing rights 491w
Airports, South East region 942w
Aviation, EC action 230w
Aviation, Freight 942w
Aviation, Government assistance 943w
Aviation, Standards 943–4w
British Transport Police, Arrest warrants 660w
British Transport Police, Manpower 660w
Central Railway 227–8w, 948w
Central Railway, Freight 658–9w
Channel tunnel, Freight 229w, 951w
Civil defence 960–1w
Crew relief costs scheme 348w
Driving, Cellular phones 359–60w
Driving, Licensing 674–6w
Driving, Working hours 40w
Driving under influence 360w
East London line 657–8w
EU Transport and Telecommunications Council, Scottish Executive 237w
Exhaust emissions 958–9w
Ferries, Scotland 941w
Fishing vessels, Accidents 346–7w
Freight 658w
Galileo project 942w
Great Central Railway 228w
Highways Agency, Broadspring Wood 32w
Liquefied petroleum gas 344–5w
Liquefied petroleum gas, Safety 25–6w
London Underground, Public private partnerships 17–8w, 236w, 349w, 945–8w
London Underground, Rolling stock 946w
M42, Noise 358w
Maritime and Coastguard Agency, Information technology 488–9w
Maritime and Coastguard Agency, Property transfer 346w
Maritime and Coastguard Agency, Standards 941w
Motor vehicles, Pollution control 484w
Motor vehicles, Registration 237w
Motor vehicles, Testing 676–7w
National Air Traffic Services, Computers 232–3w

***Jamieson, Mr David**—continued*
National Air Traffic Services, Finance 943w
National Air Traffic Services, Industrial health and safety 232w
National Air Traffic Services, Interest charges 232w
Navigation, Estuaries 31w
Navigation, River Humber 31w, 666–7w
Petrol alternatives 957–8w
Pilotage Act 1987 229w
Ports, EC grants and loans 940w
Ports, Government assistance 940w
Ports, Safety 229w, 666–7w
Ports, Shoreham 34–5w, 238w
Public transport, Standards 661w
Queen Elizabeth II, Anniversaries 349w
Railtrack 487–8w
Railtrack, Finance 18w, 654w, 949–51w
Railway stations, Information services 20–1w
Railways 21w, 654w, 659w
Railways, Concessions 953w
Railways, Disabled 486w
Railways, Electrification 953w
Railways, Fares 21w, 654w, 953w
Railways, Fences 29–30w
Railways, Finance 653w, 952w, 955w
Railways, Freight 28–9w, 658w, 951–2w
Railways, Kent 657w
Railways, Manpower 21w, 952w, 954w
Railways, Repairs and maintenance 950w
Railways, Research 350w
Railways, Romford 228w
Railways, Safety 349–50w
Railways, Somerset 659w
Railways, Standards 953–4w
Railways, Strikes 951w
Railways, West Midlands 21w
Rescue services, Brixham 39–40w
Research, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 40–1w, 667–8w, 976w
Road signs and markings, Standards 672w
Road traffic 672w
Roads, Accidents 30w
Roads, Noise 959–60w
Roads, Safety 677w
Roads, Somerset 30–1w
Roads, South West region 670w
Rolling stock 948–9w
Rolling stock, Cultural heritage 949w
Shipping, Conditions of employment 346w
Shipping, Disclosure of information 490w
Shipping, EC grants and loans 347w, 941w
Shipping, Government assistance 347–8w, 940w
Shipping, Inspections 489–90w
Shipping, Proof of identity 228–9w
Shipping, Registration 489w
Shipping, Tax allowances 348w
Shipping, Training 345w, 940w
Shorenam Port Authority 36–7w
South West Trains, Franchises 952w
Supply estimates, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 221w
Swanwick Air Traffic Control Centre 231w, 941–2w, 944–5w
Train operating companies 20w
Trans-European networks 350–2w
Transport 955w
Transport, Costs 661w
Transport, Rural areas 24–5w
Trust ports 37w
Wembley Park Station, Repairs and maintenance 674w
Written questions, Administrative delays 39w

Jeans, Simon
195w

Jenkin, Mr Bernard
Debates etc.
Afghanistan (18.03.02) 39–40, 48, (19.03.02) 169
Afghanistan, Armed conflict (20.03.02) 328–32, 340, 343–4, 371
Afghanistan, Standing order no 24 applications (19.03.02) 169
Oral question time intervention (18.03.02) 12
Questions
Afghanistan, Armed forces 546–7w
Afghanistan, International cooperation 208–9w
Afghanistan, Peace keeping operations 208–9w
Afghanistan, Turkey 209w
Air force, Deployment 65w
Apache AH-64 helicopter 552w
Armed forces, Deployment 1015–6w
Armed forces, Food 205w
Army, Deployment 559w
Ballistic missile defence 844w
Cost effectiveness, Ministry of Defence 205–6w
Defence equipment, Procurement 2–3, 206w
Defence Evaluation and Research Agency 560–1w
Defence Evaluation and Research Agency, Consultants 547w
Defence Logistics Organisation 206–7w
Defence Procurement Agency 64w
Dockyards, Flexible working 65w
EC common foreign and security policy 11
Guided weapons 204–5w
Helicopters, Repairs and maintenance 1016w
HMS Invincible 1019w
Jeans, Simon 195w
Logistics, Ministry of Defence 553–4w
Military aircraft 550–1w
Research, Ministry of Defence 552–3w
USA, Ministry of Defence 559w
Warships, Repairs and maintenance 71w

Jenkins, Mr Brian
Questions
Councillors, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 720w
Councillors, Dept for International Development 471w
Councillors, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 665–6w
Councillors, Treasury 736w
Land Registry, Standards 840w
M42, Noise 358w
Magistrates, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 505w
Magistrates, Dept for International Development 471w
Magistrates, Dept of Trade and Industry 693w
Territorial Army, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 392w
Territorial Army, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 718w
Territorial Army, Dept for International Development 470w
Territorial Army, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 217w
Territorial Army, Dept of Trade and Industry 691w
Territorial Army, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 382w
Territorial Army, Lord Chancellor's Dept 414w
Territorial Army, Ministry of Defence 318–9w
Territorial Army, Treasury 332–3w

***Jenkins, Mr Brian**—continued*
Textiles, Government assistance 792w

Jobcentre Plus
650w
Closed circuit television 151–2w
Crimes of violence 148w
Industrial disputes 418–9w
Security 148w
Working conditions 419w

Jobcentres
Crimes of violence 148w, 649w

Jobseeker's allowance
150w
Non-teaching staff 150w

***Johnson, Alan**, Minister of State for Employment Relations and Regions, Dept of Trade and Industry*
Questions
Advantage West Midlands, EC regional policy 459w
Conditions of employment 417–9
East of England Development Agency, Finance 683–4w
Employment, Regulation 87w
Employment tribunals, Dept of Trade and Industry 77w
Industrial health and safety, EC law 802–3w
Industrial health and safety, Pregnant women 802w
Parental leave, EC law 801w
Part-time employment, EC law 802w
Pensions, Industrial disputes 89w
Perkins Engines 85–6w
Privatisation, Pension rights 88–9w
Public holidays, Pay 452w
Railways, Kent 703w
Regional assistance, Buckingham 81–4w
Summertime 703w
Working hours, EC law 802w
Young people, Employment 803w

Johnson, Mr Boris
Debates etc.
Education (19.03.02) 209–12
Questions
Abandoned vehicles 268w
Capita, Dept for Education and Skills 247w
Capita, Dept of Health 434w
Capita, Home Office 275w
Capita, Scotland Office 859w

***Johnson, Miss Melanie**, Parliamentary Secretary, Dept of Trade and Industry*
Questions
Art works, EC law 509–10w
Arthur Andersen, KPMG 687w
Astra Windows, Company liquidations 801w
Beer 245w
Claims Direct, Inquiries 458–9w
Companies House, Standards 800w
Consumers, Protection 795w
Direct selling 690w
EU Internal Market Consumer Affairs and Tourism Council, Scottish Executive 243w
Insolvency 244w, 684w, 687w
Insolvency, North West region 686–8w
Insolvency Act 2000 686w
Insolvency Service 684–6w, 789–90w
Insolvency Service, Criminal investigation 685–6w
Insolvency Service, Finance 684w
Insolvency Service, Manpower 78–9w
Insolvency Service, Standards 685–6w
Insolvency Service, Telephone services 78w, 684w

Johnson, Miss Melanie—continued
Labelling, Animal experiments 457–8w
Metrication, Retail trade 245w
P and O, Royal Caribbean Cruises 687w
Patent Office, Action Aid 244w
Patent Office, Codes of practice 243–4w
Patent Office, Standards 362–3w
Science, Investment 427–8
Stop now orders 244–5w
Unsolicited goods and services, Facsimile transmission 459w

Joint strike fighter aircraft
14

Jones, Helen M
Debates etc.
Education (19.03.02) 180–1, 192
Warehouses, Fire prevention (18.03.02) 142–5
Questions
Army Base Repair Organisation 842w
Counterfeit manufacturing, Northern Ireland 334–5w
Education, Public participation 631w
Equal pay 461w
Health services, Disadvantaged 687
Maternity services 528w
Theft, Castlereagh 338w
Unsolicited goods and services, Facsimile transmission 459w

Jones, Ian
652w, 980w

Jones, Mr Jon Owen
Debates etc.
Afghanistan, Armed conflict (20.03.02) 348

Jones, Dr Lynne
Debates etc.
State Pension Credit Bill (HL), 2R (25.03.02) 599, 605, 611, 619, 625, 639–40, 665
Questions
Computers within reach programme 254–5w
Council housing, Birmingham 355w
Council housing, Walsall 22w
Home energy efficiency scheme 141–2w
Local government, VAT 963w
Mental health 156–7w
Mothers, Employment 461w
Pension credit 141–2w
Pensions 1000–1w

Jones, Mr Martyn David
Questions
Airlines, Government assistance 231w
International Monetary Fund 13w
Medicine, Student numbers 105w, 635w
Pensioners, Income support 986w
Prescriptions, Wales 1052w

Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa, Secretary of State for Culture Media and Sport
Questions
Archaeology, Finance 567w
Arts, Education 565w
Arts, North West region 566w
BBC, Finance 564w
BBC News 24 Review 508w
Festivals and special occasions, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 42w
Gambling 905w
Health education 565w
Mass media, Ownership 905–6w
Millennium Bridge 575w
Millennium landmark projects 574w
Millennium landmark projects, Portsmouth 574w
Museums and galleries, Cambridge 564w

Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa—continued
National Lottery 550–3, 561w
Queen Elizabeth II, Anniversaries 43w, 394w, 506–8w, 557, 571w
Tourism 545–6

Joyce, Mr Eric
Questions
Counterfeit manufacturing, Northern Ireland 334–5w

Judges
Recruitment 161–2

Judiciary
331w
Complaints 837w
House of Lords 162
Training 162–3

Kalahari game reserve
203w
Ethnic groups 807w

Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Debates etc.
Demonstrations, Points of order (18.03.02) 49
Hunting (18.03.02) 53, 61–3, 71, (21.03.02) 462
Questions
Disabled, Human rights 618–9w
Members, Correspondence 825w
Robinson, Anne 98w

Keeble, Ms Sally, Parliamentary Secretary, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions
Questions
Aerials, Planning permission 30w
Areas of outstanding natural beauty 31–2w
Bus services, Crimes of violence 358–9w
Coalfields Regeneration Trust, Merseyside 40w
Council housing 975w
Council housing, Birmingham 355w
Council housing, Cash incentive scheme 971w
Council housing, Finance 966w
Council housing, Property transfer 222–4w, 971–2w
Council housing, Rents 28w, 664w
Council housing, Standards 662–3w
Council housing, Tenants' incentive scheme 663–4w
Council housing, Walsall 22w
Derelict land 354–5w
Disabled facilities grants 344w
Domestic violence 29w
EC grants and loans 37w
English Partnerships Review 353–4w
Gypsies 343–4w
Hedges and ditches 38–9w
Homelessness 493–4w, 665w
Homelessness, North West region 28w
Housing, Unitary development plans 22w
Housing investment programmes 971w
Immobilisation of vehicles 956w
Institutional care, Planning permission 967–8w
Land use 970w
Land use, Greater London 669–70w
Local government, VAT 963w
Mobile homes 38w
Neighbourhood management pathfinders programme 666w
Neighbourhood nuisance, Social rented housing 492w
Noise, Pollution control 972w
Parking offences, Fines 956–7w
Passenger transport executives, Allowances 660w
Planning 492w

Keeble, Ms Sally—continued
Planning (Hazardous Substances) Act 1990, Appeals 38w
Planning Inspectorate, Standards 673–4w
Ports, Isle of Wight 346w
Ports, Shoreham 33–5w, 238w
Post offices, Urban areas 224–5w
Public appointments, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 236w
Public transport 348–9w
Public transport, Staffordshire 605–6w
"Quality and Choice a Decent Home For All Consultation Paper" 356w
Regional planning and development 668w
Regional planning and development, EC grants and loans 347w
Regional planning and development, Urban areas 968–9w
Rented housing, Standards 972w
Right to buy 356–8w
Right to buy, Greater London 357w
Sleeping rough 27–8w
Sleeping rough, West Yorkshire 665w
Social rented housing, Evictions 29w
Social rented housing, Standards 663w
Subsidence, Greater London 355–6w
Tenants, Evictions 972w
Transport, Brent 966–7w
Transport, Finance 19w
Transport, Manchester 672w
Travel, Concessions 955–6w
Urban aid 668–9w, 969–70w
Urban aid, Leeds 668w

Keen, Alan
Questions
Nursing and Midwifery Council, Public appointments 933–5w

Keen, Ann
Questions
Nurses, Greater London 910w

Keetch, Mr Paul
Debates etc.
Afghanistan (18.03.02) 42
Questions
Ministry of Defence Police 851w
NATO, Russia 4
Territorial Army, Health services 311–2w, 316–7w

Kelly, Ruth, Economic Secretary, Treasury
Questions
Annuities 739w, 746w
Bank of England, Public appointments 521w
Bank of England, Treasury 332w
British Petroleum, Treasury 746w
Civil servants, Treasury 213w
Conferences, Treasury 12w
Consultants, Treasury 733w
Contracts, Treasury 214w
Councillors, Treasury 736w
Crimes against property, Treasury 744w
Discrimination, Treasury 735w
EC budget 855w
Economic and monetary union 750w
Electoral register 858w
Employment, North West region 519–22w
Equal opportunities, Treasury 332w
Equitable Life Assurance Society 212w, 746–7w
Equitable Life Independent Inquiry 747w
Festivals and special occasions, Treasury 735–6w
Gender impact assessment, Treasury 213w
Industrial disputes, Lost working days 705–6w
Information officers, Treasury 1035w
Insurance, Buses 744–5w

Kelly, Ruth—continued
Insurance companies, Regulation 747w
International Monetary Fund 13w
Internet, Treasury 733w
Manufacturing industries, Manpower 857w
Money laundering 856w
National Investment and Loans Office 740w
National Savings and Investments, Administrative delays 854w
New deal for young people, Treasury 744w
New deal schemes, Treasury 744w
Nurseries, Treasury 741–2w
Office for National Statistics, Supply estimates 325w
Oil, Prices 748–9w
Operating costs, Treasury 744w
Parental leave, Treasury 735w
Parliamentary questions, Treasury 742w
Pensioners, Telecommunications 747w
Private finance initiative, Treasury 856w
Public private partnerships, Treasury 857w
Public relations, Treasury 332w
Secondment, Treasury 745–6w
Secondment, Valuation Office 329–30w
Standards, Treasury 13w, 331w, 749w
Statistics, Treasury 212–3w
Taxation, Pensions 739–40w
Territorial Army, Treasury 332–3w
Theft, Treasury 12w, 325w
Travel-to-work areas 13w
Travel-to-work areas, Southern region 519w
Visits abroad, Treasury 734w
Wood, Treasury 331w

Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles
Debates etc.
Barcelona Summit (EC) (18.03.02) 26–7
Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, Addresses to the Crown (03.04.02) 803–4
Questions
Afghanistan, Armed conflict 297–8
Underwater Test and Evaluation Centre 444w

Kennedy, Jane, Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office
Questions
Counterfeit manufacturing, Northern Ireland 334–5w
Drugs, Health education 337w
Drugs, Northern Ireland 333w
Northern Ireland Prison Service 538w
Organised crime, Northern Ireland 335w
Police, Northern Ireland 333–4w, 338w
Security, Northern Ireland 538w
Terrorism, Northern Ireland 337w
Terrorism, Republic of Ireland 338w
Weapons, Northern Ireland 288–90, 338w, 538w

Kent
Railways 657w, 703w

Kent and Canterbury Hospital
Waiting lists 306–7w

Key, Mr Robert
Debates etc.
Business questions intervention (21.03.02) 434
Chinook helicopters (19.03.02) 261–4
Questions
A303, Stonehenge 357–8w
Astrophysics, Monitoring 796w
Electric cables 85w
Galileo project 690–1w
Industrial diseases, Compensation 85w
Science, Investment 428

Kidney, Mr David
Debates etc.
State Pension Credit Bill (HL), 2R (25.03.02) 602
Questions
Alternative dispute resolution 622w
Armed forces, Manpower 7
Health education 565w
Plant power, Finance 688w
Supply teachers 633w

Kilfoyle, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
Afghanistan, Armed conflict (20.03.02) 342–3

Kimball Committee
see Firearms Consultative Committee

King, Andy
Debates etc.
Hunting (18.03.02) 75
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Walsgrave Hospital (20.03.02) 84–5wh
Questions
Firearms Consultative Committee, Annual reports 290–1w
Housing benefit 988–9w
"Policing a New Century White Paper" 286w

King, Ms Oona
Debates etc.
Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, Addresses to the Crown (03.04.02) 809–10
Questions
Council housing, Cash incentive scheme 971w
Council housing, Tenants' incentive scheme 663–4w
East London line 657–8w
Hospices 533–4w
Pakistan, Overseas aid 467w
"Quality and Choice a Decent Home For All Consultation Paper" 356w
Queen Elizabeth II, Anniversaries 43w
Regional planning and development 668w
Right to buy 356–8w
Right to buy, Greater London 357w
Roads, Accidents 161w
Urban aid 669w
VAT, Small businesses 732w

King Edward VII Convalescent Home for Servicemen
548–9

Kingston upon Thames
Magistrates' courts 303

Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Debates etc.
Railtrack (25.03.02) 594
Questions
Hospital beds 690–2

Kirkcudbright
Military exercises 445–6w

Kirklees
Social security benefits 523–4w

Kirkwood, Mr Archy
Debates etc.
Child Support Agency (20.03.02) 320
Questions
Child Support Agency 994w
Housing benefit 416w, 640w, 997w, 999w
Housing benefit, Hackney 640–1w
Housing benefit, Lord Chancellor's Dept 999w
Jobseeker's allowance, Non-teaching staff 150w

Kirkwood, Mr Archy—continued
Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, Public appointments 449w
Pensioners, Income support 150–1

Knight, Rt Hon Greg
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Parliamentary questions (21.03.02) 139wh, 153wh, 162wh, 168wh, 170–4wh, 181wh
Questions
Business questions 445
Convention on the Future of Europe, Scotland 154
House of Commons sessional orders, Road traffic 188w
House of Lords, Reform 164–5
M4, Bus lanes 957w

Knight, Jim
Debates etc.
Afghanistan, Armed conflict (20.03.02) 361–3
Questions
Broadband 420–1
Civil service agencies, South West region 961w
Defence Estates 55–6w
Dorset, Dept for Work and Pensions 998w

KPMG
Arthur Andersen 687w

Kumar, Dr Ashok
Questions
Mental health, Females 1041–2w
Mental health services, Research 1042–4w
Mental health services, Yellow card scheme 1044–5w
Post offices 422

Labelling
Animal experiments 457–8w

Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Questions
Driving under influence 360w

Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Questions
Departmental responsibilities, Scottish Office 859–60w
Floods 725w
Pensioners, Income support 152
Railways, Strikes 155–6, 951w
Scotland 680w

Lamb, Norman
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Africa, International assistance (19.03.02) 42–4wh
Questions
Afghanistan, Mines 468w
Africa, AIDS 368–9w
Cancer, Waiting lists 909w
Developing countries, Health 369w
Developing countries, Maternal mortality 369w
Intellectual property, Trade agreements 86–7w
Pensioners, Income support 426w
Trade agreements, Drugs 245–6w

Lammy, David
Questions
Sentencing, Greater London 401–2w

Lanarkshire
Older workers 427w

Lancashire
NHS 763w

Land
Ministry of Defence 445–7w
NHS 298w
Woodmancote School 252w

Land Registry
Standards 840w

Land use
970w
Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 112–3w
Dept for Work and Pensions 149–50w
Greater London 669–70w

Landing rights
Airports 491w

Landlords
Taxation 734w

Languages
635w
Minorities 193w
Radio 392–3w

Lansley, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Adoption and Children Bill, Programme motion and Rep (20.03.02) 389–90
Child Support Agency (20.03.02) 323
Questions
Clergy, Finance 580–1w
Females, Public appointments 431

Law Commission
Annual reports 841w

Law Officers' Dept
see Attorney General

Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Questions
Electronic government, Contracts 214–6w
Females, Public appointments 430–1
National Investment and Loans Office 740w
Working families tax credit, Abuse 741w

Laws, Mr David
Debates etc.
Afghanistan (18.03.02) 48
Afghanistan, Armed conflict (20.03.02) 337
Questions
Bank of England, Public appointments 521w
Bank of England, Treasury 332w
Chinook helicopters, Accidents 1016w
Chinook helicopters, Inquiries 851w
Dental services 911–4w
Health insurance, Dept for Education and Skills 500w
Jobcentre Plus, Industrial disputes 418–9w
Police, Health insurance 480–1w
Specialist schools 341w
Uranium 313–4w

Lazarowicz, Mr Mark
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Africa, International assistance (19.03.02) 32–3wh
Questions
Air traffic 351w
Airports, Administrative delays 230w
Airports, Fees and charges 351–3w
Armed conflict 878–81w
Asylum, Applications 1061–2w
Aviation, Standards 943–4w
Child benefit, Complaints 1000w
Convention on the Future of Europe, Scotland 152–3
Financial institutions, Fees and charges 1034w
House of Commons, Reform 187w, 615w
Northern Ireland government 333w
Parliament, Visits 863w
Peace keeping operations, Training 556–7w
Radio, Languages 392–3w

Lazarowicz, Mr Mark—continued
United Nations, Peace keeping operations 806w, 880–1w
Zimbabwe, Politics and government 302

Learning and Skills Council for England
Circulars 107–8w

Learning and skills councils
Public appointments 108w

Learning support units
254w

Leeds
Equal pay 77w
Pensioners 144w
Urban aid 668w

Legal aid scheme
Civil proceedings 650–1w
Fees and charges 181w

Legal costs
Cabinet Office 495–6w
Dept for Work and Pensions 425w

Legal deposit
Electronic publishing 576w

Legal profession
Competition 160–1

Legal representation
Civil proceedings 621w

Leicestershire
Dental services 910–1w

Leigh, Mr Edward
Debates etc.
Chinook helicopters (19.03.02) 236, 249
Consignia (25.03.02) 572
Questions
Asylum, Applications 595–6w
Asylum, Education 500w
Asylum, Hemswell Cliff 720w, 889–91w, 1063–4w
Asylum, Housing 1063w
Asylum, Lincolnshire 595w
BBC, Finance 564w
Intervention Board, Refrigerators 720w
Intervention stocks, Dumfries 828–9w
Select committees 166–7

Leisure facilities
575w

"Lending Support:Modernising the Governments Use of Loans"
324w

Lepper, Mr David
Questions
Crime prevention, Retail trade 473–7w

Leslie, Mr Christopher, Parliamentary Secretary Cabinet Office
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Parliamentary questions (21.03.02) 174–82wh
Questions
Accountancy, Cabinet Office 589w
Catering, Cabinet Office 496w
Central Office of Information, Advertising 431w
Centre for Management and Policy Studies, Manpower 495w
Civil defence 581w, 961w
Civil defence, Bedfordshire 582w
Civil defence, Finance 812–5w
Civil defence, Local authorities 679w
Civil servants, Sick leave 432–3w
Consultants, Cabinet Office 815–6w, 818w
Contracts, Cabinet Office 817–20w
Discrimination, Cabinet Office 581–2w
Employers' Forum on Disability 431–2w

Leslie, Mr Christopher—continued
Employment tribunals, Cabinet Office 292–3w
Energy, Cabinet Office 495w
Equal opportunities, Non-departmental public bodies 293w
Equipment, Cabinet Office 588w
Fair trade initiative, Cabinet Office 430w
Festivals and special occasions, Prime Minister 583–4w
Flexible working, Cabinet Office 74w
Government Car and Despatch Agency, Petrol 817w
Government departments, Advertising 817–8w
Government departments, Consultants 816w
Government departments, Disclosure of information 817w
Government departments, Females 815w
Government departments, Standards 495w
Higher civil servants, Education 816w
Hotels, Cabinet Office 497w
Human rights, Cabinet Office 583w
Manpower, Cabinet office 293w
Ministerial policy advisors, Cabinet Office 821w
Nurseries, Cabinet Office 820–2w
Parental leave, Cabinet Office 582w
Private finance initiative, Cabinet Office 820w
Public appointments, Age 584w
Public private partnerships, Cabinet Office 583w
Public relations, Cabinet Office 587–9w
Railways, Cabinet Office 430w
Recruitment, Cabinet Office 292w
Regulatory impact assessments 494w, 582w
Secondment, Cabinet Office 582w
Smoking, Codes of practice 589w
Sponsorship 430–1w

Letwin, Mr Oliver
Questions
Identity cards 472w, 598–9w

Leukaemia
Drugs 160w, 295–6w
Medical treatments 533w
Transplant surgery 767–8w

Levitt, Mr Tom
Debates etc.
Education (19.03.02) 178, 190, 197, 204, 212–5
Members' interests (26.03.02) 713
State Pension Credit Bill (HL), 2R (25.03.02) 607, 609–10, 614, 662

Levy, Lord
Visits abroad 616–7w

Lewis, Mr Ivan, Parliamentary Secretary, Dept for Education and Skills
Debates etc.
Education (21.03.02) 473–82, 484, 486, 488–9, 495, 503, 506
Questions
Asylum, Education 500w
Capita, Dept for Education and Skills 247w
Connexions Service, Standards 896w
Education, Consultants 895w
Education, Wales 342w
Educational maintenance allowance 630w
Energy, Dept for Education and Skills 636w
Festivals and special occasions, Dept for Education and Skills 895w

Lewis, Mr Ivan—continued
General certificate of secondary education, Standards 895w
Health insurance, Dept for Education and Skills 500w
Information technology, Dept for Education and Skills 255w
Learning support units 254w
Physical education 631w
Public private partnerships, Dept for Education and Skills 499w, 631w
Publicity, Dept for Education and Skills 894w
Queen Elizabeth II, Anniversaries 255–6w
Railways, Dept for Education and Skills 98–100w
Schools, Accidents 501–2w
Secondment, Dept for Education and Skills 254w
Standards, Dept for Education and Skills 342w, 634w
Theft, Dept for Education and Skills 341w, 501–2w
Truancy 338–9w
Work sharing, Dept for Education and Skills 110w

Lewis, Dr Julian
Debates etc.
Chinook helicopters (19.03.02) 244
Postal services (26.03.02) 785–8
Zimbabwe (21.03.02) 455
Questions
Asbestos, Compensation 967w
Broadcasting programmes 555
EC common foreign and security policy 10
Science, Dept of Trade and Industry 457w
Scottish Parliament, Electoral systems 175–6w
Southampton University Hospitals NHS Trust, Medical treatments 917w

Liability
NHS 1045–6w

Libraries
see Public libraries

Licensed premises
Crime prevention 93–4w

Licensing laws
394w, 904–5w

Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen, Secretary of State for Scotland
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Asbestos, Scotland (19.03.02) 61–5wh
Questions
Accountancy, Scotland Office 465w
Advertising, Scottish Office 462–3w
Airports, Scotland 862w
Asbestos, Scotland 861w
Billing, Scotland Office 462–3w
Capita, Scotland Office 859w
Cellular phones, Scotland Office 465w
Conferences, Scotland Office 465w
Consultants, Scotland Office 861w
Convention on the Future of Europe, Scotland 152–5
Correspondence, Scotland Office 858w
Departmental responsibilities, Scottish Office 859–60w
Devolution, Scotland 461–2w, 681w
Drugs, Scotland 175w
European Capital of Culture, Scotland 178–9w
Fair trade initiative, Scotland Office 466w, 679–80w
Foot and mouth disease, Inquiries 177–8w
Foot and mouth disease, Scotland 177w
Glasgow Airport, Railway network 862w
Hospitals, Waiting lists 178w

Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen—continued
Information technology, Scotland Office 463–4w
Life insurance, Scotland 175w
Meat, Imports 175w
Official hospitality, Scotland Office 465w
Open government 461w
Police, Scotland 861w
Public expenditure, Scotland 178w
Public private partnerships, Scotland Office 681w
Publications, Scotland Office 464w
Retirement, Scotland Office 679w
Scotland 680w
Scottish Parliament, Elections 861w
Scottish Parliament, Electoral systems 175–6w
Scottish Parliament, Members 175w
Theft, Scotland Office 53w, 387w
Working hours, Scotland Office 465–6w

Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Debates etc.
Agriculture, Somerset (25.03.02) 678–81
Education (19.03.02) 194, 204–7, (21.03.02) 514–6
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Parliamentary questions (21.03.02) 164wh
Questions
Ammunition, Standards 444w
Arms trade, USA 848–9w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Sheep 257w
Countryside Agency, Public appointments 1024–5w
Explosives 444–5w
Floods, Somerset 831w
Foot and mouth disease, Inquiries 177w
Health authorities, Somerset 298–9w
Pupils, Personal records 110w
Railways, Somerset 659w
Regional assemblies, Regional development agencies 974w
Regional assemblies, South West region 973–4w
Regional assemblies, Taxation 218w
Roads, Somerset 30–1w
Roads, South West region 670w

Lidington, Mr David
Debates etc.
Postal services (26.03.02) 751–6
Questions
Aggregates levy 748w, 856w, 1035w
Aggregates levy, Northern Ireland 1035w
Aylesbury Young Offender Institution, Fire prevention 93w
Cannabis, Health hazards 436w
Central Railway 948w
Circulars, Dept for Education and Skills 624w
Customs and Excise, Annual reports 745w
Customs and Excise, Supply estimates 745w
Education, Circulars 106–7w
Learning and Skills Council for England, Circulars 107–8w
Members, Correspondence 536w, 1059w
Office for National Statistics, Supply estimates 325w
Oxford Brookes University 107w
Public Record Office, Census 411–2w, 836w
Stoke Mandeville Hospital NHS Trust, South Buckinghamshire NHS Trust 529w
VAT, Fraud 732w

Life insurance
Scotland 175w

Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Questions
Hospitals, Mergers 908w
Maternity services 689–90
Primary education, Class sizes 100–4w

Limited Liability Partnerships (Competent Authority) (Fees) Regulations 2002
Debates etc.
(19.03.02) 275

Limited Liability Partnerships (No 2) Regulations 2002
Debates etc.
(19.03.02) 275

Limited Liability Partnerships (Particulars of Usual Residential Address) (Confidentiality Orders) Regulations 2002
Debates etc.
(19.03.02) 275

Lincolnshire
Asylum 595w

Linton, Martin
Questions
Political parties, Finance 561

Liquefied petroleum gas
344–5w
Safety 25–6w

Literacy
635–6w
Developing countries 867–8w
Long term unemployed 637w

Litter
123w

Liverpool
Asylum 596w
Education 248–9w
Health services 1046–7w
Local government 963w
Maternity services 1046w

Livestock
377w
Devon 140w
Markets 123w, 730w, 1030–1w
Transport 140w, 830–1w

Livingston
Working families tax credit 740w

Lloyd, Mr Tony
Questions
Natural gas, Explosions 670–1w
Uddin, Jamal 386w

Llwyd, Mr Elfyn
Debates etc.
Adoption and Children Bill, Programme motion and Rep (20.03.02) 385–9, 391–3
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Age, Discrimination (20.03.02) 95wh
Questions
Arms trade, Angola 53w
Czech Republic 614–5w
Education, Wales 342w
Judges, Recruitment 161–2
Metrication, Retail trade 245w
Middle East, Peace negotiations 196w
National Assembly for Wales, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 322w
Palestinians, International assistance 384w
Public expenditure, Wales 12w

Loan guarantee scheme
Small businesses 242w

Local authorities
Civil defence 679w
Contracts 672w
Debts 963–5w

Local authorities—continued
Disclosure of information 485–6w
Functions 651–2w
Postal services 798w

Local Authorities (Capital Finance) (Amendment) Regulations 1999
Questions
357w

Local education authorities
Information technology 255w
South West region 250–2w

Local government
(26.03.02) 730–4
Defamation 962–3w
Human rights 966w
Liverpool 963w
North West region 219w
Ringfenced funding 222w
VAT 963w

Local Government (Best Value) Performance Plans and Reviews Amendment and Specified Dates Order 2002
Debates etc.
(26.03.02) 798

Local government finance
22w, (18.03.02) 141, 219–20w, 237w, (19.03.02) 274

Local Government Pension Scheme (Amendment) Regulations 2002
Debates etc.
(26.03.02) 798

Location
NHS 441w
Slaughterhouses 731w

Lockerbie
Bombings (26.03.02) 724–5

Logistics
Ministry of Defence 553–4w

London
see Greater London

London Development Agency Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R order read (20.03.02) 287, (26.03.02) 685

London Underground
228w, (26.03.02) 739–41
Public private partnerships 17–8w, 236w, 349w, 945–8w
Rolling stock 946w

Londonderry
Army 64–5w

Lone parents
Prisoners 400w

Long term unemployed
Literacy 637w

Lord Chancellor's Dept
Correspondence 836–7w
Employment tribunals 623–4w
Housing benefit 999w
Manpower 526–7w
Territorial Army 414w

Lost working days
Industrial disputes 705–6w

Loughton, Tim
Debates etc.
Adoption and Children Bill, Programme motion and Rep (20.03.02) 375–7, 379, 388, 393–4, 397–9
Consignia (25.03.02) 575–6
Questions
Adoption, Personal records 529w

Loughton, Tim—continued
Archaeology, Finance 567w
Asbestos 32–3w
Brighton Healthcare NHS Trust, Cancer 1049w
Community police consultative groups 481w
Festivals and special occasions, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 42w
Festivals and special occasions, Dept for Education and Skills 895w
Festivals and special occasions, Dept for International Development 883w
Festivals and special occasions, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 237–8w
Festivals and special occasions, Dept for Work and Pensions 988w
Festivals and special occasions, Dept of Trade and Industry 683w
Festivals and special occasions, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 510–1w
Festivals and special occasions, Ministry of Defence 547w
Festivals and special occasions, Prime Minister 583–4w
Festivals and special occasions, Treasury 735–6w
Fire prevention, Shoreham 27w
General practitioners 760w
General practitioners, Females 762w
General practitioners, Part-time employment 759–61w
Hazardous materials, Shoreham 270w
Intercountry adoption, Romania 754–5w
MMR vaccine 441–2w
NHS, Complaints 1049–50w
NHS, Location 441w
NHS Direct 1049w
NHS trusts, Screening 922–4w
Police, Best value 481w
Pollution control, Shoreham 270–1w
Ports, Shoreham 33–5w, 238w
Railways, Disabled 486w
Shoreham Port Authority 36–7w
Trust ports 37w

Love, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Easter adjournment debate intervention (26.03.02) 753
Energy, Sales methods (26.03.02) 765–8
Questions
Inheritance tax, Historic buildings 734–5w
Motor vehicles, Registration 237w
Tipping of waste 271w

Lucas, Ian
Debates etc.
Hospitals, Consultants (20.03.02) 409–11
Questions
Incinerators, Dioxins 134w
International Criminal Court 194–5w
International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia 194w
Jobcentre Plus, Industrial disputes 418–9w
Judiciary, Training 162–3
Middle East, Peace negotiations 384–5w
Scottish Parliament, Elections 861w
UN Security Council, Terrorism 195–6w

Luff, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
Asylum, Petitions (19.03.02) 276
Hunting (18.03.02) 82, 95–9, 114
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Parish councils (19.03.02) 2wh, 8–16wh, 22wh
Questions
Asylum, Housing 281w, 590w

Luff, Mr Peter—continued
Coventry Warwickshire Herefordshire and Worcestershire Health Authority, Public appointments 755w
Hunting 831w
Institutional care, Standards 304
Land use, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 112–3w
Land use, Dept for Work and Pensions 149–50w
Magistrates' courts, Evesham 179w
Scottish Parliament, Members 175w
Tourism 545–6

Luke, Mr Iain
Debates etc.
Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, Addresses to the Crown (03.04.02) 812–3

Lymphoedema
528w

Lyons, Mr John
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Parliamentary questions (21.03.02) 161–3wh

M4
672w
Bus lanes 957w

M42
Noise 358w

McCabe, Mr Stephen
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Solihull Hospital (20.03.02) 126wh
Questions
Transport, Brent 966–7w

McCafferty, Ms Chris
Questions
Personal injury 847w

McCartney, Rt Hon Ian, Minister for Pensions, Department for Work and Pensions
Questions
Foster care, National insurance credits 597w
Pension credit 420–2w
Pensioners, Council tax 993w
Pensioners, Income 423w
Pensioners, Tax credit 418w
Pensions, Carers 641w
Pensions, Foster care 640w
Pensions, National insurance contributions 143w
State retirement pensions 144w
State second pension, Self-employed 427w

McDonagh, Ms Siobhain
Questions
Exservicemen, Nuclear weapons 54w

McDonnell, John
Questions
Business questions 437
City of London Corporation, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 112w
Jobcentre Plus, Working conditions 419w

MacDougall, Mr John
Debates etc.
Afghanistan (18.03.02) 46
Questions
Employment, Discrimination 1005–6w
Gibraltar, Overseas investment 190w
Older workers 643–4w
Older workers, Dept for Work and Pensions 427w
St Helena 470w
St Helena, Airports 470w
St Helena, Overseas aid 470w

MacDougall, Mr John—continued
Spain, Foreign relations 323w
State retirement pensions 145w
Working families tax credit, Scotland 178w

Macedonia
613w, 807w
Military aid 849w
Overseas aid 865w
Overseas trade 702w

McFall, Mr John
Debates etc.
Barcelona Summit (EC) (18.03.02) 33
Hunting (18.03.02) 54–5, (21.03.02) 468–9
Questions
Convention on the Future of Europe, Scotland 154–5
EC common foreign and security policy 10–1
Life insurance, Scotland 175w
Theft, Castlereagh 313
Warships, Modernisation 207w

McGrady, Mr Eddie
Questions
Fishing vessels, Accidents 346–7w
Submarines, Accidents 552w
Theft, Castlereagh 312–3
Weapons, Northern Ireland 289

McIntosh, Miss Anne
Debates etc.
Railtrack (25.03.02) 592
Questions
Afghanistan, Armed conflict 56w
Art works, EC law 509–10w
Channel tunnel, Freight 229w, 659w, 951w
Churches, VAT 581w
Communications Bill (Draft) 509w
Consultants, Cabinet Office 818w
Criminal Courts Review 886w
Devolution, Scotland 156–7
European Bank for Reconstruction and Development 361w
Females, Pensions 615–6w
Flood control, Finance 135w
Gibraltar, Spain 612w
Hospital beds 690–1
Hunting 560
Languages 635w
Magistrates' courts, North Yorkshire 180w
National Lottery 552–3
National Radiological Protection Board 436–7w
Nuclear power stations, Scotland 795w
Office of Communications 572w
Office of Communications, Disabled 572w
Office of Communications, Regional assemblies 571–2w
Police, Pensions 287w
Post offices, Rural areas 454w
Privy Council, Silverware 44–5w
Railways, Freight 28–9w
Type 45 destroyers 18
Weapons, Northern Ireland 538w

MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Debates etc.
Zimbabwe (21.03.02) 454
Questions
Iron and steel, USA 424
Theft, Castlereagh 313

McKechin, Ann
Questions
Drugs, Scotland 175w
Flexible working, Productivity 460w
General Agreement on Trade in Services, Higher education 693w

McLoughlin, Mr Patrick
Debates etc.
Easter adjournment debate intervention (26.03.02) 730–1, 750, 791
Education (19.03.02) 178, 193
Postal services (26.03.02) 742–6
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Parish councils (19.03.02) 4wh, 7wh
Questions
Advertising, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 980–1w
Press releases, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 975–6w
Roads, Safety 981–2w
Speed limits, Cameras 981–2w

McNamara, Mr Kevin
Questions
Afghanistan, Armed conflict 207–8w
Armed forces, Disciplinary proceedings 62w, 318w
Army, Londonderry 64–5w
Bici, Fahir 72w
Bloody Sunday Tribunal of Inquiry, Costs 787–8w
Courts, Northern Ireland 518w
Courts martial 60–3w
Firearms, Northern Ireland 209–10w
Green Howards Regiment 207w
Magistrates 73–4w
Miscarriages of justice 279–80w
Morris, John 291w
Nepal 51w
Travelling people 284w

MacShane, Mr Denis, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office
Debates etc.
Ministerial statement intervention (21.03.02) 451
Questions
Advertising, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 197w, 804–5w
Australia, Aborigines 808w
Belize, Guatemala 385w
British Petroleum, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 807w
Central Asia, Drugs 609–10w
Contracts, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 383–4w, 511–2w, 609w
Correspondence, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 805–6w
Energy, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 805w
Equipment, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 511w
Falkland Islands, Mines 806–7w
Global Crossing 806w
Global Crossing, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 606–7w
Husaini, Safiya 611w
International Criminal Court 194–5w
International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia 194w
Kalahari game reserve, Ethnic groups 807w
Languages, Minorities 193w
Macedonia 807w
Military bases, USA 1032w
Mines, Transport 806w
Ministerial policy advisors, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 383w
Official visits, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 809w
Overseas investment, Government assistance 198w
South Africa, Farmers 807w
Standards, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 806w

MacShane, Mr Denis—continued
Sudan, Armed conflict 196–7w
UN Security Council, Terrorism 195–6w
United Nations, Peace keeping operations 806w
Visits abroad, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 511w, 809w
Yugoslavia 810w

Mactaggart, Fiona
Questions
Belize, Guatemala 385w
Health services, Disadvantaged 700–1
House of Lords, Reform 163–4
Illegal immigrants 408w
Mothers, Employment 431–2
Public appointments, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 120w
Public appointments, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 236w
Public appointments, Dept for Work and Pensions 154w
Public appointments, Dept of Health 929–30w
Public appointments, Home Office 892w
Public appointments, Solicitor-General 515w

McWalter, Mr Tony
Questions
Business questions 444
House of Lords, Reform 303–4
Integrated schools, Northern Ireland 335–6w

Maddison, Ronald
200w

Magazine press
Young people 1047w

Magistrates
73–4w
Dept for Culture Media and Sport 505w
Dept for International Development 471w
Dept of Trade and Industry 693w
Manpower 158–60
Social class 412w
Treasury 332–3w

Magistrates' courts
179–80w
Criminal Courts Review 180w
Evesham 179w
Greater London 412–3w, 415w
Kingston upon Thames 303
North Yorkshire 180w
Petitions (25.03.02) 676
Reform 412w
Standards 414–5w

Maharaj, Krishna
(26.03.02) 781–5

Mahon, Mrs Alice
Debates etc.
Afghanistan (18.03.02) 43
Questions
Publications, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 962w
Roads, Safety 677w, 957w

Maintenance
Children 992w, 994–6w
Scottish courts 180–1w

"Making Contact Work Consultation Paper"
183w

Malawi
Poverty 878w

Malins, Mr Humfrey
Questions
Asylum, Administrative delays 1062w
Asylum, Housing 408–9w
Illegal immigrants, Channel tunnel 96–7w
Yarls Wood Detention Centre, Manpower 889w

Mallaber, Judy
Debates etc.
Hunting (18.03.02) 56

Malta
EC accession 827–8w

Management consultants
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 345w

Managers
Defence Housing Executive 1018w

Manchester
Commonwealth Games 41–2w, 1058–9w
Transport 490–1w, 672w

Mann, John
Debates etc.
Education (21.03.02) 500–1, 527–8
Questions
Coal Industry Social Welfare Organisation 793w
Higher education 636w
Higher education, Social class 110–1w
Literacy 635–6w
Long term unemployed, Literacy 637w
Pensions 419–20w
Schools, Buildings 250w
Vibration white finger 456w

Manufacturing industries
458w
Climate change levy 456w
Manpower 857w

Maples, Mr John
Debates etc.
Afghanistan (18.03.02) 46
Hunting (21.03.02) 462

Mari Geni
see MV Mari Geni

Maritime and Coastguard Agency
Information technology 488–9w
Property transfer 346w
Standards 941w

Market towns
1026–8w

Markets
Farmers 717–8w
Livestock 123w, 730w, 1030–1w

Married people
Institutional care 166w

Marris, Rob
Debates etc.
Child Support Agency (20.03.02) 324
Corporate manslaughter (19.03.02) 281–2
Questions
Conditions of employment 417–8

Marsden, Mr Gordon
Questions
Defence equipment, Procurement 64w
House of Commons, Reform 186w
Students, Blackpool 634w

Marsden, Mr Paul
Debates etc.
Afghanistan, Armed conflict (20.03.02) 365–6
Questions
Nitrates, Pollution 717w
Perkins Engines 85–6w

Marsden, Mr Paul*—*continued
Schools, Shrewsbury 630w

Marshall, Mr David
Questions
Attendance allowance 999–1000w
Commonwealth, Overseas aid 874–6w
Pensioners, Income support 151
Road signs and markings, Standards 672w

Marshall-Andrews, Mr Robert
Debates etc.
Chinook helicopters (19.03.02) 248

Martlew, Mr Eric
Debates etc.
Demonstrations, Points of order (18.03.02) 49

Mass media
Ownership 905–6w

Maternal mortality
Developing countries 369w

Maternity services
440w, 528w, 688–90, 775–6w
Liverpool 1046w

Mates, Mr Michael
Questions
Queen Elizabeth II, Anniversaries 302–3
Weapons, Northern Ireland 289

May, Mrs Theresa
Debates etc.
Railtrack (25.03.02) 582–4
Questions
Antisocial behaviour orders 278–80w
Bisham Abbey National Sports Centre 575–6w
British Transport Police, Manpower 659–60w
Civil servants, Disciplinary proceedings 23w
Council housing, Empty property 492w
Disclosure of information, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 653w, 975w
Electoral systems 23w
European Parliament, Electoral systems 23w
Fire services 238–40w
Global Crossing 488w
Government departments, Consultants 816w
Heathrow Airport, Railway network 657w
Homelessness 492–3w
Information officers, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 217–8w, 483–4w, 979w
Institutional care 920w
Jones, Ian 652w, 980w
Local government finance 237w
M4 672w
Management consultants, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 345w
Moore, Jo 979w
Multiple occupation 236w
Office of the Rail Regulator 20w, 653w
Official engagements, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 976w
Planning, Inquiries 970–1w
Prime Minister's Policy Unit, Strategic Rail Authority 619w
Railtrack 485–6w
Railtrack, Finance 486–7w, 654–5w
Railways 659w
Railways, Finance 233–5w, 486w
Railways, Franchises 952w
Roads, Accidents 285w, 405w, 1040w
Special constables 290w
Speed limits, Cameras 677w

May, Mrs Theresa*—*continued
Sportsgrounds, Bradford 671w, 904w, 967w
Sportsgrounds, Planning permission 671w
Starter home initiative 972–3w
Strategic Rail Authority 653w
Strategic Rail Authority, Assets 20w
Tinsley Viaduct 655–6w
West coast railway line 657w

McAllister, Ian
976w

Meacher, Rt Hon Michael, Minister of State for the Environment, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs
Questions
Abandoned vehicles 268w
Air pollution 715w
Air pollution, Fees and charges 834–5w
Carbon dioxide, Pollution control 705w
Climate Change Convention 714w
Committee Examining Radiation Risks of Internal Emitters 370w
Compost, Greater Manchester 707w
Compulsory purchase, Torquay 272w
Dogs, Buckinghamshire 123w
Dogs, Licensing 606w
EC Environment Council, Scottish Executive 711–2w
Electronic equipment, Waste disposal 121w
Energy, Conservation 141w
Environment Agency 370–1w
Environment protection 267w, 721w
Farms, Hedges and ditches 124–5w
Fluoride 123w
Genetically modified organisms, Crops 707w
Government departments, Air conditioning 712–3w
Government departments, Refrigeration 133–4w
Government departments, Wood 723w
Hazardous materials, Pollution control 1021w
Hazardous materials, Shoreham 270w
Home energy efficiency scheme 141–2w, 727w, 828w
Incinerators 832w
Incinerators, Dioxins 134w
Inland waterways 114w, 714–5w
Litter 123w
Nitrates, Pollution 716–7w
Odour pollution 730w
Packaging, EC law 1022w
Pollution, Irish Sea 726–7w
Pollution control 825–6w
Pollution control, Shoreham 270–1w
Radioactive wastes, Irish Sea 372w
Recycling 269–70w, 719–20w
Recycling, Standards 829w
Refrigeration, Hazardous materials 134w
Refrigerators, Waste disposal 1020w
Sewers, Capital investment 710w
Sustainable development 378–9w, 721–2w
Tipping of waste 271w
Tipping of waste, Hazardous materials 707–8w
Waste disposal, EC law 708–10w
Waste management, Standards 269w
Waste Minimisation and Recycling Fund 833w
Water, EC law 264w, 716w
Water supply, Competition 262–4w
Wild ducks 121–2w
Wood, Imports 722–3w
World Summit on Sustainable Development 1022w

Means tested benefits
1011–2w

Means tested benefits—continued
Pensioners 990w

Measurement
Alcoholic drinks 75w

Meat
Imports 119–20w, 175w
Scotland 175w
Smuggling 257w, 373w, 619–20w

Medals
Armed forces 302–3
Emergency services 508w
Prison Service 508w
Yeoman warders 43w

Medical Devices Agency
Standards 933w

Medical examinations
Disability living allowance 648–9w
Incapacity benefit 416–8w

Medical Practices Committee
1047w

Medical profession
Foreign workers 161w
Witnesses 893w

Medical treatments
Cancer 306–7w
Chronic fatigue syndrome 919w
EC countries 532w, 917w
Leukaemia 533w
Pain 438w
Southampton University Hospitals NHS Trust 917w

Medicine
Student numbers 105w, 635w

Melton Borough Council
Pathfinder projects 19–20w

Members
Correspondence 19w, 72w, 199w, 212w, 442w, 536w, 596w, 661w, 825w, 858w, 885w, 906w, 930w, 986w, 1031w, 1033w, 1052w, 1059–60w
Scottish Parliament 175w

Members' constituency work
Data protection 413w

Members' interests
(26.03.02) 708–16

Mental health
156–7w
Asians 1041–2w
Females 1041–2w

Mental health review tribunals
924–5w

Mental health services
775w
Elderly 439w
Expenditure 771–6w
Finance 439–40w, 771–2w
Research 1042–4w
Yellow card scheme 1044–5w

Mental patients
Social security benefits 422–3w

Mentally ill
1039w
Community care 528–9w
Council tax 639–40w
Elderly 771w

Mentally incapacitated
Protection 936w

Mercer, Patrick
Debates etc.
Afghanistan (18.03.02) 47

Mercer, Patrick—continued
Questions
Type 45 destroyers 18

Mergers
Hospitals 908w

Merron, Ms Gillian
Debates etc.
Education (21.03.02) 484–5, 510–4
Questions
Business questions 441–2
Dental services, Manpower 1048w
Drugs, Misuse 1053–6w
Employment Bill 2001/02, Small businesses 428

Mersey Tunnels Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R order read (19.03.02) 149, (26.03.02) 685

Merseyside
Coalfields Regeneration Trust 40w

Methicillin resistant staphylococcus aureus
907w

Metrication
Retail trade 245w

Metropolitan Police
Ethnic groups 593w
Football Association 398w
Inquiries 592w
Manpower 287–8w
Racial discrimination 596w
Right to buy 398–9w
Standards 288w

Metropolitan Police Authority
288w

Metropolitan Police Commissioner
see Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis

Metropolitan Police Independent Advisory Group
592w

Michael, Rt Hon Alun, Minister of State, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs
Debates etc.
Business motions (18.03.02) 50–1
Hunting (18.03.02) 52–6, 65, 127–8
Hunting, Ministerial statements (21.03.02) 457–70
Questions
Agriculture, Subsidies 115–7w, 261–2w
Boats, Navigation 272w
Common land, Access 377–8w
Countryside, Access 378w
Countryside Agency, Public appointments 1024–5w
Energy, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 266w
Foot and mouth disease 131w
Hunting 831w
Market towns 1026–8w
Parish councils, Isle of Wight 1030w
Rural areas, Employment 713–4w
Rural areas, Tourism 378w, 835–6w
Water sports 272w
Water sports, North East region 1025–6w
Water sports, Publications 1026w

Middle East
Armed conflict 608w
Armed forces 63–4w
EC aid 877w
Peace negotiations 196w, 384–5w

Midlothian
Ambulance services 529–30w

Midwives
Gaza Strip 876w

Milburn, Rt Hon Alan, Secretary of State for Health
Questions
Health services, Disadvantaged 687–8, 700–2
Hospital beds 690–4
Written questions, Administrative delays 751–4w

Miliband, Mr David
Debates etc.
Education (19.03.02) 198–204

Military aid
Macedonia 849w

Military aircraft
550–1w
Repairs and maintenance 549w

Military bases
Colchester 557w
Disclosure of information 551–2w
USA 204w, 1032w

Military Corrective Training Centre Colchester
558w

Military exercises
Eskmeals 445–6w
Kirkcudbright 445–6w

Milk
Prices 711w

Millennium Bridge
575w

Millennium landmark projects
574w
Portsmouth 574w

Miller, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Barcelona Summit (EC) (18.03.02) 35
Education (19.03.02) 206–9
Questions
Counterfeit manufacturing, Northern Ireland 334–5w
Maritime and Coastguard Agency, Standards 941w
Office of Surveillance Commissioners, Public appointments 449–50w
Written questions, Administrative delays 751–4w

Mines
469w
Afghanistan 468w
Falkland Islands 806–7w
Transport 806w

Minimum wage
Paisley 736w

Mining
Subsidence 796–7w

Ministerial policy advisors
Cabinet Office 819–21w
Dept for Culture Media and Sport 390–1w
Dept for International Development 15w, 539w
Dept of Health 1051w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 383w
Prime Minister 322–3w, 618w

Ministerial powers
Social services 1038w

Ministerial statements
Afghanistan (18.03.02) 37–48
Barcelona Summit (EC) (18.03.02) 21–36
Child Support Agency (20.03.02) 315–24
Consignia (25.03.02) 565–80

Ministerial statements—continued
Hunting (21.03.02) 457–70
Railtrack (25.03.02) 581–95
Rulings and statements (25.03.02) 596
Zimbabwe (21.03.02) 446–56

Ministers
Codes of practice 1w
Correspondence 214w

Ministry of Defence
Computers 847w
Contracts 1019w
Correspondence 545–6w, 1019w
Cost effectiveness 205–6w
Disclosure of information 556w
Documents 69–70w
Early retirement 546w
Energy 844w
Environment protection 843w
Festivals and special occasions 318w, 547w
Housing 317w
Human rights 845w
Land 445–7w
Logistics 553–4w
New deal schemes 1019–20w
Non-governmental organisations 69w
Nurseries 555–6w
Parental leave 547w
Private finance initiative 845–6w
Public private partnerships 68w, 845–6w
Public relations 65–6w
Regulatory Impact Unit 548w
Research 552–3w
Standards 548w
Territorial Army 318–9w
Theft 71w, 319w
Training 317w
Travel 546w
USA 559w
Visits abroad 546w
Written questions 550w

Ministry of Defence Police
851w

Mink
Farms 729w

Minorities
Languages 193w

Miscarriages of justice
279–80w

Misuse
Alcoholic drinks 435w
Drugs 1053–6w

Mitchell, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Business questions intervention (21.03.02) 440
State Pension Credit Bill (HL), 2R (25.03.02) 605, 636–9
Questions
Business questions 442
Churches, Repairs and maintenance 559
Dept of Trade and Industry 79w
Maintenance, Children 992w, 994–6w

Mitchell, Mr Austin
Questions
Accountancy, Cabinet Office 589w
Accountancy, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 505w
Accountancy, Dept of Health 1057w
Accountancy, Home Office 274–5w
Fisheries, Compensation 79–80w
Health authorities, North Yorkshire 920–1w
Maritime and Coastguard Agency, Property transfer 346w
Navigation, Estuaries 31w

Mitchell, Mr Austin—continued
Navigation, River Humber 31w
NHS, Finance 920w
Pilotage Act 1987 229w
Ports, Safety 229w

Mittal, Lakshmi
75w, 204w, 692w, 871–2w, 884w

MMR vaccine
441–2w
Cynon Valley 442w
Side effects 162w

Mobile homes
38w

Mobile phone masts
see Aerials

Mobile phones
see Cellular phones

Moffatt, Laura
Questions
Contracts, Ministry of Defence 1019w
Hospitals, Consultants 764–5w
Smuggling, South East region 1035w
Sports, Schools 905w

Mole, Mr Chris
Debates etc.
Education (19.03.02) 177–8, (21.03.02) 480, 525–6

Monetary compensatory amounts
374–6w

Money laundering
856w

Monitoring
Astrophysics 796w
Pesticides 1021w

Monmouth
Roads 30w

Monmouthshire
Broadband 798–9w

Monuments
Armed forces 311w, 448–9w

Moonie, Dr Lewis, Parliamentary Under-Secretary, Ministry of Defence
Debates etc.
Afghanistan, Armed conflict (20.03.02) 370–3
Chinook helicopters (19.03.02) 272–3
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Downie, Gordon (20.03.02) 133–6wh
Dunkeswell airfield (19.03.02) 53–7wh
Questions
Ammunition, Standards 444w
Apache AH-64 helicopter 552w, 846w
Armed forces, Food 205w
Armed forces, Housing 68w, 447w, 554–5w, 846–8w
Armed forces, Injuries 315–6w, 559w
Armed forces, Overseas residence 68w
Armed forces, Training 66–7w
Arms trade 9
Arms trade, USA 848–9w
AWE Aldermaston 58w
British overseas territories 315w
Central Data Management Authority 548w
Chemical and biological warfare, Research 443–4w, 550w
Chemical weapons, Baltic sea 70w
Chemical weapons, World War II 69–70w
Colerne airfield 70–1w
Computers, Ministry of Defence 847w
Contracts, Ministry of Defence 1019w
Correspondence, Ministry of Defence 545–6w, 1019w
Defence, Israel 448w

Moonie, Dr Lewis—continued
Defence equipment, Procurement 1–3, 64w, 67w
Defence Estates 55–6w
Defence Evaluation and Research Agency 560–1w
Defence Evaluation and Research Agency, Consultants 547w
Defence Evaluation and Research Agency, Privatisation 560w
Defence Housing Executive, Fraud 447–8w
Defence Housing Executive, Managers 1018w
Defence Medical Services 559w
Defence Procurement Agency 64w
Disclosure of information, Ministry of Defence 556w
Early retirement, Ministry of Defence 546w
"Effects of a Chemical Agent on the Eyes of Aircrew" 314w
Energy, Ministry of Defence 844w
Environment protection, Ministry of Defence 843w
Explosives 444–5w
Exservicemen 19–20, 54–5w
Exservicemen, Nuclear weapons 54w
Exservicemen, Radiation exposure 548–9w
Festivals and special occasions, Ministry of Defence 547w
Firing ranges, Shoeburyness 848w
Future large aircraft 15
Guided weapons 204–5w
Joint strike fighter aircraft 14
Land, Ministry of Defence 445–7w
Military bases, Colchester 557w
Military bases, USA 204w
Military exercises, Eskmeals 445–6w
Ministry of Defence Police 851w
New deal schemes, Ministry of Defence 1019–20w
"Non-Competitive Procurement in the Ministry of Defence" 67–8w
Non-governmental organisations, Ministry of Defence 69w
Nurseries, Ministry of Defence 555–6w
Parental leave, Ministry of Defence 547w
Porton Down, Animal experiments 57w
Porton Down, Human experiments 57–8w, 314–5w
Prisoners of war, Compensation 72w
Public private partnerships, Ministry of Defence 68w
Public relations, Ministry of Defence 65–6w
Queen Elizabeth II, Anniversaries 318w, 448w
RAF Lyneham 849–50w
Regulatory Impact Unit, Ministry of Defence 548w
Standards, Ministry of Defence 548w
Territorial Army 12–3
Territorial Army, Health services 311–2w, 316–7w
Territorial Army, Ministry of Defence 318–9w
Territorial Army, Plymouth 65w
Theft, Ministry of Defence 319w
Training, Ministry of Defence 317w
Type 45 destroyers 17–8, 59–60w
Underwater Test and Evaluation Centre 444w
Uranium 312–4w
Uranium, Foulness 557–8w
Visits abroad, Ministry of Defence 546w
War pensions 207w
War pensions, Appeals 317–8w
West Freugh airfield 1017–8w
World War I, Capital punishment 16–7

Moonie, Dr Lewis—continued
Written questions, Ministry of Defence 550w

Moore, Jo
979w

Moore, Mr Michael
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Africa, International assistance (19.03.02) 36–8wh

Moran, Margaret
Questions
Australia, Aborigines 808w
Business questions 438–9
Community development 451w
Domestic violence 29w, 73w, 406–7w, 482w
East of England Development Agency, Finance 683w
Higher education, Complaints 105w
House of Commons, Reform 186w
Northern Ireland Prison Service 538w
Perinatal mortality 915w
Racial violence, Internet 97–8w
Social rented housing, Evictions 29w
Taxation, Landlords 734w
Tenants, Evictions 972w
Wired up communities initiative 252–3w

Morgan, Gerard
Petitions (25.03.02) 677

Morgan, Julie
Questions
Asylum, Housing 409w
House of Commons, Reform 186w
Iron and steel, Wales 453w

Morley, Mr Elliot, Parliamentary Secretary, Dept of Environment Food and Rural Affairs
Debates etc.
Agriculture, Somerset (25.03.02) 682–4
Neighbourhood noise (21.03.02) 540–4
Questions
Advertising, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 823w
Agricultural products, Prices 114–6w
Agricultural shows 377w
Agriculture, Subsidies 117w
Animal feed, Imports 118–9w
Ash Moor, Environmental impact assessment 1021w
Asylum, Hemswell Cliff 720w
Badgers 1025w
Beef, Exports 718w
Beef, France 826w
Beekeeping, Essex 273–4w
Bees, Varroasis 118w
Birds, Conservation 125–6w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Sheep 257w
Bovine tuberculosis, Disease control 502–3w
Brucellosis, Disease control 729–30w
Catering, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 1023w
Cereals 373w
Cereals, Disease control 117w
Circulars, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 824w
City of London Corporation, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 112w
Complaints, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 122w
Councillors, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 720w
Countryside Alliance 114w
Countryside stewardship scheme 262w

Morley, Mr Elliot—continued
Discrimination, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 824–5w
Dogs, Animal welfare 121w
EC Agriculture Council, Scottish Executive 121w
EC grants and loans, Cornwall 268w
EC law, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 1023w
Engineers, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 267w
Farmers, Markets 717–8w
Farmers, Supermarkets 117–8w
Farms, Tenants 831–2w
Fish farming 126w
Fisheries 127w
Fisheries, Quotas 503–4w
Fisheries, Shetland 373–4w
Fishery agreements, EC external relations 1023w
Fishing vessels 830w
Fishing vessels, Decommissioning 128w
Flexible working, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 265–6w
Flood control 268w
Flood control, EC grants and loans 135w, 723–4w
Flood control, Finance 135w
Floods 725w
Floods, Boats 829–30w
Floods, Hullbridge 724w
Floods, Insurance 135–6w
Floods, Shropshire 135w
Floods, Somerset 831w
Food, Import controls 827w
Food, Prices 504–5w
Foot and mouth disease 503w
Foot and mouth disease, Cumbria 710w
Foot and mouth disease, Disease control 128–9w, 376–7w, 731w
Foot and mouth disease, EC action 131w
Foot and mouth disease, Inquiries 130w
Foot and mouth disease, North Yorkshire 130–1w, 730–1w
Foot and mouth disease, Wales 130w
Foot and mouth disease, Waste disposal 129w, 257–8w
Forest Enterprise, Sports 120w
Forests, Sustainable development 124w
Future of Farming and Food Policy Commission 136–40w, 1024w
Honey 131–2w
Honey, Imports 132–3w
Hotels, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 115–6w
Intervention Board, Refrigerators 720w
Intervention stocks, Dumfries 828–9w
Land use, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 112–3w
Livestock 377w
Livestock, Devon 140w
Livestock, Markets 123w, 730w, 1030–1w
Livestock, Transport 140w, 830–1w
Manpower, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 267w
Meat, Imports 119–20w
Members, Correspondence 825w
Milk, Prices 711w
Mink, Farms 729w
Monetary compensatory amounts 374–6w
National Farmers' Union 273w
National Forest Company 503w
New deal for young people, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 725–6w
New deal schemes, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 726w
Non-governmental organisations, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 112w

Morley, Mr Elliot—continued
Nurseries, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 725w
Organic farming 268w
Parental leave, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 264–5w
Pesticides, Monitoring 1021w
Pesticides, Taxation 1021w
Poland, EC accession 827–8w
Poultry, Animal welfare 126–7w
Poultry, EC law 127–8w, 720–1w, 1030w
Press, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 824w
Public appointments, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 120w
Publications, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 822w
Quarantine, Animal welfare 374w
Queen Elizabeth II, Anniversaries 1024w
Railways, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 380w
Recruitment, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 113w
Regulatory Impact Unit, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 122w
Seabed, Environment protection 374w
Sheep, Exports 118w
Shellfish, Compensation 126w
Shellfish, Poisoning 126w
Soil, Surveys 724w
Standards, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 125w, 830w
Stillman, Ian 124w
Territorial Army, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 718w
Theft, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 379–80w
Veal 124w
Visits abroad, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 273w
Whales, Conservation 728w
Wild animals, Pets 1029–30w
Written questions, Administrative delays 134–5w

Morris, Rt Hon Ms Estelle, Secretary of State for Education and Skills
Debates etc.
Education (19.03.02) 180, 185–93
Questions
Departmental expenditure limits, Dept for Education and Skills 502w

Morris, John
291w

Moss, Mr Malcolm
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Parish councils (19.03.02) 2wh, 21–3wh
Questions
Central Railway 227–8w
Truancy 338–9w

Mothers
Employment 431–2, 461w

Motor vehicles
Pollution control 484w
Registration 237w
Testing 676–7w

Motorcycles
Excise duties 1033w

Mountains
Cumbria 564w

Mudie, Mr George
Questions
Peers, Public appointments 884w
Pensioners, Income support 144w
Service Families Task Force 58–9w

Mullin, Mr Chris
Debates etc.
Afghanistan (18.03.02) 43
Hunting (21.03.02) 463
Questions
Clothing, USA 455w
Doctors, Pay 755w
Husaini, Safiya 611w
Theft, Castlereagh 308–9

Multiple occupation
236w

Mundic blocks
678–9w

Murphy, Mr Jim
Debates etc.
Railtrack (25.03.02) 590–1
Questions
VAT, Tax evasion 1034w
Weapons, Northern Ireland 288–9

Murphy, Rt Hon Paul, Secretary of State for Wales
Questions
Coalfields Regeneration Trust, Cynon Valley 614w
Contracts, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 321–2w
Dairy Crest 321w
Human rights, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 894w
Internet, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 320w
MMR vaccine, Cynon Valley 442w
National Assembly for Wales, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 322w
Nurseries, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 894w
Press releases, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 614w
Public relations, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 320w
Theft, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 2w, 321w

Murrison, Dr Andrew
Questions
Armed forces, Injuries 559w
Folic acid, Flour 921w
Hospital beds 1036–7w

Museums and galleries
564w
Cambridge 564w

Music
556–7

MV Mari Geni
128w

National Air Traffic Services
Computers 232–3w
Finance 39w, 233w, 351w, 943w
Industrial health and safety 232w
Interest charges 232w

National Assembly for Wales
Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 322w

National Audit Office
13–4w, 580w

National Experience Corps
see Experience Corps

National Farmers' Union
273w

National Forest Company
503w

National Institute for Clinical Excellence
Drugs 1045w

National insurance
Personal records 330w

National insurance contributions
738w
Pensions 143w

National Insurance Contributions Unit
see Social Security Contributions Agency

National insurance credits
Foster care 597w

National Investment and Loans Office
740w

National Lottery
43–4w, 550–5, 561–3w
Barrow in Furness 906w
Grants 199w
Sales 561w
Tewkesbury 562–3w
Wear Valley 906w

National parks
Botswana 203w

National Physical Laboratory
795w

National Probation Service for England and Wales
Information technology 403w

National Radiological Protection Board
436–7w

National Savings and Investments
Administrative delays 854w

National Statistics
see Office for National Statistics

National vocational qualifications
Grants 896–7w

NATO
Russia 3–4

Natural gas
Explosions 670–1w

Navigation
Boats 272w
Estuaries 31w
River Humber 31w, 666–7w

Naysmith, Dr Douglas
Questions
Aerospace industry, Research 415–6
Drugs, Crime 407–8w
Witnesses 160

Negligence
NHS 1045–6w

Neighbourhood management pathfinders programme
666w

Neighbourhood noise
(21.03.02) 536–44

Neighbourhood nuisance
Social rented housing 492w

Nepal
51w

New deal for disabled people
643w

New deal for long term unemployed
Vocational training 985w

New deal for young people
987w, 990w, 992w
Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 725–6w
Dept for International Development 866w
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 977w
Dept of Trade and Industry 701w

New deal for young people—continued
Treasury 744w

New deal schemes
148–9w, 425–6w
Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 726w
Dept for International Development 866w
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 977–8w
Dept of Trade and Industry 700–1w
Ministry of Defence 1019–20w
Paisley 989–90w
President of the Council 862–3w
Treasury 744w

New Millennium Experience
389w
Shareholders 576w

New Scotland Yard
see Metropolitan Police

Newcastle upon Tyne
Council tax 222w

Newhaven
Customs and Excise 855–6w

NHS
Accountability 908w
Complaints 784w, 1049–50w
Consultants 303
Debts 768–72w
Disciplinary proceedings 929w
Email 435w
Fees and charges 931w
Finance 532w, 751w, 781w, 909w, 920w, 939w
Lancashire 763w
Land 298w
Liability 1045–6w
Location 441w
Negligence 1045–6w
Per capita costs 929w
Recruitment 161w
Redundancy 535–6w
Standards 781w, 784w
Vacancies 534w

NHS Direct
1049w

NHS Professionals
757–9w

NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency
Business plans 933w

NHS trusts
Accountability (26.03.02) 777–8
Screening 922–4w

Nitrates
Pollution 716–7w

Noise
M42 358w
Pollution control 972w
Roads 959–60w

"Non-Competitive Procurement in the Ministry of Defence"
67–8w

Non-departmental public bodies
Equal opportunities 293w
Home Office 276w

Non-domestic rates
664w
Farms 23–4w
Nurseries 224w

Non-governmental organisations
Dept for Culture Media and Sport 299w
Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 112w
Dept of Trade and Industry 362w

Non-governmental organisations—continued
Home Office 276–7w
Ministry of Defence 69w
Solicitor-General 539w

Non-teaching staff
Jobseeker's allowance 150w

Norman, Mr Archie
Questions
A21, Accidents 227w

North America
Exports 366w

North East region
Individual learning accounts 247–8w
Water sports 1025–6w

North West region
Armed forces 18–9
Arts 566w
Breast cancer 922w
Community Legal Service 72–3w
Employment 519–22w
Equal pay 77w
Homelessness 28w
Hospital beds 907w
Insolvency 686–8w
Local government 219w

North West Regional Assembly
Finance 968w

North Yorkshire
Foot and mouth disease 130–1w, 730–1w
Health authorities 920–1w
Magistrates' courts 180w

Northern Ireland
Aggregates levy 1035w
Armed forces 851–2w
Civil defence 211w
Counterfeit manufacturing 334–5w
Courts 518w
Drugs 333w, 337w
Elections 287–8, 336–7w
Ferries 941w
Firearms 209–10w
Integrated schools 335–6w
Offenders 333w
Organised crime 294–5, 335w
Police 333–4w, 338w, 537w
Royal charters 183w
Security 538w
Terrorism 291–4, 334w, 337–8w
Weapons 288–90, 338w, 538w

Northern Ireland Act 1998
Questions
537w

Northern Ireland government
333w

Northern Ireland Office
Accenture 788w
Arthur Andersen 788w
Fair trade initiative 537w
Public relations 537w

Northern Ireland Prison Service
538w

Northern Ireland Victims' Liaison Unit
see Victims' Liaison Unit

Northumberland
Healthy living centres 435w

Nuclear fuel reprocessing
Germany 271w

Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty
844–5w

Nuclear power stations
700w
Decommissioning 694w

Nuclear power stations—continued
Scotland 680–1w, 795w
Sellafield 211w

Nuclear reactors
Design 793w

Nuclear weapons
607–8w
Exservicemen 54w
Indian subcontinent 196w
USA 323w

Nurseries
Cabinet Office 820–2w
Dept for Culture Media and Sport 573w
Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 725w
[illegible] International Development 882w
Dept for [illegible] Local Government and the Regions 97[illegible]
Dept of Trade and Industry 701w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 610w
Ministry of Defence 555–6w
Non-domestic rates 224w
Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 894w
President of the Council 512w
Treasury 741–2w

Nurses
Ashford and St Peter's Hospital NHS Trust 783w
Greater London 685–6, 910w
Institutional care 308w
Recruitment 759w, 925–6w
Training 629w

Nursing and Midwifery Council
Public appointments 933–5w

Oakington Detention Centre
Asylum 594w

Oaten, Mr Mark
Questions
Entry clearances, Slovakia 1059–60w
Local authorities, Contracts 672w
Wheelchairs, Safety 1036w

Objects in lieu of tax
903–4w

O'Brien, Mr Mike
Debates etc.
Afghanistan (18.03.02) 45
Barcelona Summit (EC) (18.03.02) 33–4
Hunting (18.03.02) 55, (21.03.02) 464
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Walsgrave Hospital (20.03.02) 81–4wh
Questions
Departmental expenditure limits, Dept for Education and Skills 502w

O'Brien, Mr Stephen
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Africa, International assistance (19.03.02) 39–41wh
Questions
Foot and mouth disease, Scotland 177w

O'Brien, Mr William
Questions
Coal, Pollution control 455w

Occupational pensions
155–6w, 428w, 1002w, 1012–4w
Accountancy 650w

Occupational therapy
Waiting lists 534w

Occupied territories
Education 877w
Unemployment 877–8w
Water 877w

Odour pollution
730w

Offences against children
Children in care 481–2w

Offenders
Northern Ireland 333w

Office for National Statistics
Supply estimates 325w

Office of Communications
553–4, 572w
BBC 389w
Disabled 572w
Regional assemblies 571–2w

Office of Communications Bill (HL) 2001/02
Debates etc.
Royal Assent (19.03.02) 149

Office of Surveillance Commissioners
Public appointments 449–50w

Office of the Rail Regulator
20w, 653w
Assets 20w

Office of the Schools Adjudicator
106w

Office of the Secretary of State for Wales
Contracts 321–2w
Human rights 894w
Internet 320w
National Assembly for Wales 322w
Nurseries 894w
Press releases 614w
Public relations 320w
Theft 2w, 321w

Offices
Home Office 275w, 889w

Official engagements
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 976w

Official hospitality
Dept of Trade and Industry 682w
Scotland Office 465w
Solicitor-General 541–3w

Official visits
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 809w
USA 613w

O'Hara, Mr Edward
Debates etc.
NHS trusts, Accountability (26.03.02) 777–8

Oil
Irish Sea 702–3w
Prices 748–9w

Older workers
643–4w
Dept for Culture Media and Sport 387w
Dept for Work and Pensions 427w
Lanarkshire 427w

O'Neill, Mr Martin
Debates etc.
Chinook helicopters (19.03.02) 246, 253–5
Consignia (25.03.02) 570

Open government
461w
Administrative delays 182–3w
Cabinet Office 821w
Codes of practice 182w
Dept for International Development 882w

Opik, Lembit
Debates etc.
Hunting (18.03.02) 99, 101, 112, 121–4, (21.03.02) 468

Opik, Lembit*—*continued
Questions
Disability aids, Sight impaired 76w
Terrorism, Northern Ireland 293–4
Theft, Castlereagh 309–10

Opposition days
Chinook helicopters (19.03.02) 235–73
Education (19.03.02) 175–234

Organ Donation (Presumed Consent and Safeguards) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
1R (20.03.02) 325–7

Organic farming
268w, 722w

Organised crime
Northern Ireland 294–5, 335w

Orkney
Fisheries 373–4w

Orthopaedics
Avon 299–300w
Waiting lists 299–300w

Osborne, Mr George
Questions
Health services, Disadvantaged 687–8
House of Lords, Reform 187w

Osborne, Sandra
Debates etc.
State Pension Credit Bill (HL), 2R (25.03.02) 640, 648–9

Osborne Estates Act 1902
Questions
548–9

Osteoporosis
Screening 1038w

Ottaway, Richard
Debates etc.
Railtrack (25.03.02) 594
Questions
Afghanistan, Peace keeping operations 15–6
Levy, Lord, Visits abroad 616–7w
Roads, Tolls 77–8w

Out-patients
Attendance 531–2w

Overseas aid
469–70w, 832–3w, 867w
Africa 203w
Angola 875w
Burma 864w
Burundi 202w
Commonwealth 874–6w
Cuba 17w
Democratic Republic of Congo 875–6w
India 869w
Macedonia 865w
Pakistan 467w
Rwanda 14w, 876w
St Helena 15w, 470w
South Africa 869w
Yugoslavia 872–3w
Zambia 873w
Zimbabwe 868–9w

Overseas investment
Gibraltar 190w
Government assistance 198w, 324w

Overseas residence
Armed forces 68w
Zimbabwe 611w, 996–8w

Overseas trade
India 703w
Macedonia 702w

Owen, Albert
Questions
Sinnot, Lionel Peter 808w

Oxford Brookes University
107w

P and O
Royal Caribbean Cruises 687w

Packaging
Confectionery 371w
EC law 718–9w, 1022w

Page, Mr Richard
Debates etc.
Hunting (18.03.02) 101–3
Questions
Aerospace industry, Research 416–7

Paice, Mr James
Debates etc.
Hunting (18.03.02) 108, 113–7
Questions
Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis 288w
Crime prevention, Greater London 289w
Criminal Records Bureau, Rents 478w
Metropolitan Police, Standards 288w
Police, Pay 286–8w

Pain
Medical treatments 438w

Paisley
Minimum wage 736w
New deal schemes 989–90w
Pensioners 509w

Paisley, Rev Ian
Debates etc.
Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, Addresses to the Crown (03.04.02) 808–9

Pakistan
Arms trade 700w
Overseas aid 467w

Palestinians
International assistance 384w

Palmer, Dr Nick
Debates etc.
Hunting (18.03.02) 70, 106–8
Questions
EC common foreign and security policy 9–10

Parental leave
Cabinet Office 582w
Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 264–5w
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 22w
Dept for Work and Pensions 638w
EC law 801w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 384w
Ministry of Defence 547w
President of the Council 615w
Prime Minister 617w
Solicitor-General 544–5w
Treasury 735w

Parish councils
(19.03.02) 1–25wh
Codes of practice 224w
Isle of Wight 1030w

Parking offences
Fines 956–7w

Parliament
Visits 863w

Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards
Public appointments 449w

Parliamentary procedure
186–7w

Parliamentary questions
(21.03.02) 137–82wh
Dept of Health 784w, 930w
Treasury 742w

Parliamentary scrutiny
Public expenditure (26.03.02) 756–61

Part-time employment
EC law 802w
General practitioners 759–61w

Passenger transport executives
Allowances 660w

Passport Agency
see United Kingdom Passport Agency

Patent Office
Action Aid 244w
Codes of practice 243–4w
Standards 362–3w

Paterson, Mr Owen
Questions
Asylum, Rural areas 891w
Farms, Tenants 831–2w
Hospitals, Asbestos 299w
Hospitals, Shropshire 931–2w
Institutional care, Shropshire 932w
Institutional care, West Midlands 920w
Livestock, Markets 730w
Members, Correspondence 536w
Poultry, Animal welfare 126–7w
Poultry, EC law 127w, 1030w

Pathfinder projects
Melton Borough Council 19–20w

Patients
Attendance allowance 155w
Disability living allowance 155w
Invalid care allowances 155w
Social security benefits 986–7w

Peace keeping operations
Afghanistan 7–8, 15–6, 208–9w
Training 556–7w
United Nations 806w, 880–1w
Yugoslavia 60w

Peace negotiations
Middle East 196w, 384–5w

Peers
Public appointments 884w

Penrose Inquiry
see Equitable Life Independent Inquiry

Pension credit
141–2w, 145w, 420–2w, 1000w

Pension rights
Privatisation 88–9w

Pension Service
649–50w

Pension sharing
241w

Pensioners
Clwyd 986w
Council tax 993w
Council tax benefits 982–3w
Dorset 153w
Housing benefit 982–3w
Income 143–4w, 423w, 428–9w, 1003–4w
Income support 144w, 149–52, 153w, 426–7w, 642–3w, 860w, 986w, 988w, 991w
Leeds 144w
Means tested benefits 990w
Paisley 509w
Portsmouth 905w
Scotland 149–52, 860w

Pensioners—continued
Staffordshire 642–3w
Tax allowances 330w
Tax credit 418w
Telecommunications 747w
Telford 153w
Tooting 418w
Warrington 153w
Winter fuel payments 1004w

Pensions
13w, 419–20w, 644–7w, 1000–1w, 1003w, 1011w
Armed forces 207w
Carers 641w
Clergy 580w
Doctors 442w, 915w
Females 615–6w
Foster care 640w
Industrial disputes 89w
National insurance contributions 143w
Police 287w
Public sector 1001w
Publicity 1003w
Tax allowances 330–1w
Taxation 739–40w

Performance and Innovation Unit
Manpower 294w

Perham, Linda
Questions
Gypsies 343–4w

Perinatal mortality
915w

Perkins Engines
85–6w

Personal injury
847w

Personal records
Adoption 529w
National insurance 330w
Pupils 109–10w, 339–41w

Pesticides
(26.03.02) 726–30
Monitoring 1021w
Taxation 1021w

Petitions
Asylum (19.03.02) 276
Fireworks (25.03.02) 676
Isle of Wight 885w
Magistrates' courts (25.03.02) 676
Morgan, Gerard (25.03.02) 677
Rugby (20.03.02) 408
Sandringham School (20.03.02) 408

Petrol
Government Car and Despatch Agency 817w

Petrol alternatives
957–8w
Excise duties 1034w

Pets
Wild animals 1029–30w

Pharmacy
309–10w
Elderly 935w
Fees and charges 1037w

Philippines
Trade 455–6w

Physical education
631w

Pickles, Mr Eric
Questions
London Underground, Public private partnerships 18w
Security Industry Authority 285–6w

Pickthall, Mr Colin
Debates etc.
Hunting (18.03.02) 99–101, (21.03.02) 470
Questions
Countryside, Access 378w
Government departments, Repairs and maintenance 684w
Imports, Standards 75w
Occupational pensions 155–6w

Pigs
Hampshire 728w
Wiltshire 728w

Pike, Mr Peter L
Debates etc.
Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, Addresses to the Crown (03.04.02) 823–4
Questions
Arts, North West region 566w
Magistrates, Manpower 159

Pilot schemes
Small Business Service 242w

Pilotage Act 1987
Questions
229w

Planning
492w, (26.03.02) 785–8
Inquiries 970–1w

Planning (Hazardous Substances) Act 1990
Questions
Appeals 38w

Planning Inspectorate
Standards 673–4w

Planning permission
Aerials 30w, 80w
Institutional care 967–8w
Sportsgrounds 671w

Plant power
Finance 688w

Plants
Imports 119–20w

Plaskitt, Mr James
Debates etc.
Barcelona Summit (EC) (18.03.02) 36
Education (19.03.02) 176
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Walsgrave Hospital (20.03.02) 75–8wh
Questions
UK membership of EC 298

Playgrounds
Disabled 670w
Safety 40w

Playing fields
Haringey 248w
Schools 248w, 251–2w, 632w

Plymouth
Territorial Army 65w

Poisoning
Shellfish 126w

Poland
EC accession 827–8w
Entry clearances 94–5w

Police
(26.03.02) 773–6, 785–8
Best value 481w
Commonwealth Games 1058–9w
Diabetes 598w
Finance 287w
Health insurance 480–1w
Northern Ireland 333–4w, 338w, 537w
Pay 286–8w
Pensions 287w

Police—continued
Protection 97w
Scotland 861w
Standards 888–9w

Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984
Questions
286w

Police custody
Habitual offenders 622–3w
Young offenders 414w, 622–3w

Police stations
90w

"Policing a New Century White Paper"
286w

Policy Commission on Farming and Food for England
see Future of Farming and Food Policy Commission

Political impartiality
Civil servants 449w

Political parties
Finance 561

Political refugees
see Asylum

Politics and government
Iraq 50–1w
Zimbabwe 302

Pollard, Mr Kerry
Debates etc.
Education (19.03.02) 213, (21.03.02) 507–9
Sandringham School, Petitions (20.03.02) 408

Pollution
Irish Sea 726–7w
Nitrates 716–7w

Pollution control
825–6w
Carbon dioxide 705w
Coal 455w
Hazardous materials 1021w
Motor vehicles 484w
Noise 972w
Shoreham 270–1w

Pond, Mr Chris
Debates etc.
Child Support Agency (20.03.02) 322
State Pension Credit Bill (HL), 2R (25.03.02) 613, 659–60
Questions
Arthritis, Drugs 305–6w
Environment Agency 370–1w

Pope, Mr Greg
Questions
BBC News 24 Review 508w

Pornography
Schools 247w

Portillo, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Afghanistan, Armed conflict (20.03.02) 351–4

Porton Down
Animal experiments 57w
Human experiments 57–8w, 314–5w

Ports
EC grants and loans 940w
Government assistance 940w
Isle of Wight 346w
Safety 229w, 666–7w
Shoreham 33–5w, 238w

Portsmouth
Millennium landmark projects 574w
Pensioners 905w

Portsmouth and South East Hampshire Health Authority
Chiropody 762–3w

Post offices
422–3, 454w
Bank services 76w, 639w, 697w, 800–1w
Profits 793–4w
Rural areas 88w, 454w
Urban areas 224–5w, 246w, 454w
Wales 88w

Postal rates
798w

Postal services
(26.03.02) 742–6, 751–6, 773–6, 785–8
Competition 361w, 797w
Greater London 77–8w
Immigration and Nationality Directorate 96w
Licensing 246w
Local authorities 798w
Standards 794w

Postal Services Commission
797–8w

Poultry
Animal welfare 126–7w
EC law 127–8w, 720–1w, 1030w

Pound, Mr Stephen
Questions
Aviation, Government assistance 943w
Civil defence, Finance 812–5w
Medical Devices Agency, Standards 933w
National Air Traffic Services, Finance 351w

Poverty
1006–12w
Children 329w, 983w
Developing countries 466–7w, 878w
Malawi 878w
Scotland 176w

Powys
Foot and mouth disease 129w

Pregnant women
EC law 802w
Industrial health and safety 802w

Prentice, Mr Gordon
Debates etc.
Business motions (18.03.02) 50
Hunting (18.03.02) 59, 68, 73, 76–9, (21.03.02) 468
Questions
Art works 391–2w
Future large aircraft 801w
House of Lords, Reform 187–8w
Hunting 559–60
Indian subcontinent, Nuclear weapons 196w
Manufacturing industries, Manpower 857w
Money laundering 856w
National Lottery, Grants 199w
NHS, Lancashire 763w
Odour pollution 730w
Postal services, Competition 797w
St Helena, Overseas aid 15w
Select committees 616w
Social services, Ministerial powers 1038w
Subsidence, Greater London 355–6w
Television, Electric shock 678w
USA, Nuclear weapons 323w

Prescott, Rt Hon John, Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State
Questions
Advertising, Cabinet Office 587w
Bloody Sunday Tribunal of Inquiry, Cabinet Office 822w
Disclosure of information, Cabinet Office 821–2w
EC law, Cabinet Office 496–7w
Information officers, Cabinet Office 816–7w
Legal costs, Cabinet Office 495–6w
Ministerial policy advisors, Cabinet Office 819–20w
Open government, Cabinet Office 821w
Public appointments, Cabinet Office 584–7w
Publicity, Cabinet Office 587–8w
Standards, Cabinet Office 494–5w
Theft, Cabinet Office 583w

Prescriptions
Wales 1052w

President of the Council
Correspondence 863w
Crimes against property 512w
Discrimination 513w
EC law 512w
Energy 513–4w
Equal pay 862w
Equipment 189w
Flexible working 615w
Hotels 189w
Human rights 512–3w
Manpower 188w
New deal schemes 862–3w
Nurseries 512w
Parental leave 615w
Relocation services 189w
Standards 512w

Press
Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 824w

Press releases
Dept for Culture Media and Sport 392w
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 19w, 975–6w
Dept of Health 434w
Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 614w

Preston
Court of Protection 179w

Prestwick
Air traffic control 668w

Price, Adam
Questions
Beef, Exports 718w
Bovine tuberculosis, Disease control 502–3w
Dogs, Licensing 606w
Industrial diseases, Compensation 691w
Iron and steel, USA 425
Mittal, Lakshmi 692w, 872w
Overseas investment, Government assistance 324w
Trade Partners UK 242–3w

Primarolo, Ms Dawn, Paymaster General
Questions
Business, Regulation 738w
Capital allowances, Small businesses 745w
Children's tax credit 741w
Construction, Self-employed 746w
Disabled person's tax credit 740w
Employee share ownership schemes, Advertising 854–5w
Inheritance tax, Historic buildings 734–5w

Primarolo, Ms Dawn—continued
Inland Revenue, Codes of practice 853w
Inland Revenue, Telephone services 737–8w
Inland Revenue Regulation Act 1890, Payments 325–6w
Minimum wage, Paisley 736w
National insurance, Personal records 330w
National insurance contributions 738w
Pay, Treasury 732–3w
Poverty, Children 329w, 983w
Social Security Contributions Agency, Billing 326w
Tax allowances, Pensioners 330w
Tax allowances, Pensions 330–1w
Tax allowances, Shipping 854w
Tax Law Rewrite Project 739w
Taxation, Landlords 734w
Taxation, Small businesses 734w, 741w
Valuation Office, Standards 853–4w
Working families tax credit 740–1w
Working families tax credit, Abuse 741w, 852–3w
Working families tax credit, Livingston 740w

Primary care trusts
1036w
Finance 937–8w
Wirral 931w

Primary education
Class sizes 100–4w

Prime Minister
Advertising 883–4w
Consultants 883w
Correspondence 620w
Discrimination 617w
Energy 449w
Equipment 616w
Festivals and special occasions 583–4w
Flexible working 322w
Human rights 884w
Information officers 884w
Manpower 322w
Ministerial policy advisors 322–3w, 618w
Parental leave 617w
Public appointments 883w
Recruitment 322w

Prime Minister's Policy Unit
Strategic Rail Authority 619w

Prime Minister's questions
188w

Princess Royal Hospital Telford
Accident and emergency departments 441w

Prisk, Mr Mark
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Parish councils (19.03.02) 1–6wh, 10wh, 24wh
Questions
Employment Bill 2001/02, Small businesses 429
Iraq, Weapons 196w
NATO, Russia 3–4

Prison accommodation
399w

Prison sentences
Crimes of violence 401w
Driving offences 401w

Prison Service
Medals 508w

Prisoner escapes
400w

Prisoners
Courts martial 472w
France 194w

Prisoners—continued
Lone parents 400w

Prisoners of war
Compensation 72w

Prisons
Finance 92–3w
Pay 478w

Private education
Foreign workers 279w

Private finance initiative
Cabinet Office 820w
Dept for International Development 539w, 882–3w
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 945w
Dept for Work and Pensions 142–3w, 987w
Dept of Trade and Industry 701–2w
Hospitals 531w
Ministry of Defence 845–6w
Schools 901–2w
Scotland Office 681w
Treasury 856w

Private Members' bills
187w

Private sector
Surgery 698–9

Private Security Industry Act 2001
Questions
285–6w

Privatisation
962w
Defence Evaluation and Research Agency 560w
Pension rights 88–9w

Privy Council
Silverware 44–5w

Probation and aftercare
93w, 404–5w
Sexual offences 283–4w
Standards 282–3w

Procurement
Defence equipment 1–3, 64w, 67w, 206w

Productivity
Flexible working 460w
Public sector 331w, 1035w

Professional organisations
Engineering 365w
Science 365w

Programme motions
see Timetabling of bills

"Promoting Sport in the Community Consultation Paper"
742w

Proof of identity
Shipping 228–9w

Proscribed organisations
Charities 596w

Prosecutions
Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001 286w
Reform 886–8w
Retail trade 245w
Steroid drugs 92w

Public appointments
Age 584w
Ashford and St Peter's Hospital NHS Trust 783w
BAE Systems 804w
Bank of England 521w
BBC 389w
Cabinet Office 584–7w

Public appointments—continued
Commission for Racial Equality 411w
Countryside Agency 1024–5w
Coventry Warwickshire Herefordshire and Worcestershire Health Authority 755w
Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 120w
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 236w
Dept for Work and Pensions 154w
Dept of Health 929–30w
Females 430–1
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 381–2w
Gas and Electricity Markets Authority 681–2w
Health Professions Council 933–5w
Home Office 892w
Learning and skills councils 108w
Nursing and Midwifery Council 933–5w
Office of Surveillance Commissioners 449–50w
Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards 449w
Peers 884w
Prime Minister 883w
Rolls-Royce 804w
Senior Salaries Review Body 2w
Solicitor-General 515w, 543w

Public bodies
Information technology 853w

Public expenditure
751w, 852w
Dept of Health 918–9w
Parliamentary scrutiny (26.03.02) 756–61
Scotland 178w
Sustainable development 857w
Wales 12w

Public finance
750–1w

Public Guardianship Office
Fees and charges 1032–3w
Standards 183–5w

Public holidays
Pay 452w

Public libraries
Internet 903w

Public participation
Education 631w

Public private partnerships
750w
Cabinet Office 583w
Commonwealth Development Corporation 865w
Dept for Culture Media and Sport 390w, 906w
Dept for Education and Skills 499w, 631w
Dept for International Development 366–8w, 539w, 882–3w
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 945w
Dept of Trade and Industry 81w, 701–2w
London Underground 17–8w, 236w, 349w, 945–8w
Ministry of Defence 68w, 845–6w
Scotland Office 681w
Treasury 853w, 857w

Public Record Office
Census 186w, 411–2w, 836w
Standards 839–41w

Public relations
Cabinet Office 587–9w
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 484w, 652w
Dept of Health 434w, 1051–2w
Home Office 395–6w

Public relations—continued
Ministry of Defence 65–6w
Northern Ireland Office 537w
Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 320w
Treasury 332w

Public transport
348–9w
Festivals and special occasions 349w
Staffordshire 605–6w
Standards 661w

Publicity
Cabinet Office 587–8w
Dept for Education and Skills 894w
Dept of Trade and Industry 789w
European Communities 194w
Home Office 89–90w
Pensions 1003w
Solicitor-General 513–5w
Sports 566w

Pugh, Dr John
Debates etc.
Education (19.03.02) 219
Questions
Incinerators 832w
Railways, Research 350w
Railways, Safety 349–50w
Recycling 719–20w
Recycling, Standards 829w
Refrigerators, Waste disposal 1020w

Pupils
Personal records 109–10w, 339–41w

Purnell, James
Debates etc.
State Pension Credit Bill (HL), 2R (25.03.02) 603, 610, 622, 636–7, 647, 658–9
Questions
Broadband 419–20
Doctors, Pensions 442w, 915w
Museums and galleries 564w
Pensioners, Income support 427w
State retirement pensions 1005w

"Quality and Choice a Decent Home For All Consultation Paper"
356w

Quarantine
Animal welfare 374w

Queen Elizabeth II
Anniversaries 43w, 183w, 255–6w, 302–3, 318w, 349w, 394w, 448w, 450–1w, 506–8w, 557, 571w, 597w, 665w, 1024w
Commemorative coins 571w

Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother
(03.04.02) 799
Addresses to the Crown (03.04.02) 799–828

Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Questions
Fruit, Schools 910w
House of Lords, Reform 165, 187w
Members, Correspondence 930w

Quinn, Lawrie
Questions
Council housing, Property transfer 222–4w
Heathrow Airport, Railway network 945w
Police, Standards 888–9w
Railtrack, Finance 655w
Terrorism 20

Racial discrimination
202w
Metropolitan Police 596w

Racial violence
Internet 97–8w

Radiation exposure
Exservicemen 548–9w

Radio
Languages 392–3w

Radioactive wastes
Irish Sea 372w
Storage 791w

Radiocommunications Agency
Standards 803–4w

Radiotherapy
East Sussex 301–2

RAF Halton
(26.03.02) 751–6

RAF Lyneham
849–50w

RAF Turnhouse
Asylum 95w

Rail Regulator
see Office of the Rail Regulator

Railtrack
228w, 485–8w
Finance 18w, 486–7w, 654–5w, 949–51w
Ministerial statements (25.03.02) 581–95

Railway network
Edinburgh Airport 862w
Glasgow Airport 862w
Heathrow Airport 657w, 945w

Railway stations
Information services 20–1w
Security 20–1w

Railways
21w, 654w, 659w
Buckinghamshire (26.03.02) 751–6
Cabinet Office 430w
Concessions 953w
Dept for Education and Skills 98–100w
Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 380w
Dept for Work and Pensions 1011–2w
Disabled 486w
Electrification 953w
Fares 21w, 654w, 953w
Fences 29–30w
Finance 233–5w, 486w, 653w, 952w, 955w
Franchises 952w
Freight 28–9w, 658w, 951–2w
Home Office 275w
Kent 657w, 703w
Manpower 21w, 952w, 954w
Repairs and maintenance 950w
Research 350w
Romford 228w
Safety 349–50w
Scotland 155–6
Solicitor-General 10w, 517–8w
Somerset 659w
Standards 953–4w
Strikes 155–6, 951w
West Midlands 21w

Rammell, Mr Bill
Questions
Hospitals, Admissions 910w

Randall, Mr John
Questions
Macedonia 613w, 807w
Macedonia, Military aid 849w
Macedonia, Overseas aid 702w, 865w
Yugoslavia 810w

Rapid deployment forces
EC countries 56w

Rapson, Syd
Questions
Afghanistan, Peace keeping operations 8
Gambling 549–50

Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick, Minister for Local Government, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions
Questions
Electronic government 974–5w
Local authorities, Disclosure of information 485–6w
Non-domestic rates, Farms 23–4w

Recess motions
(26.03.02) 724–98, (03.04.02) 828

Recruitment
Cabinet Office 292w
Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 113w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 45–50w, 382w
Judges 161–2
NHS 161w
Nurses 759w, 925–6w
Prime Minister 322w

Recycling
269–70w, 719–20w
Standards 829w

Redundancy
Aviation 634w
NHS 535–6w

Redwood, Rt Hon John
Debates etc.
Chinook helicopters (19.03.02) 245
Consignia (25.03.02) 576–7
Questions
London Underground 228w
National Air Traffic Services, Finance 39w, 233w
Railtrack 228w
Railtrack, Finance 654–5w
Rolling stock 18w
West coast railway line 39w

Refrigeration
Government departments 133–4w, 712–3w
Hazardous materials 134w

Refrigerators
Intervention Board 720w
Waste disposal 1020w

Refugees
see Asylum

Regional assemblies
973w
Finance 973w
Office of Communications 571–2w
Regional development agencies 974w
South West region 973–4w
Taxation 218w

Regional assistance
Buckingham 81–4w
South East region 81–4w

Regional development agencies
Regional assemblies 974w

Regional planning and development
668w
EC grants and loans 347w
Urban areas 968–9w

Regulatory impact assessments
494w, 582w

Regulatory Impact Unit
Dept for Culture Media and Sport 390w
Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 122w
Home Office 283w

Regulatory Impact Unit—continued
Ministry of Defence 548w

Regulatory Reform (Golden Jubilee Licensing) Order 2002
Debates etc.
(18.03.02) 141

Rehabilitation
Drugs 291w

Reid, Mr Alan
Questions
Devolution, Scotland 681w
Meat, Imports 175w
Meat, Smuggling 619–20w

Reid, Rt Hon Dr John, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland
Questions
Civil defence, Northern Ireland 211w
Fair trade initiative, Northern Ireland Office 537w
Integrated schools, Northern Ireland 335–6w
Northern Ireland government 333w
Offenders, Northern Ireland 333w
Organised crime, Northern Ireland 294–5
Public relations, Northern Ireland Office 537w
Terrorism, Northern Ireland 291–4, 334w
Theft, Castlereagh 306–14, 338w

Relatives and Residents Association
Finance 157w

Religious freedom
India 810w
Vietnam 810w

Relocation services
Dept for Work and Pensions 525w
Dept of Health 1058w
Home Office 91w
President of the Council 189w
Solicitor-General 2–3w

Rendel, Mr David
Debates etc.
Chinook helicopters (19.03.02) 238
Education (19.03.02) 184, 193–8, 221
Questions
AWE Aldermaston 58w
Higher education 110w
Higher education, Student numbers 111–2w

Renewables obligation
699w

Rented housing
Standards 972w

Rents
Council housing 28w, 664w
Criminal Records Bureau 478w

Republic of Ireland
Sellafield 371–2w
Terrorism 338w

Rescue services
Brixham 39–40w

Resignations
Civil servants 979w
Teachers 633w

Respiratory syncytial virus
768w

Retail trade
Crime prevention 473–7w
Metrication 245w
Prosecutions 245w

Retirement
Dept for Work and Pensions 982w
Scotland Office 679w

Revenue support grant
City of Westminster 220–2w

Review Body on Senior Salaries
see Senior Salaries Review Body

Rheumatology
Waiting lists 534w

Right to buy
356–8w
Greater London 357w
Metropolitan Police 398–9w

Ringfenced funding
Local government 222w

Risk assessment
Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease 1046w

River Humber
Navigation 31w, 666–7w

Road signs and markings
Standards 672w

Road traffic
672w
House of Commons sessional orders 188w

Roads
(26.03.02) 778–81
Accidents 30w, 161w, 285w, 399w, 405w, 483w, 1040w
Greater London 341–2w
Monmouth 30w
Noise 959–60w
Safety 677w, 957w, 981–2w
Shoreham 34–5w
Somerset 30–1w
South West region 670w
Tolls 77–8w, 341–2w, 857w

Robathan, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Afghanistan, Armed conflict (20.03.02) 330, 342
Railtrack (25.03.02) 594
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Africa, International assistance (19.03.02) 27wh, 31wh, 33–4wh
Questions
Courts martial 60w
Nurses, Greater London 686

Robbery
Firearms 593–4w

Robertson, Angus
Debates etc.
Chinook helicopters (19.03.02) 268–9
Navy, Points of order (25.03.02) 596
Questions
Armed forces, Training 1015w
Central Data Management Authority 548w
Correspondence, Ministry of Defence 545–6w
EC Agriculture Council, Scottish Executive 121w
EC Environment Council, Scottish Executive 711–2w
EC Foreign Affairs Council, Scottish Executive 190–1w
EU Employment and Social Policy Council, Scottish Executive 997–8w
EU Internal Market Consumer Affairs and Tourism Council, Scottish Executive 243w
EU Justice Home Affairs and Civil Protection Council, Scottish Executive 406w
EU Transport and Telecommunications Council, Scottish Executive 237w
Iraq, Armed conflict 294w, 324w

Robertson, Hugh
Debates etc.
Afghanistan (18.03.02) 47–8
Afghanistan, Armed conflict (20.03.02) 343, 371
Questions
Afghanistan, Peace keeping operations 7–8
Armed forces, Deployment 851–2w
Cancer, Medical treatments 306–7w
Community hospitals 306w, 938w

Robertson, John
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Asbestos, Scotland (19.03.02) 58–65wh
Questions
Clyde Shipyards Task Force 176–7w
Digital broadcasting 546–7
Type 45 destroyers 18
Victims' Liaison Unit 336w

Robertson, Mr Laurence
Questions
Council housing, Finance 966w
Criminal Courts Review, Magistrates' courts 180w
Cystic fibrosis 173w
Dogs, Animal welfare 121w
EC budget 855w
Entry clearances, Romania 280w
Future large aircraft 15
Hearing aids 162w
Hearing aids, Gloucestershire 162w
Inland waterways 114w
Institutional care, Fees and charges 171w, 907–8w
Local authorities, Debts 963–5w
Magistrates' courts, Reform 412w
National Lottery 44w, 563w
National Lottery, Tewkesbury 562–3w
Non-departmental public bodies, Home Office 276w
Police, Northern Ireland 338w
Schools, Playing fields 251–2w
Social Security Contributions Agency, Billing 326w
Woodmancote School, Land 252w

Robinson, Anne
98w

Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Walsgrave Hospital (20.03.02) 78–81wh, 83wh, 86–7wh

Robinson, Mrs Iris
Questions
Security, Northern Ireland 538w

Roche, Mrs Barbara, Minister of State, Cabinet Office
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Age, Discrimination (20.03.02) 111–5wh
Questions
Government Office for London, Manpower 293–4w
Women and Equality Unit, Manpower 431w
Women and Equality Unit, Standards 431w

Rolling stock
18w, 948–9w
Cultural heritage 949w
London Underground 946w

Rolls-Royce
Public appointments 804w

Romania
Entry clearances 280w
Intercountry adoption 754–5w

Romford
Railways 228w

Rooney, Mr Terry
Debates etc.
Child Support Agency (20.03.02) 319–20

Rosindell, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
British citizenship (26.03.02) 768–72
Easter adjournment debate intervention (26.03.02) 732–3, 736–7
Questions
Discrimination, EC action 380–1w
Railways, Fences 29–30w
Railways, Romford 228w
Terrorism, EC action 383w
Tourism 579w

Ross, Mr Ernie
Questions
Peace keeping operations, Yugoslavia 60w

Roy, Mr Frank
Questions
Jobseeker's allowance 150w
Older workers, Lanarkshire 427w
Social security benefits, Forms 428w

Royal Caribbean Cruises
P and O 687w

Royal charters
Northern Ireland 183w

Royal Maritime Auxiliary Service
Training 64w

Royal Mint Trading Fund (Extension and Variation) Order 2002
Debates etc.
(18.03.02) 141

Royal Shrewsbury Hospital
Accident and emergency departments 441w

Ruane, Chris
Questions
Burglar alarms 477w
Homelessness 493–4w, 665w
Jobcentre Plus, Crimes of violence 148w
Jobcentre Plus, Security 148w
Jobcentres, Crimes of violence 148w
MMR vaccine, Side effects 162w
Oil, Irish Sea 702–3w
Pollution, Irish Sea 726–7w
Schools, Accidents 501–2w

Rugby
565w
Petitions (20.03.02) 408

Rural areas
Asylum 891w
Employment 713–4w
Post offices 88w, 454w
Tourism 378w, 835–6w
Transport 24–5w

Russell, Bob
Debates etc.
Neighbourhood noise (21.03.02) 536–40, 542
Railtrack (25.03.02) 592–3
Questions
Army, Manpower 53–4w
Homeopathy 160–1w
Inland Revenue, Codes of practice 853w
Leisure facilities 575w
Military bases, Colchester 557w
Military Corrective Training Centre Colchester 558w
Post offices, Urban areas 454w
"Promoting Sport in the Community Consultation Paper" 742w

Russell, Bob—continued
Queen Elizabeth II, Anniversaries 508w
Railways, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 380w
Railways, Freight 951–2w
Royal charters, Northern Ireland 183w
St Helena 387w, 808w

Russia
NATO 3–4

Rwanda
Overseas aid 14w, 876w

Ryan, Ms Joan
Questions
Nurses, Greater London 685–6
Science, Investment 427–8

St Bartholomew's Hospital
Accident and emergency departments 762w

St George's Hospital Tooting
1041w

St Helena
387w, 470w, 808w
Airports 470w
Overseas aid 15w, 470w

Sales methods
Energy (26.03.02) 765–8

Salford
Social security benefits 522–3w

Salmond, Mr Alex
Debates etc.
Afghanistan, Armed conflict (20.03.02) 333
Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, Addresses to the Crown (03.04.02) 805–6
Questions
Advertising, Dept for Work and Pensions 149w
Advertising, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 804–5w
Aggregates levy 798w
Convention on the Future of Europe, Scotland 153
Pensioners, Income support 426w

Salter, Mr Martin
Questions
Air pollution, Fees and charges 834–5w
Dizaei, Ali 592w
Metropolitan Police, Inquiries 592w
Metropolitan Police Authority 288w
Metropolitan Police Independent Advisory Group 592w
Waste management, Standards 269w

Sanders, Mr Adrian
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Parish councils (19.03.02) 18–21wh
Questions
Council housing, Standards 662w
Members, Correspondence 1033w
Non-governmental organisations, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 299w
Non-governmental organisations, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 112w
Non-governmental organisations, Dept of Trade and Industry 362w
Non-governmental organisations, Home Office 276–7w
Non-governmental organisations, Ministry of Defence 69w
Non-governmental organisations, Solicitor-General 539w
Playgrounds, Disabled 670w

Sandringham School
Petitions (20.03.02) 408

Savidge, Mr Malcolm
Debates etc.
Afghanistan, Armed conflict (20.03.02) 334–5, 365–7
Hunting (18.03.02) 55, 63, 75, 100, 122

Sawford, Phil
Questions
Drugs, Health education 337w
Husaini, Safiya 611w
Terrorism, Iraq 56w

Sayeed, Mr Jonathan
Questions
Air conditioning, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 125w
Flood control, EC grants and loans 135w, 723–4w
Floods, Boats 829–30w
Forests, Sustainable development 124w
Government Communications Headquarters, Air conditioning 607w
Government departments, Air conditioning 712–3w
Government departments, Refrigeration 133–4w
Government departments, Wood 723w
Water, EC law 264w, 716w
Wood, Imports 722–3w
Yarls Wood Detention Centre 281w

Schools
Accidents 501–2w
Admissions 897–902w
Buildings 250w, 630w
Drinking water 253–4w
Fruit 910w
Governing bodies 633w
Greater London 501w
Playing fields 248w, 251–2w, 632w
Pornography 247w
Private finance initiative 901–2w
Shrewsbury 630w
Sports 905w

Schools Adjudicator
see Office of the Schools Adjudicator

Science
Dept of Trade and Industry 457w
Higher education 633w
Investment 427–8
Professional organisations 365w
Women and Equality Unit 429–30

Scientists and Engineers Supply Review
212w

Scotland
85w, 680w
A1 177w
Aggregates 176w
Aggregates levy 176w
Airports 862w
Asbestos (19.03.02) 58–65wh, 861w
Asylum 410–1w
Beef 826w
Convention on the Future of Europe 152–5
Devolution 156–7, 461–2w, 681w
Drugs 175w
European Capital of Culture 178–9w
Ferries 941w
Foot and mouth disease 177–8w, 731w
Football 861w
Hospitals 178w
Life insurance 175w
Meat 175w
Nuclear power stations 680–1w, 795w
Pensioners 149–52, 860w
Police 861w
Poverty 176w
Public expenditure 178w
Railways 155–6
Tourism 178w, 903w

Scotland—continued
Winter fuel payments 176w
Working families tax credit 178w

Scotland Office
Accountancy 465w
Billing 462–3w
Capita 859w
Cellular phones 465w
Conferences 465w
Consultants 861w
Correspondence 858w
Fair trade initiative 466w, 679–80w
Information technology 463–4w
Official hospitality 465w
Private finance initiative 681w
Public private partnerships 681w
Publications 464w
Retirement 679w
Theft 53w, 387w
Working hours 465–6w

Scotland Yard
see Metropolitan Police

Scottish courts
Maintenance 180–1w

Scottish Executive
EC Agriculture Council 121w
EC Environment Council 711–2w
EC Foreign Affairs Council 190–1w
EU Employment and Social Policy Council 997–8w
EU Internal Market Consumer Affairs and Tourism Council 243w
EU Justice Home Affairs and Civil Protection Council 406w
EU Transport and Telecommunications Council 237w

Scottish Land Fund
577–80w

Scottish Office
Advertising 462–3w
Departmental responsibilities 859–60w

Scottish Parliament
Elections 861w
Electoral systems 175–6w
Members 175w

Seabed
Environment protection 374w

Seas and oceans
Archaeology 903w

Seasonal workers
Cornwall 284–5w

Secondment
Cabinet Office 582w
Dept for Education and Skills 254w
Dept for International Development 882w
Treasury 745–6w
Valuation Office 329–30w

Security
Jobcentre Plus 148w
Northern Ireland 538w
Railway stations 20–1w

Security Industry Authority
285–6w

Select committees
165–8, 616w

Self-employed
Construction 746w
State second pension 427w

Sellafield
Nuclear power stations 211w
Republic of Ireland 371–2w

Selous, Andrew
Debates etc.
Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, Addresses to the Crown (03.04.02) 825
State Pension Credit Bill (HL), 2R (25.03.02) 603, 646–8
Questions
Civil defence, Bedfordshire 582w
Iron and steel 453w
Trade Partners UK 692w
Yarls Wood Detention Centre 591w

Senior Salaries Review Body
Public appointments 2w

Sentencing
399–400w, 479w
Greater London 401–2w
Habitual offenders 299

Service Families Task Force
58–9w

Sewers
Capital investment 710w

Sex Discrimination Act 1975
Questions
558

Sexual offences
Probation and aftercare 283–4w

Shareholders
New Millennium Experience 576w

Shaw, Mr Jonathan
Questions
Arts, Education 565w
Broadband 454–5w
Office of the Schools Adjudicator 106w

Sheep
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 257w
Exports 118w

Sheerman, Mr Barry
Debates etc.
Hunting (18.03.02) 55–6, 72–4
Questions
Government departments, Disclosure of information 817w
National Lottery 44w

Shellfish
Compensation 126w
Poisoning 126w

Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Questions
East of England Development Agency, Finance 683–4w
East of England Development Agency, Pay 673w

Sheridan, Mr Jim
Questions
Conditions of employment 297
Pensioners, Income support 149–50

Shetland
Fisheries 373–4w

Shipbuilding
457w

Shipley, Ms Debra
Debates etc.
Barcelona Summit (EC) (18.03.02) 30
Chinook helicopters (19.03.02) 257
Questions
Derelict land 354–5w
Energy, Research 689–90w
Fuels, Prices 689w
Homicide, Children 295
Investment Approvals Board 843–4w
Office of Communications 554
Police stations 90w

Shipley, Ms Debra—continued
Renewables obligation 699w
Schools, Pornography 247w
Swimming 579w
Transport, Environment protection 697–8w

Shipping
Conditions of employment 346w
Disclosure of information 490w
EC grants and loans 347w, 941w
Government assistance 347–8w, 940w
Inspections 489–90w
Proof of identity 228–9w
Registration 489w
Tax allowances 348w, 854w
Training 345w, 940w
Work permits 598w

Shoeburyness
Firing ranges 848w

Shoreham
Fire prevention 27w
Hazardous materials 270w
Pollution control 270–1w
Ports 33–5w, 238w
Roads 34–5w

Shoreham Port Authority
36–7w

***Short, Rt Hon Clare**, Secretary of State for International Development*
Questions
Afghanistan, International assistance 15–6w, 864–5w
Afghanistan, Mines 468w
Angola, Overseas aid 875w
Armed conflict 878–81w
Bomb disposal, Expenditure 468w
Burma, Overseas aid 864w
Common fisheries policy, Corruption 15w
Commonwealth, Overseas aid 874–6w
Commonwealth Development Corporation, Public private partnerships 865w
Contracts, Dept for International Development 16–7w
Correspondence, Dept for International Development 881w
Crimes against property, Dept for International Development 883w
Cuba, Overseas aid 17w
Debts 466–7w
Democratic Republic of Congo, Overseas aid 875–6w
Developing countries, Commodities 866–7w
Developing countries, Disabled 873–4w
Developing countries, HIV infection 863–4w
Developing countries, Literacy 867–8w
Developing countries, Loans 467w
Developing countries, Poverty 878w
"Eliminating Hunger Consultation Paper" 17w
Engineers, Dept for International Development 200–1w
Festivals and special occasions, Dept for International Development 883w
Gaza Strip, Midwives 876w
Heavily indebted poor countries initiative 855w
Human rights, Dept for International Development 867w
Imports, Forced labour 867w
India, Overseas aid 869w
International Conference on Financing for Development 870–1w
International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance 865w
Iraq, Armed conflict 467w
Macedonia, Overseas aid 865w
Malawi, Poverty 878w

Short, Rt Hon Clare—continued
Middle East, EC aid 871w
Mines 469w
Ministerial policy advisors, Dept for International Development 15w, 539w
Mittal, Lakshmi 871–2w
New deal for young people, Dept for International Development 866w
New deal schemes, Dept for International Development 866w
Nurseries, Dept for International Development 882w
Occupied territories, Education 877w
Occupied territories, Unemployment 877–8w
Occupied territories, Water 877w
Open government, Dept for International Development 882w
Overseas aid 469–70w, 832–3w, 867w
Pakistan, Overseas aid 467w
Private finance initiative, Dept for International Development 539w, 882–3w
Public private partnerships, Dept for International Development 539w
Rwanda, Overseas aid 14w, 876w
St Helena, Airports 470w
St Helena, Overseas aid 15w, 470w
Secondment, Dept for International Development 882w
South Africa, Overseas aid 869w
Standards, Dept for International Development 17w, 882w
Tanzania, Air traffic control 471w
Theft, Dept for International Development 16w
Turkey, Amec 876–7w
United Nations, Peace keeping operations 880–1w
Yugoslavia, Overseas aid 872–3w
Zambia, Overseas aid 873w
Zimbabwe, International assistance 869w
Zimbabwe, Overseas aid 868–9w

Shrewsbury
Schools 630w

Shropshire
Constituencies 842w
Floods 135w
Hospitals 931–2w
Institutional care 932w

Sick leave
Civil servants 432–3w

Sight impaired
Diabetes 777w
Disability aids 76w

Silverware
Privy Council 44–5w

Simmonds, Mr Mark
Debates etc.
Hunting (18.03.02) 84
State Pension Credit Bill (HL), 2R (25.03.02) 606, 654–5
Questions
Air ambulance services, Finance 305w
Gambling Review Body 298–9
Out-patients, Attendance 531–2w

Simpson, Mr Alan
Debates etc.
Afghanistan, Armed conflict (20.03.02) 358–9
Questions
Community health services 915–6w
Iron and steel, USA 425–6

Simpson, Mr Keith
Debates etc.
Consignia (25.03.02) 573

***Simpson, Mr Keith**—continued*
Questions
Agricultural shows 377w
Agriculture, Subsidies 115–7w
Foot and mouth disease, EC action 131w

Single parents
see Lone parents

Sinnot, Lionel Peter
808w

Sixsmith, Martin
19w

Skinner, Mr Dennis
Debates etc.
Business questions intervention (21.03.02) 442

Slaughterhouses
766w
Location 731w

Sleeping rough
27–8w
West Yorkshire 665w

Slough
Social Security Benefits Agency 990w

Slovakia
Entry clearances 1059–60w

Small Business Service
361w
Pilot schemes 242w

Small businesses
Broadband 87–8w
Capital allowances 745w
Double glazing 704w
Employment Bill 2001/02 428–9
Industrial health and safety 966w
Internet 87–8w
Loan guarantee scheme 242w
Taxation 734w, 741w
VAT 213w, 732w

Smallpox
Terrorism 937w

Smith, Rt Hon Andrew, Chief Secretary to the Treasury
Questions
Central Government Audit and Accountability Review 211–2w
Disadvantaged 213–4w
Electronic government, Contracts 214–6w
Financial institutions, Fees and charges 1034w
Invest to save budget 328–9w
Members, Correspondence 212w, 858w
National Audit Office 13–4w
NHS, Finance 751w
Pay, Public sector 325w
Pensions 13w
Privy Council, Silverware 44–5w
Public bodies, Information technology 853w
Public expenditure 751w, 852w
Public expenditure, Sustainable development 857w
Public expenditure, Wales 12w
Public finance 750–1w
Public private partnerships 750w
Public private partnerships, Treasury 853w
Public sector, Productivity 331w, 1035w
Tax burden 751w

Smith, Geraldine
Questions
Neighbourhood nuisance, Social rented housing 492w
Postal rates 798w
Postal services, Competition 797w
Postal Services Commission 797–8w

Smith, Jacqui, Minister of State, Dept of Health
Debates etc.
Adoption and Children Bill, Programme motion and Rep (20.03.02) 374–5, 378–9, 390–9,403–4
Questions
Acute beds 1037w
Adoption, Personal records 529w
Agency nurses 761w
Arthritis, Drugs 305–6w
Autism 757w
Autism, Research 438w
Boarding schools, Inspections 1038w
Breast cancer, North West region 922w
Cancer, Essex 908w
Children in care, General certificate of secondary education 436w
Chronic fatigue syndrome, Medical treatments 919w
Community care 440w
Compulsorily detained mental patients 775w
Cystic fibrosis 173w
Dental services, East Riding 438–9w
Diabetes 924w
Diabetes, Health education 776–7w
Diabetes, Manpower 777w
Diabetes, Research 777w
Diabetes, Screening 777–8w
Diabetes, Sight impaired 777w
Employment rehabilitation 915w
Epilepsy 778–9w
Foster care, Vetting 306w
Health authorities, North Yorkshire 920–1w
Health services, Children 1046–7w
Health services, Elderly 308–9w
Healthy living centres, Northumberland 435w
Hearing aids 162w, 695–8, 766w, 916w
Hearing aids, Gloucestershire 162w
Hearing impaired, Disability aids 917w
Home care services 930–2w
Home care services, Elderly 936w
Hospital beds 158w, 530w, 917w, 1036–7w
Hospital beds, Barrow in Furness 785–6w
Hospital beds, Isle of Wight 158w
Hospital beds, North West region 907w
Hospitals, Admissions 172–3w
Hospitals, Repairs and maintenance 298w
Hospitals, Shropshire 931–2w
Institutional care 308w, 530–1w, 920w
Institutional care, Barrow in Furness 767w
Institutional care, Construction 307w
Institutional care, Fees and charges 157–8w, 167w, 170–1w, 296w, 308w, 527–8w, 536w,786w, 907–8w, 935–6w
Institutional care, Greater London 307w
Institutional care, Married people 166w
Institutional care, Nurses 308w
Institutional care, Registration 766–7w
Institutional care, Shropshire 932w
Institutional care, Standards 164–9w, 171w, 307–8w, 440–1w, 936w
Institutional care, West Midlands 920w
Institutional care, Young people 170w
Intercountry adoption, Romania 754–5w
Lymphoedema 528w
Members, Correspondence 930w
Mental health 156–7w
Mental health, Females 1041–2w
Mental health review tribunals 924–5w
Mental health services 775w
Mental health services, Elderly 439w
Mental health services, Expenditure 771–6w
Mental health services, Finance 439–40w, 771–2w

***Smith, Jacqui**—continued*
Mental health services, Research 1042–4w
Mentally ill 1039w
Mentally ill, Community care 528–9w
Mentally ill, Elderly 771w
Mentally incapacitated, Protection 936w
NHS, Complaints 784w
NHS, Fees and charges 931w
Osteoporosis, Screening 1038w
Pharmacy, Elderly 935w
Relatives and Residents Association, Finance 157w
Social services 159w
Social services, Codes of practice 935w
Social services, Elderly 174w
Social services, Ministerial powers 1038w
Social workers 919–20w
Speech therapy, Manpower 759–60w
Stepping Hill Hospital, Hearing aids 916w
Strokes 939w
Transplant surgery, Waiting lists 171–2w

Smith, Mr John
Debates etc.
Afghanistan (18.03.02) 41
Questions
Aircraft, Safety 230–1w
Defence Aviation Repair Agency 549w
Military aircraft, Repairs and maintenance 549w
NATO, Russia 4

Smith, Llew
Questions
Chemical and biological warfare 607–8w
Committee Examining Radiation Risks of Internal Emitters 370w
Disclosure of information, Cabinet Office 821–2w
Internet, Dept of Trade and Industry 796w
Nuclear fuel reprocessing, Germany 271w
USA 808–9w

Smith, Sir Robert
Debates etc.
Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, Addresses to the Crown (03.04.02) 820
Railtrack (25.03.02) 595
Questions
Aggregates levy 1035w
Inland Revenue 157–8

Smoking
702
Codes of practice 589w

Smuggling
Alcoholic drinks 213w
Meat 257w, 373w, 619–20w
South East region 1035w

Smyth, Rev Martin
Debates etc.
Child Support Agency (20.03.02) 321–2
Questions
Disabled facilities grants 344w
Terrorism, Northern Ireland 291–2

Soames, Mr Nicholas
Debates etc.
Afghanistan (18.03.02) 44
Afghanistan, Armed conflict (20.03.02) 334
Barcelona Summit (EC) (18.03.02) 32
Castlereagh, Points of order (19.03.02) 171
Hunting (21.03.02) 463
Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, Addresses to the Crown (03.04.02) 815–6
Questions
Territorial Army 13

Social class
Higher education 110–1w
Magistrates 412w

Social conditions
Iraq 467w

Social Fund
642w

Social rented housing
Evictions 29w
Neighbourhood nuisance 492w
Standards 662–3w

Social Security Administration Act 1992 (Amendment) Order 2002
Debates etc.
(18.03.02) 141

Social Security Amendment (Residential Care and Nursing Homes) Regulations 2002
Debates etc.
(26.03.02) 798

Social security benefits
Abuse 147w, 522–4w, 1005w
Automated credit transfer 638–9w
Disabled 146w, 425w
Forms 428w
Gloucestershire 146w
Kirklees 523–4w
Mental patients 422–3w
Patients 986–7w
Salford 522–3w
Standards 984–6w
Widowed people 984w

Social Security Benefits Agency
Slough 990w

Social Security Contributions Agency
Billing 326w
Computers 738w

Social services
159w
Codes of practice 935w
Elderly 174w
Ministerial powers 1038w

Social workers
919–20w

Soil
Surveys 724w

Solicitor-General
Catering 516w
Discrimination 545w
EC law 515–6w
Equal pay 9–10w
Equipment 11–2w
Flexible working 539–41w
Hotels 6–8w
Internet 5–6w
Manpower 3–5w
Non-governmental organisations 539w
Official hospitality 541–3w
Parental leave 544–5w
Public appointments 515w, 543w
Publicity 513–5w
Railways 10w, 517–8w
Relocation services 2–3w
Theft 543–4w
Visits abroad 885w
Work sharing 8–9w

Solicitors
527w
Complaints 527w
Fees and charges 791–2w

Solihull Hospital
(20.03.02) 123–30wh
Accident and emergency departments 694–5

Somerset
Agriculture (25.03.02) 678–84
Floods 831w

Somerset*—*continued
Health authorities 298–9w
Railways 659w
Roads 30–1w

South Africa
Farmers 807w
Overseas aid 869w

South Buckinghamshire NHS Trust
Stoke Mandeville Hospital NHS Trust 529w

South East region
Airports 712w, 942w
Regional assistance 81–4w
Smuggling 1035w

South West region
Civil service agencies 961w
Local education authorities 250–2w
Regional assemblies 973–4w
Roads 670w

South West Trains
Franchises 952w

Southampton University Hospitals NHS Trust
Medical treatments 917w

Southend
Airports (26.03.02) 773–6

Southern region
Travel-to-work areas 519w

Southworth, Ms Helen
Questions
Endometriosis 1052–3w
Endometriosis, Cheshire 1053w
Motor vehicles, Pollution control 484w
Pensioners, Income support 153w

Spain
Foreign relations 323w
Gibraltar 189–90w, 300–1, 612w

Speaker and deputies
Debates etc.
Amendments and new clauses (19.03.02) 175, 235, (20.03.02) 380, 396, 399, (25.03.02) 597, (26.03.02) 717
Conduct of proceedings (18.03.02) 2, 7, 51, 56, 61, 68, 75–6, 81, 90–3, 97, 109, 125,(19.03.02) 150, 178, 205, 221, (20.03.02) 294, 297, 301, 312, 317, 333, 335, 345, 351, 378, (21.03.02) 430, 455, 457, 460, 469–70, 481, 507, (25.03.02) 559, 565, 578, 580, 584, 588, 599, 609, 621, 632, 636, 646, (26.03.02) 692–3, 698, 709, 712, 722, 726
Disallowed questions (18.03.02) 8, 34, (25.03.02) 555
EC documents motions (18.03.02) 140
Hunting Bill motions (18.03.02) 50, 52
Orders and regulations motions (18.03.02) 141, (26.03.02) 798
Points of order (18.03.02) 49–50, 82, (19.03.02) 170–1, 234, (21.03.02) 471–2, (25.03.02) 665, (26.03.02) 704, 713–4
Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother (03.04.02) 799
Royal Assent (19.03.02) 149
Rulings and statements, Demonstrations (18.03.02) 49
Rulings and statements, Early day motions (20.03.02) 305
Rulings and statements, Ministerial statements (25.03.02) 596
Standing order no 24 applications, Afghanistan (19.03.02) 169
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Conduct of proceedings (19.03.02) 6wh, 25wh, 30–1wh, 36wh, 41–2wh, 49wh

Special areas of conservation
264w

Special constables
290w

Specialist schools
341w
Engineering 256w

Speech therapy
Manpower 759–60w

Speed limits
Cameras 677w, 975–6w, 981–2w

***Spellar, Rt Hon John**, Minister for Transport, Department for Transport Local Government and the Regions*
Questions
Aviation, Government assistance 943w
Channel tunnel, Freight 659w
Delivery services, Freight 960w
Greater London Authority, Transport 348w
London Underground 228w
M4, Bus lanes 957w
Members, Correspondence 661w
National Air Traffic Services, Finance 39w, 233w
Railtrack 228w
Railtrack, Finance 654–5w
Rolling stock 18w
Tachographs 677–8w
Transport, EC action 954–5w
Transport, Manchester 490–1w
West coast railway line 39w

Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Solihull Hospital (20.03.02) 125–6wh, 128wh
Walsgrave Hospital (20.03.02) 85wh
Questions
Africa, Overseas aid 203w
Angola, Overseas aid 875w
Botswana, National parks 203w
Burundi, Overseas aid 202w
Commonwealth Development Corporation 201–2w
Commonwealth Development Corporation, Public private partnerships 865w
Democratic Republic of Congo, Overseas aid 875–6w
Developing countries, Commodities 866–7w
Fair trade initiative, Cabinet Office 430w
Fair trade initiative, Northern Ireland Office 537w
Fair trade initiative, Scotland Office 679–80w
Husaini, Safiya 611w, 617w
Kalahari game reserve 203w
Mittal, Lakshmi 204w, 871–2w
Mothers, Employment 432
Racial discrimination 202w
South Africa, Overseas aid 869w
Tanzania, Air traffic control 471w
Turkey, Amec 876–7w
Zimbabwe, Elections 202w
Zimbabwe, International assistance 869w
Zimbabwe, Overseas aid 868–9w
Zimbabwe, Overseas residence 611w

Spicer, Sir Michael
Debates etc.
Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, Addresses to the Crown (03.04.02) 827–8
Questions
Strikes 295

Spink, Bob
Debates etc.
Easter adjournment debate intervention (26.03.02) 731–2, 736, 776

Spink, Bob—continued
Hunting (18.03.02) 58
Questions
Beekeeping, Essex 273–4w
Bees, Varroasis 118w
Design, Home Office 591–2w
Gibraltar 323w
Honey 131–2w
Honey, Imports 132–3w
Iraq, Weapons 319w
Local government finance 219–20w
Members' constituency work, Data protection 413w
Nuclear power stations 700w
Nuclear reactors, Design 793w
Nurseries, Non-domestic rates 224w
Pensioners, Means tested benefits 990w
Speech therapy, Manpower 759–60w
Voting rights, Young people 557–8

Sponsorship
430–1w
Dept for Culture Media and Sport 568w

Sports
43w
Clubs 564–5w
Facilities 43w
Finance 198–9w
Forest Enterprise 120w
Government assistance 301
Publicity 566w
Schools 905w
Voluntary work 567–8w

Sportsgrounds
Bradford 671w, 904w, 967w
Planning permission 671w

Spring, Mr Richard
Debates etc.
Zimbabwe, Points of order (19.03.02) 234
Questions
Common fisheries policy, Corruption 15w
Convention on the Future of Europe, Expenditure 193w
Fishery agreements, EC external relations 1023w
Gibraltar 1031–2w
Industrial health and safety, EC action 966w
Industrial health and safety, EC law 802–3w
Industrial health and safety, Pregnant women 802w
Industrial health and safety, Small businesses 966w
Parental leave, EC law 801w
Part-time employment, EC law 802w
Working hours, EC law 802w
Young people, Employment 803w

Squire, Ms Rachel
Questions
Pensioners, Income support 149–50

Staffordshire
Pensioners 642–3w
Public transport 605–6w

Stakeholder pensions
146w

Standing order no 24 applications
Afghanistan (19.03.02) 169

Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Questions
Gas and Electricity Markets Authority, Codes of practice 710–1w
NATO, Russia 3
Radiocommunications Agency, Standards 803–4w
Trans-European networks 350–2w
Travel, Concessions 955–6w

Starter home initiative
972–3w

State Pension Credit Bill (HL) 2001/02
Debates etc.
2R, Programme motion and Money res* (25.03.02) 597–675

State retirement pensions
144–5w, 647w, 1001–3w, 1005w

State second pension
993w
Self-employed 427w

State Veterinary Service
Crawley 257w

Statistics
Tourism 904w
Treasury 212–3w

Steen, Mr Anthony
Questions
Compulsory purchase, Torquay 272w
Food, Import controls 827w
Foot and mouth disease, Disease control 376–7w
Livestock, Devon 140w
Members, Correspondence 199w, 212w
New deal for long term unemployed, Vocational training 985w
Rescue services, Brixham 39–40w

Steinberg, Mr Gerry
Debates etc.
Hunting (18.03.02) 87–90
Questions
Higher education, Finance 111w

Stepping Hill Hospital
Hearing aids 916w

Steroid drugs
Prosecutions 92w

Stevenage
Equal pay 77w

Stewart, Mr David
Questions
Air routes, Inverness 942w
Airports, Landing rights 491w
Diabetes 924w
Elections, Northern Ireland 287–8
European Capital of Culture, Scotland 178–9w
Iraq, Armed conflict 613w
Occupational pensions, Accountancy 650w
Oil, Prices 748–9w
Prisoners, France 194w

Stewart, Ian
Questions
Corporation tax 750w
Taxation, Pensions 739–40w
Water supply, Competition 262–4w

Stillman, Ian
1–2w, 51–2w, 124w, 510w, 692w

Stinchcombe, Mr Paul
Questions
Queen Elizabeth II, Anniversaries 508w

Stoate, Dr Howard
Debates etc.
Fireworks, Petitions (25.03.02) 676
Questions
Business questions 441
Civil service agencies, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 833–4w

Stoke Mandeville Hospital NHS Trust
South Buckinghamshire NHS Trust 529w

Stoke on Trent
Derelict land 796–7w

Stonehenge
A303 357–8w

Stop now orders
244–5w

Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin,
Questions
Railways, Scotland 155

Strategic Rail Authority
653w
Assets 20w
Prime Minister's Policy Unit 619w

Straw, Rt Hon Jack, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs
Debates etc.
Zimbabwe, Ministerial statements (21.03.02) 446–56
Questions
Government Communications Headquarters, Air conditioning 607w
Iraq, Weapons 613w
Israel, Army 50w
Theft, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 50w, 385–6w
USA, Official visits 613w
Zimbabwe 510w
Zimbabwe, Diplomatic relations 611–2w

Streeter, Mr Gary
Debates etc.
Railtrack (25.03.02) 592
Questions
Royal Maritime Auxiliary Service, Training 64w

Strikes
295
Railways 155–6, 951w

Strokes
939w

Stuart, Ms Gisela
Debates etc.
Barcelona Summit (EC) (18.03.02) 27

Student numbers
Higher education 111–2w
Medicine 105w, 635w

Students
Blackpool 634w

Stunell, Mr Andrew
Questions
Pharmacy, Fees and charges 1037w

Submarines
Accidents 552w

Subsidence
Greater London 355–6w
Mining 796–7w

Sudan
Armed conflict 196–7w

Summertime
703w

Supermarkets
Farmers 117–8w

Supply estimates
Customs and Excise 745w
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 221w, 652w
Office for National Statistics 325w

Supply teachers
633w

Surgery
Private sector 698–9

Surgery—continued
Waiting lists 530w

Surveys
Soil 724w

Sustainable development
378–9w, 721–2w
Exports 459w
Forests 124w
Public expenditure 857w

Swanwick Air Traffic Control Centre
231w, 941–2w, 944–5w

Swayne, Mr Desmond
Debates etc.
Ministerial statement intervention (21.03.02) 457
Questions
Fish farming 126w
Hospitals, Waiting lists 756–7w
Inland Revenue, Telephone services 737–8w
Lymphoedema 528w
Medical treatments, EC countries 532w
National Lottery, Sales 561w
Occupational therapy, Waiting lists 534w
Offenders, Northern Ireland 333w
Prisoners of war, Compensation 72w
Rheumatology, Waiting lists 534w

Swimming
579w

Swindon and Marlborough NHS Trust
Consultants 1040w

Swire, Mr Hugo
Debates etc.
Afghanistan, Armed conflict (20.03.02) 359–61
Education (19.03.02) 222
Hunting (18.03.02) 60, 63, 97
Questions
Livestock, Markets 123w
Sports, Clubs 564–5w

Syms, Mr Robert
Debates etc.
Education (21.03.02) 479, 504, 509–10
Questions
Armed forces, Manpower 5
Fluoride 123w
Fluoride, Imports 372w

Tachographs
677–8w

Take-away food
VAT 732w

Tami, Mark
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Cars, Theft (20.03.02) 116wh
Questions
Rolls-Royce, Public appointments 804w

Tanzania
Air traffic control 471w

Tapsell, Sir Peter
Debates etc.
Afghanistan (18.03.02) 43
Afghanistan, Armed conflict (20.03.02) 356–8

Tax allowances
Pensioners 330w
Pensions 330–1w
Shipping 348w, 854w

Tax burden
751w

Tax credit
Pensioners 418w

Tax evasion
VAT 1034w

Tax Law Rewrite Project
739w

Taxation
Landlords 734w
Pensions 739–40w
Pesticides 1021w
Regional assemblies 218w
Small businesses 734w, 741w
Whisky 748w

Taylor, Rt Hon Ann
Debates etc.
Education (21.03.02) 491–8
Questions
India, Religious freedom 810w

Taylor, Ms Dari
Questions
Planning Inspectorate, Standards 673–4w

Taylor, Mr David
Debates etc.
Education (19.03.02) 186, 210–1, 213
Oral question time intervention (26.03.02) 687
Railtrack (25.03.02) 586–7
Questions
Aggregates levy 748w
Energy, Pensions 580w
Dental services, Leicestershire 910–1w
House of Lords, Reform 165, 187w
Jobcentres, Crimes of violence 649w
Mass media, Ownership 905–6w
National Lottery 551

Taylor, Mr Ian
Debates etc.
Barcelona Summit (EC) (18.03.02) 29
Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, Addresses to the Crown (03.04.02) 820–1

Taylor, Mr John
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Solihull Hospital (20.03.02) 123–5wh, 130wh
Questions
Cannabis 92w
Contact orders 183w
Public Record Office, Census 186w
Solihull Hospital, Accident and emergency departments 694–5

Taylor, Matthew
Questions
Arthur Andersen, Northern Ireland Office 788w
Belize, Debts 367w
Belize, Financial services 367w
Chemical and biological warfare, Research 443–4w, 550w
Civil servants, Treasury 213w
Conferences, Treasury 12w
Data protection 837w
Data Protection Act 1998 186w
Economic and monetary union 750w
"Effects of a Chemical Agent on the Eyes of Aircrew" 314w
Fees and charges, Home Office 472–4w
Global Crossing 806w
Global Crossing, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 606–7w
London Underground, Public private partnerships 236w, 946w
Maddison, Ronald 200w
Members, Correspondence 858w
Military bases, USA 204w, 1032w
Mittal, Lakshmi 884w
Open government, Administrative delays 182–3w

Taylor, Matthew—continued
Open government, Codes of practice 182w
Overseas investment, Government assistance 198w
Parliamentary questions, Treasury 742w
Porton Down, Human experiments 57–8w, 314–5w
Public bodies, Information technology 853w
Public expenditure, Sustainable development 857w
Public sector, Productivity 331w, 1035w
Regulatory Impact Unit, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 390w
Regulatory Impact Unit, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 122w
Regulatory Impact Unit, Home Office 283w
Regulatory Impact Unit, Ministry of Defence 548w
Sellafield, Republic of Ireland 371–2w
Sponsorship 430–1w
Swanwick Air Traffic Control Centre 944–5w
UK Anti-Drugs Coordinator, USA 892–3w
Valuation Office, Secondment 329–30w

Taylor, Dr Richard
Questions
Solihull Hospital, Accident and emergency departments 695

Taylor, Sir Teddy
Debates etc.
Barcelona Summit (EC) (18.03.02) 28–9
Questions
Jobcentre Plus, Industrial disputes 418–9w
Members, Correspondence 930w
National Lottery 554
Public expenditure, Scotland 178w
Rapid deployment forces, EC countries 56w

Teachers
Information technology 256w
Manpower 632w
Resignations 633w

Technology
Dept of Trade and Industry 458w

Technology Advisory Group
433–4w

Telecommunications
Civil service agencies 961w
Pensioners 747w

Telecommunications masts
see Aerials

Telephone services
Business links 704–5w
Inland Revenue 737–8w
Insolvency Service 78w, 684w

Telephone systems
88w

Television
Electric shock 678w
Licensing 509w, 575w, 905w

Telford
Income support 429w
Pensioners 153w
Winter fuel payments 991w

Tenants
Evictions 972w
Farms 831–2w

Tenants' incentive scheme
Council housing 663–4w
Greater London 664w

Territorial Army
12–3
Dept for Culture Media and Sport 392w
Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 718w
Dept for International Development 470w
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 217w
Dept of Trade and Industry 691w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 382w
Health services 311–2w, 316–7w
Lord Chancellor's Dept 414w
Ministry of Defence 318–9w
Plymouth 65w
Treasury 332–3w

Terrorism
20, 57–8w
EC action 383w
Fire services 960w
Iraq 56w, 385w
Northern Ireland 291–4, 334w, 337–8w
Republic of Ireland 338w
Smallpox 937w
UN Security Council 195–6w
USA (19.03.02) 66–72wh

Tewkesbury
National Lottery 562–3w

Textiles
Government assistance 792w

Theft
Cabinet Office 583w
Cars (20.03.02) 116–22wh
Castlereagh 306–14, 338w
Dept for Culture Media and Sport 42w, 395w
Dept for Education and Skills 341w, 501–2w
Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 379–80w
Dept for International Development 16w
Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 38w, 345w
Dept for Work and Pensions 142w, 154–5w, 416w
Dept of Health 1051w
Dept of Trade and Industry 246–7w, 363–6w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 50w, 385–6w
Home Office 274w
Ministry of Defence 71w, 319w
Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 2w, 321w
Scotland Office 53w, 387w
Solicitor-General 543–4w
Treasury 12w, 325w

Thomas, Mr Gareth R
Questions
Boats, Navigation 272w
Commonwealth Games, Manchester 41w
Doctors, Career structure 759w
India, UN Security Council 52–3w
Islam, Discrimination 91–2w
Senior Salaries Review Body, Public appointments 2w
Steroid drugs, Prosecutions 92w
Water sports 272w

Thomas, Simon
Debates etc.
Barcelona Summit (EC) (18.03.02) 33
Hunting (18.03.02) 54, 108–11, (21.03.02) 466
Members' interests (26.03.02) 715
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Age, Discrimination (20.03.02) 96wh

Thomas, Simon—continued
Questions
Commonwealth Heads of Government Conference, Climate Change Convention 323–4w
Forest Enterprise, Sports 120w
Veterinary medicine, Wales 105w
World Summit on Sustainable Development 1022w

Thurso, John
Debates etc.
Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, Addresses to the Crown (03.04.02) 811–2
Questions
Pensioners, Income support 151–2
Wind power 245w

Times of sittings
189w

Timetabling of bills
168, (20.03.02) 374–408, (25.03.02) 597–675

Timms, Mr Stephen, Minister of State for Schools, Dept for Education and Skills
Debates etc.
Education (21.03.02) 532–5
Questions
Circulars, Dept for Education and Skills 624w
Education, Circulars 106–7w
Education, Public participation 631w
Education of children at home 108–9w
Faith schools 896w
Local education authorities, South West region 250–2w
Office of the Schools Adjudicator 106w
Primary education, Class sizes 100–4w
Pupils, Personal records 109–10w, 339–41w
Roads, Tolls 341–2w
Schools, Admissions 897–902w
Schools, Governing bodies 633w
Schools, Greater London 501w
Specialist schools 341w
Specialist schools, Engineering 256w
Supply teachers 633w
Teachers, Manpower 632w
Teachers, Resignations 633w

Tinsley Viaduct
655–6w

Tipping, Mr Paddy
Debates etc.
Hunting (21.03.02) 467
Questions
Aerospace industry, Research 417
Foot and mouth disease, Waste disposal 257–8w

Tipping of waste
271w
Hazardous materials 707–8w

Todd, Mr Mark
Questions
Social security benefits, Mental patients 422–3w

Tolls
Roads 77–8w, 341–2w, 857w

Tonge, Dr Jenny
Debates etc.
Afghanistan (18.03.02) 46
Afghanistan, Armed conflict (20.03.02) 339
Questions
Bomb disposal, Expenditure 468w
Gaza Strip, Midwives 876w
India, Overseas aid 869w

Tonge, Dr Jenny—continued
Metropolitan Police, Football Association 398w
Middle East, EC aid 871w
Mines 469w
Occupied territories, Education 877w
Occupied territories, Unemployment 877–8w
Occupied territories, Water 877w
Secondment, Dept for International Development 882w
Secondment, Treasury 745–6w
Smoking 702
Vietnam, Religious freedom 810w

Tooting
Pensioners 418w

Torquay
Compulsory purchase 272w

Touhig, Mr Don, Parliamentary Secretary, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales
Questions
Czech Republic 320–1w, 614–5w
Disadvantaged, Cynon Valley 320w

Tourism
393–4w, 545–6, 571w, 579w
Euro 566w
Festivals and special occasions 394w
Rural areas 378w, 835–6w
Scotland 178w, 903w
Statistics 904w

Trade
Philippines 455–6w
USA 455w

Trade agreements
Drugs 245–6w
Intellectual property 86–7w

Trade marks
EC law 697w

Trade Partners UK
242–3w, 692w

Trade promotion
Beef 826–7w

Trade unions
698w

Train operating companies
20w

Training
Armed forces 66–7w, 1015w
Judiciary 162–3
Ministry of Defence 317w
Nurses 629w
Peace keeping operations 556–7w
Royal Maritime Auxiliary Service 64w
Shipping 345w, 940w

Trans-European networks
350–2w

Transplant surgery
763–4w
Leukaemia 767–8w
Waiting lists 171–2w

Transport
955w
Asylum 590w
Brent 966–7w
Costs 661w
EC action 954–5w
Environment protection 697–8w
Finance 19w
Greater London Authority 348w
Livestock 140w, 830–1w
Manchester 490–1w, 672w
Mines 806w

Transport—continued
Rural areas 24–5w

Transport Act 2000
Questions
230w

Travel
Concessions 955–6w
Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 273w
Dept of Health 1058w
Dept of Trade and Industry 682–3w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 511w
Hospitals 440w
Ministry of Defence 546w

Travelling people
284w

Travel-to-work areas
13w
Southern region 519w

Treasury
Bank of England 332w
British Petroleum 746w
Civil servants 213w
Conferences 12w
Consultants 733w
Contracts 214w
Correspondence 743w
Councillors 736w
Crimes against property 744w
Discrimination 735w
Equal opportunities 332w
Festivals and special occasions 735–6w
Gender impact assessment 213w
Information officers 1035w
Internet 733w
Magistrates 332–3w
New deal for young people 744w
New deal schemes 744w
Nurseries 741–2w
Operating costs 744w
Parental leave 735w
Parliamentary questions 742w
Pay 732–3w
Private finance initiative 856w
Public private partnerships 853w, 857w
Public relations 332w
Secondment 745–6w
Standards 13w, 331w, 749w
Statistics 212–3w
Territorial Army 332–3w
Theft 12w, 325w
Visits abroad 734w
Wood 331w
Written questions 214w

Tredinnick, Mr David
Questions
Alternative medicine, EC action 914–5w
Health services, Disadvantaged 701

Trend, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, Addresses to the Crown (03.04.02) 818–9

Trespassers on Land (Liability for Damage and Eviction) Bill 2001/02
Debates etc.
1R (26.03.02) 705–7

Trials
406w

Trimble, Rt Hon David
Debates etc.
Chinook helicopters (19.03.02) 251
Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, Addresses to the Crown (03.04.02) 806–7
Questions
Theft, Castlereagh 310–2

Truancy
338–9w

Trust ports
37w

Truswell, Mr Paul
Questions
Tax allowances, Pensioners 330w

Tuberculosis
Vaccination 433w

Turkey
Afghanistan 209w
Amec 876–7w

Turner, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Education (19.03.02) 186, 196–7, 204, 206, 216–8
Hunting (18.03.02) 62, 88
Questions
Aerospace industry, Research 415–6
Antisocial behaviour orders 279w
Areas of outstanding natural beauty 31–2w
Civil servants, Resignations 979w
Departmental responsibilities, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 217w
Disabled, Access 89w
Driving, Working hours 40w
EC grants and loans 37w
Education of children at home 108–9w
Educational maintenance allowance 630w
Employment tribunals, Cabinet Office 292–3w
Employment tribunals, Dept of Trade and Industry 77w
Employment tribunals, Lord Chancellor's Dept 623–4w
Food, Prices 504–5w
Future large aircraft 15
Hospital beds, Isle of Wight 158w
Individual learning accounts 497–9w
Institutional care, Fees and charges 167w
Institutional care, Married people 166w
Institutional care, Standards 165–9w, 171w, 440–1w
Jones, Ian 980w
King Edward VII Convalescent Home for Servicemen 548–9
Members, Correspondence 885w
Ministerial policy advisors, Dept of Health 1051w
Mittal, Lakshmi 75w
Parish councils, Isle of Wight 1030w
Petitions, Isle of Wight 885w
Ports, Isle of Wight 346w
Press releases, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 392w
Press releases, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 19w
Press releases, Dept of Health 434w
Press releases, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 614w
Public relations, Cabinet Office 587–9w
Public relations, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 484w, 652w
Public relations, Dept of Health 434w, 1051–2w
Public relations, Home Office 395–6w
Public relations, Ministry of Defence 65–6w
Public relations, Northern Ireland Office 537w
Public relations, Treasury 332w
Pupils, Personal records 109w, 339–41w
Slaughterhouses 766w
Slaughterhouses, Location 731w
Terrorism, Northern Ireland 291
Travel-to-work areas 13w

Turner, Mr Andrew—continued
Travel-to-work areas, Southern region 519w
Written questions, Administrative delays 134–5w

Turner, Mr Neil
Questions
Health services, Disadvantaged 688
NHS, Finance 909w
Type 45 destroyers 17

Twigg, Derek
Questions
Health services, Disadvantaged 701–2
Patent Office, Standards 362–3w

Twigg, Mr Stephen, Parliamentary Secretary to President of the Council and Leader of the House
Debates etc.
Easter adjournment debate intervention (26.03.02) 742
Recess motions (26.03.02) 792–8
Questions
House of Commons, Reform 186–7w
House of Lords, Reform 187w
Parliamentary procedure 186–7w
Prime Minister's questions 188w
Private Members' bills 187w
Times of sittings 189w
Timetabling of bills 168

Tyler, Mr Paul
Debates etc.
Easter adjournment debate intervention (26.03.02) 738–40, 759
Members' interests (26.03.02) 710–1
Pesticides (26.03.02) 726–30
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Parliamentary questions (21.03.02) 148–55wh, 158wh, 167wh, 171wh, 179–80wh
Questions
Business questions 436–7
House of Lords, Reform 164

Tynan, Mr Bill
Debates etc.
State Pension Credit Bill (HL), 2R (25.03.02) 608, 612, 623, 633, 657–8
Questions
Afghanistan, International assistance 15–6w
Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention 51w
Construction, Standards 86w
"Eliminating Hunger Consultation Paper" 17w
Iraq 385w
Iraq, Armed conflict 467w
Iraq, Social conditions 467w
Iraq, Terrorism 385w
National Lottery 553
Patent Office, Action Aid 244w
Patent Office, Codes of practice 243–4w
Rwanda, Overseas aid 14w

Type 45 destroyers
17–8, 59–60w

Tyrie, Mr Andrew
Questions
Planning 492w

Uddin, Jamal
386w

UK Anti-Drugs Coordinator
USA 892–3w

UK membership of EC
298

UN Security Council
India 52–3w

UN Security Council—continued
Terrorism 195–6w

Underwater Test and Evaluation Centre
444w

Unemployment
see also Long term unemployed
Occupied territories 877–8w

Unitary development plans
Housing 22w

United Kingdom Passport Agency
Business plans 597w

United Nations
Peace keeping operations 806w, 880–1w

Universities
see Higher education

Unsolicited goods and services
Facsimile transmission 459w

Uranium
312–4w
Foulness 557–8w

Urban aid
668–9w, 969–70w
Leeds 668w

Urban areas
Post offices 224–5w, 246w, 454w
Regional planning and development 968–9w

USA
808–9w
Arms trade 848–9w
Clothing 455w
Iron and steel 423–7, 687–8w
Military bases 204w, 1032w
Ministry of Defence 559w
Nuclear weapons 323w
Official visits 613w
Terrorism (19.03.02) 66–72wh
Trade 455w
UK Anti-Drugs Coordinator 892–3w

Vaccination
Tuberculosis 433w

Valuation Office
Secondment 329–30w
Standards 853–4w

Varroasis
Bees 118w

VAT
Churches 581w
Fraud 732w
Internet 518w
Local government 963w
Small businesses 213w, 732w
Take-away food 732w
Tax evasion 1034w

Vaz, Mr Keith
Questions
Adoption and Children Bill 2001/02 1033w
Arthur Andersen, Dept of Trade and Industry 788w
Barristers, Ethnic groups 885–6w
Courts, Closures 1033w
Economic and monetary union 750w
Gibraltar 612–3w, 620w
Official visits, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 809w
Public appointments, Solicitor-General 543w
Visits abroad, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 809w
Visits abroad, Solicitor-General 885w

Veal
124w

Veterinary medicine
Wales 105w

Vetting
Foster care 306w

Vibration white finger
456w

Victims' Liaison Unit
336w

Vietnam
Religious freedom 810w

Viggers, Mr Peter
Questions
NATO, Russia 4
Portsmouth and South East Hampshire Health Authority, Chiropody 762–3w

Vis, Dr Rudi
Debates etc.
Easter adjournment debate intervention (26.03.02) 770
Finchley Memorial Hospital (26.03.02) 772–3
Questions
Armed forces, Monuments 311w, 448–9w
Exservicemen 54–5w
Territorial Army, Plymouth 65w

Vitamin B12
163–4w

Vocational training
New deal for long term unemployed 985w

Voluntary work
Sports 567–8w

Voting behaviour
560–1

Voting methods
563–4

Voting rights
Young people 557–8

Voucher schemes
Asylum 594–5w

Wales
Alternative energy 699–700w
Education 342w
Foot and mouth disease 129–30w
Iron and steel 453w, 688w
Post offices 88w
Prescriptions 1052w
Public expenditure 12w
Veterinary medicine 105w

Wales Office
see Office of the Secretary of State for Wales

Walley, Ms Joan
Questions
Advantage West Midlands, EC regional policy 459w
Alcoholic drinks, Measurement 75w
Bus services, Crimes of violence 358–9w
"Draught Beer and Cider Consultation Paper" 78w
English Heritage, EC grants and loans 505–6w
Foot and mouth disease 503w
Occupational pensions 1002w
Pensioners, Income support 642–3w
Pesticides, Monitoring 1021w
Pesticides, Taxation 1021w
Public transport, Staffordshire 605–6w
Regional planning and development, EC grants and loans 347w
Schools, Drinking water 253–4w
Sewers, Capital investment 710w
Smoking, Codes of practice 589w
Tourism 393–4w

Walsall
Council housing 22w

Walsgrave Hospital
(20.03.02) 73–93wh

Walter, Mr Robert
Debates etc.
Adoption and Children Bill, Programme motion and Rep (20.03.02) 377–8

War pensions
207w
Appeals 317–8w

Ward, Ms Claire
Debates etc.
Demonstrations, Points of order (18.03.02) 49
Questions
Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service, Standards 183w

Warehouses
Fire prevention (18.03.02) 142–8

Wareing, Mr Robert N
Questions
Yugoslavia, Overseas aid 872–3w

Warrington
Pensioners 153w

Warships
Modernisation 207w
Repairs and maintenance 71w, 319w, 554w, 559–60w

Washington Tyne and Wear
Child benefit 1000w

Waste disposal
EC law 708–10w
Electronic equipment 121w, 689w
Foot and mouth disease 129w, 257–8w
Health hazards 271w
Refrigerators 1020w

Waste management
Standards 269w

Waste Minimisation and Recycling Fund
833w

Water
EC law 264w, 716w
Occupied territories 877w

Water sports
272w
North East region 1025–6w
Publications 1026w

Water supply
Competition 262–4w

Waterson, Mr Nigel
Questions
Arthur Andersen, KPMG 687w
Consumers, Protection 795w
Electricity 792–3w
Gas fired power stations 694w
Insolvency 684w, 687w
Insolvency Act 2000 686w
Insolvency Service 684–6w, 789–90w
Insolvency Service, Criminal investigation 685–6w
Insolvency Service, Finance 684w
Insolvency Service, Manpower 78–9w
Insolvency Service, Standards 685–6w
Insolvency Service, Telephone services 78w, 684w
P and O, Royal Caribbean Cruises 687w

Watkinson, Angela
Questions
Business questions 441
Foot and mouth disease, Inquiries 177–8w

Watson, Mr Tom
Debates etc.
Organ Donation (Presumed Consent and Safeguards) Bill, 1R (20.03.02) 325–7
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Cars, Theft (20.03.02) 116–8wh
Questions
Electoral Commission 579w
Transplant surgery, Waiting lists 171–2w

Watts, Mr Dave
Questions
Community Legal Service, North West region 72–3w
Conditions of employment 419
Environment protection, Ministry of Defence 843w
Public holidays, Pay 452w

Weapons
Iraq 196w, 319w, 613w
Northern Ireland 288–90, 338w, 538w

Wear Valley
National Lottery 906w

Webb, Mr Steve
Debates etc.
Child Support Agency (20.03.02) 318–9
State Pension Credit Bill (HL), 2R (25.03.02) 597, 601, 621–9
Questions
Attendance allowance, Patients 155w
Disability living allowance, Patients 155w
Disabled person's tax credit 740w
Hearing aids 695–6
Housing benefit 524–5w
Invalid care allowances, Patients 155w
Maintenance, Children 996w
Pension Service 649–50w
Pensioners, Housing benefit 982–3w
Pensioners, Income 423w, 1003–4w
Pensioners, Income support 988w
Pensioners, Telecommunications 747w
Pensions 644w
Pensions, National insurance contributions 143w
Retirement, Dept for Work and Pensions 982w
Retirement, Scotland Office 679w
Social Security Benefits Agency, Slough 990w
Stakeholder pensions 146w
State retirement pensions 144w, 1003w
Television, Licensing 509w
Written questions, Administrative delays 1004w

Weekly benefit savings scheme
1006w

Weights and Measures Act 1985
Questions
78w

Weir, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Afghanistan, Armed conflict (20.03.02) 341, 372–3
Questions
Aggregates levy, Scotland 176w
Correspondence, Dept of Health 784w
Fair trade initiative, Cabinet Office 430w
Fair trade initiative, Home Office 589–90w, 1060–1w
Fair trade initiative, Scotland Office 466w
Post offices, Bank services 76w

Welsh National Assembly
see National Assembly for Wales

Wembley Park Station
Repairs and maintenance 235–6w, 674w

Wembley Stadium
573w
Finance 572–3w

West coast railway line
39w, 657w

West Freugh airfield
1017–8w

West Midlands
Institutional care 920w
Railways 21w

West Surrey Health Authority
Finance 782w

West Yorkshire
Sleeping rough 665w

Whales
Conservation 728w

Wheelchairs
1036w
Safety 1036w

Whisky
Taxation 748w

White, Brian
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Parliamentary questions (21.03.02) 143wh, 146–8wh, 150wh, 175wh
Questions
Bladder cancer 534–5w
NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency, Business plans 933w
Rented housing, Standards 972w

Whitehead, Dr Alan, Parliamentary Secretary, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions
Debates etc.
Corporate manslaughter (19.03.02) 282–6
Warehouses, Fire prevention (18.03.02) 145–8
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Parish councils (19.03.02) 23–5wh
Questions
Advertising, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 980–1w
Air conditioning, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 125w
Asbestos 32–3w
Asbestos, Compensation 967w
British Petroleum, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 671w
Constituencies, Shropshire 842w
Contracts, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 976w
Cornish language 225w
Correspondence, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 977w
Coucher, Ian 976w
Council tax, Newcastle upon Tyne 222w
Councillors, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 665–6w
Departmental responsibilities, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 217w
Discrimination, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 345w
Double glazing, Small businesses 704w
East of England Development Agency, Pay 673w
EC law, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 961–2w
Electoral register 962w
Emergency calls, Buckinghamshire 227w
Festivals and special occasions, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 237–8w
Fire prevention, Grants 670w
Fire prevention, Shoreham 27w

Whitehead, Dr Alan—continued
Fire services 225–6w
Fire services, Buckinghamshire 226w
Fire services, Terrorism 960w
Fire stations, Buckinghamshire 27w
Fires, Buckinghamshire 27w
Health and Safety Executive, Contracts 976w
Human rights, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 977w
Industrial health and safety, Agriculture 967w
Industrial health and safety, EC action 966w
Industrial health and safety, Hazardous materials 835w
Industrial health and safety, Small businesses 966w
Industrial injuries, Greater London 970w
Information officers, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 652w
Jones, Ian 980w
Local authorities, Contracts 672w
Local authorities, Debts 963–5w
Local authorities, Functions 651–2w
Local government, Defamation 962–3w
Local government, Human rights 966w
Local government, Liverpool 963w
Local government, North West region 219w
Local government, Ringfenced funding 222w
Local government finance 22w, 219–20w
Manpower, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 18w
Melton Borough Council, Pathfinder projects 19–20w
Members, Correspondence 19w
Natural gas, Explosions 670–1w
New deal for young people, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 977w
New deal schemes, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 977–8w
Non-domestic rates 664w
North West Regional Assembly, Finance 968w
Nurseries, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 978w
Nurseries, Non-domestic rates 224w
Operating costs, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 978–80w
Parental leave, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 22w
Parish councils, Codes of practice 224w
Playgrounds, Disabled 670w
Press releases, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 19w, 975–6w
Private finance initiative, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 945w
Privatisation 962w
Public relations, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 484w, 652w
Publications, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 962w
Queen Elizabeth II, Anniversaries 665w
Regional assemblies 973w
Regional assemblies, Finance 973w
Regional assemblies, Regional development agencies 974w
Regional assemblies, South West region 973–4w
Regional assemblies, Taxation 218w
Revenue support grant, City of Westminster 220–2w
Roads, Safety 957w, 981–2w
Shoreham Port Authority 37w

Whitehead, Dr Alan—continued
Sixsmith, Martin 19w
Speed limits, Cameras 981–2w
Standards, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 26–7w, 977w
Supply estimates, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 652w
Territorial Army, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 217w
Theft, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 38w, 345w
Visits abroad, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions 484w

Whittingdale, Mr John
Debates etc.
Consignia (25.03.02) 567–9
Questions
Broadband 696–7w
Common customs tariffs 696w
Company law 695w
Consignia 794w
Foreign investment in UK 695–6w, 794–5w
Industrial disputes, Lost working days 705–6w
Iron and steel, Manpower 453–4w
Iron and steel, USA 426–7
Mittal, Lakshmi 75w
Post offices, Bank services 697w
Post offices, Profits 793–4w
Postal services, Standards 794w
Small businesses, Loan guarantee scheme 242w
Trade marks, EC law 697w
Trade unions 698w
Uranium, Foulness 557–8w

***Wicks, Malcolm**, Parliamentary Secretary, Dept for Work and Pensions*
Questions
Child benefit, Complaints 1000w
Child Support Agency 994w
Child Support Agency, Departmental responsibilities 996w
Council tax benefits, Abuse 991–2w
Discrimination, Dept for Work and Pensions 1004w
Dorset, Dept for Work and Pensions 998w
Equal pay, Dept for Work and Pensions 153w
EU Employment and Social Policy Council 342–3w
EU Employment and Social Policy Council, Scottish Executive 997–8w
Festivals and special occasions, Dept for Work and Pensions 988w
Guardians' allowances 986w
Housing benefit 416w, 521–2w, 524–5w, 640w, 988–9w, 994w, 997w, 999w
Housing benefit, Abuse 147w, 989w
Housing benefit, Hackney 640–1w
Housing benefit, Lord Chancellor's Dept 999w
Housing benefit, Reform 147w
Income support, Telford 429w
Invalid care allowances 152w
Jobcentres, Crimes of violence 649w
Jobseeker's allowance 150w
Jobseeker's allowance, Non-teaching staff 150w
Maintenance, Children 992w, 994–6w
Manpower, Dept for Work and Pensions 153–4w
Means tested benefits 1011–2w
Mentally ill, Council tax 639–40w
Occupational pensions 155–6w, 1012–4w
Overseas residence, Zimbabwe 996–8w
Pension credit 141–2w, 145w, 1000w
Pensioners, Housing benefit 982–3w

Wicks, Malcolm—continued
Pensioners, Income support 153w
Pensions 419–20w, 645–7w, 1000–1w
Pensions, Public sector 1001w
Pensions, Publicity 1003w
Post offices, Bank services 639w
Public appointments, Dept for Work and Pensions 154w
Railways, Dept for Work and Pensions 1011–2w
Retirement, Dept for Work and Pensions 982w
Social Fund 642w
Social security benefits, Abuse 147w, 522–4w, 1005w
Social security benefits, Automated credit transfer 638–9w
Social security benefits, Widowed people 984w
Stakeholder pensions 146w
State retirement pensions 145w
Theft, Dept for Work and Pensions 142w, 154–5w, 416w
Weekly benefit savings scheme 1006w
Winter fuel payments 150w
Work sharing, Dept for Work and Pensions 999w

Widdecombe, Rt Hon Ann
Debates etc.
Hunting (18.03.02) 75, 79–81, (21.03.02) 464
Questions
Burma, Overseas aid 864w

Widowed people
Social security benefits 984w

Wiggin, Mr Bill
Debates etc.
Afghanistan, Armed conflict (20.03.02) 336
Questions
Air ambulance services 165w
Environment protection, Dept of Trade and Industry 456w
Housing, Unitary development plans 22w
Members, Correspondence 661w
National Lottery 561w
Police, Diabetes 598w
Railtrack 487–8w
Railways, Scotland 155

Wild animals
Pets 1029–30w

Wild ducks
121–2w

Wilkinson, Mr John
Debates etc.
Afghanistan (18.03.02) 45
Chinook helicopters (19.03.02) 239–40, 254, 257, 265–8
Questions
Joint strike fighter aircraft 14
Nurses, Greater London 686

Willetts, Mr David
Debates etc.
Child Support Agency (20.03.02) 316–7
State Pension Credit Bill (HL), 2R (25.03.02) 609–18
Questions
Advertising, Dept for Work and Pensions 423–4w
Council tax benefits, Abuse 991–2w
Housing benefit, Abuse 147w
National insurance, Personal records 330w
New deal for young people 990w
Pension credit 420–2w
Pension sharing 241w
Pensioners, Council tax 993w

Willetts, Mr David—continued
Pensioners, Income 428–9w
Pensions, Publicity 1003w
Social security benefits, Abuse 147w, 1005w
Social Security Contributions Agency, Computers 738w
State second pension, Self-employed 427w
Weekly benefit savings scheme 1006w

Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Questions
National Audit Office 580w

Williams, Mrs Betty
Questions
Exservicemen 19–20

Williams, Hywel
Debates etc.
Afghanistan (18.03.02) 45–6
Consignia (25.03.02) 575
State Pension Credit Bill (HL), 2R (25.03.02) 649–51
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Age, Discrimination (20.03.02) 94–8wh
Questions
Government departments, Advertising 817–8w
Pensioners, Income 143–4w

Williams, Mr Roger
Debates etc.
Hunting (18.03.02) 64

Willis, Mr Phil
Debates etc.
Education (19.03.02) 179, 187, (21.03.02) 475, 481, 486, 498–507
Questions
Secondment, Dept for Education and Skills 254w

***Wills, Mr Michael**, Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Dept*
Questions
Community service orders, Enforcement 413–4w
Courts, Closures 1033w
Courts, Working hours 413w, 622w
Criminal Courts Review, Magistrates' courts 180w
Data protection 837w
Data Protection Act 1998 186w
Judges, Recruitment 161–2
Judiciary 331w
Judiciary, Complaints 837w
Judiciary, Training 162–3
Land Registry, Standards 840w
Law Commission, Annual reports 841w
Legal profession, Competition 160–1
Magistrates, Manpower 158–60
Magistrates, Social class 412w
Magistrates' courts 179–80w
Magistrates' courts, Evesham 179w
Magistrates' courts, Greater London 412–3w
Magistrates' courts, North Yorkshire 180w
Magistrates' courts, Reform 412w
Magistrates' courts, Standards 414–5w
Members, Correspondence 72w
Members' constituency work, Data protection 413w
Open government, Administrative delays 182–3w
Open government, Codes of practice 182w
Personal injury 847w
Royal charters, Northern Ireland 183w
Solicitors 527w
Solicitors, Complaints 527w
Young offenders, Criminal proceedings 402–3w

Wills, Mr Michael—continued
Young offenders, Police custody 414w, 622–3w

Wilshire, Mr David
Questions
Ashford and St Peter's Hospital NHS Trust, Finance 782–3w
Ashford and St Peter's Hospital NHS Trust, Nurses 783w
Ashford and St Peter's Hospital NHS Trust, Public appointments 783w
Ashford and St Peter's Hospital NHS Trust, Waiting lists 938–9w
West Surrey Health Authority, Finance 782w

Wilson, Mr Brian, Minister of State for Industry and Energy, Dept of Trade and Industry
Questions
Aerospace industry, Government assistance 691–2w
Aerospace industry, Manpower 791w
Aggregates levy 798w
Alternative energy, Wales 699–700w
Coal Industry Social Welfare Organisation 793w
Construction, Certification 694w
Construction, Standards 86w
Electric cables 85w
Electricity 792–3w
Electronic equipment, Waste disposal 689w
Energy, Dept of Trade and Industry 682w
Energy, Research 689–90w
Fuels, Prices 689w
Future large aircraft 801w
Gas and Electricity Markets Authority, Codes of practice 710–1w
Gas and Electricity Markets Authority, Public appointments 681–2w
Gas fired power stations 694w
Industrial diseases, Compensation 85w, 691w, 693w, 799w
Iron and steel, USA 687–8w
Mining, Subsidence 796–7w
Mundic blocks 678–9w
Nuclear power stations 700w
Nuclear power stations, Decommissioning 694w
Nuclear power stations, Scotland 795w
Nuclear reactors, Design 793w
Oil, Irish Sea 702–3w
Plant power, Finance 688w
Radioactive wastes, Storage 791w
Renewables obligation 699w
Solicitors, Fees and charges 791–2w
Transport, Environment protection 697–8w
Wind power 245w

Wiltshire
Dental services 780–1w
Pigs 728w

Wind power
245w

Winnick, David
Debates etc.
Afghanistan, Armed conflict (20.03.02) 339
Hunting (18.03.02) 54
Hunting, Points of order (21.03.02) 472
Questions
Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, Public appointments 449w

Winter fuel payments
150w
Harwich 1004w
Pensioners 1004w
Scotland 176w

Winter fuel payments—continued
Telford 991w

Winterton, Ann
Debates etc.
Business motions (18.03.02) 51
Hunting (18.03.02) 56–61, 66, 100, 126, (21.03.02) 458–9
Questions
Agriculture, Subsidies 117w
Cereals 373w
Cereals, Disease control 117w
Circulars, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 824w
Countryside Alliance 114w
Farmers, Markets 717–8w
Farmers, Supermarkets 117–8w
Fisheries, Quotas 503–4w
Fisheries, Shetland 373–4w
Fishing vessels, Decommissioning 128w
Foot and mouth disease 131w
Foot and mouth disease, Disease control 129w
Foot and mouth disease, North Yorkshire 130–1w
Foot and mouth disease, Waste disposal 129w
Future of Farming and Food Policy Commission 136–40w
Livestock 377w
Livestock, Markets 1030–1w
National Farmers' Union 273w
Nitrates, Pollution 716–7w
Poland, EC accession 827–8w

Winterton, Mr Nicholas
Debates etc.
Afghanistan, Armed conflict (20.03.02) 337–8, 363–5, 372
Easter adjournment debate intervention (26.03.02) 786
Members' interests (26.03.02) 710
Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, Addresses to the Crown (03.04.02) 826
Zimbabwe (21.03.02) 453–4
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Parliamentary questions (21.03.02) 180wh
Questions
Hearing aids 696–7
Manufacturing industries, Climate change levy 456w
Prime Minister's questions 188w
Weapons, Northern Ireland 338w

Winterton, Ms Rosie, Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Dept
Questions
Adoption and Children Bill 2001/02 1033w
Alternative dispute resolution 622w
Children, Abuse 838–9w
Children, Homicide 839w
Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service 621w, 840w
Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service, Information technology 621–2w
Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service, Standards 183w
Civil proceedings, Legal representation 621w
Community Legal Service, Disadvantaged 182w
Community Legal Service, North West region 72–3w
Contact orders 183w
Correspondence, Lord Chancellor's Dept 836–7w
Court of Protection, Preston 179w
Domestic violence 73w

Winterton, Ms Rosie—continued
Employment tribunals, Lord Chancellor's Dept 623–4w
European Convention on the Exercise of Children Rights 605w
House of Lords, Judiciary 162
Legal aid scheme, Civil proceedings 650–1w
Legal aid scheme, Fees and charges 181w
Magistrates 73–4w
Maintenance, Scottish courts 180–1w
Manpower, Lord Chancellor's Dept 526–7w
Members, Correspondence 1033w
Pension sharing 241w
Public Guardianship Office, Fees and charges 1032–3w
Public Guardianship Office, Standards 183–5w
Public Record Office, Census 186w, 411–2w, 836w
Public Record Office, Standards 839–41w
Territorial Army, Lord Chancellor's Dept 414w
Witnesses 160

Wired up communities initiative
252–3w

Wirral
Primary care trusts 931w

Wishart, Pete
Debates etc.
Railtrack (25.03.02) 591
Questions
Airports, Scotland 862w
Business questions 438
Contracts, Cabinet Office 817–9w
Contracts, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 383–4w, 511–2w
Glasgow Airport, Railway network 862w
Housing benefit 994w
Maritime and Coastguard Agency, Information technology 488–9w
Music 556–7
Playgrounds, Safety 40w
Railways, Strikes 951w
Shipping, Disclosure of information 490w
Shipping, Inspections 489–90w
Shipping, Registration 489w
Tourism, Scotland 178w, 903w

Witnesses
160
Medical profession 893w

Women
see Females

Women and Equality Unit
Manpower 431w
Science 429–30
Standards 431w

Wood
Dept for Culture Media and Sport 391w
Dept for International Development 203–4w
Dept of Trade and Industry 361–2w
Government departments 723w
Imports 722–3w
Treasury 331w

Wood, Mr Mike
Debates etc.
Hunting (18.03.02) 114

Woodmancote School
Land 252w

Woodward, Mr Shaun
Questions
Asylum, Transport 590w

Woodward, Mr Shaun—continued
Coalfields Regeneration Trust, Merseyside 40w
Disability Discrimination Act 1995 89w
Employment, North West region 519–22w
Homelessness, North West region 28w
Human Rights Act 1998, Charities 1060w
Individual voluntary arrangements 366w
Insolvency 244w
Insolvency, North West region 686–8w
Institutional care, Standards 164–5w
Licensing laws 394w
Local government, Human rights 966w
NHS, Complaints 784w
Pensioners, Income support 991w
Small Business Service, Pilot schemes 242w
Terrorism, Northern Ireland 337–8w

Work permits
Shipping 598w

Work sharing
Dept for Culture Media and Sport 388–9w
Dept for Education and Skills 110w
Dept for Work and Pensions 999w
Dept of Health 1058w
Solicitor-General 8–9w

Working Age Agency
see Jobcentre Plus

Working conditions
Jobcentre Plus 419w

Working families tax credit
740–1w
Abuse 741w, 852–3w
Livingston 740w
Scotland 178w

Working hours
Courts 413w, 622w
Driving 40w
EC law 802w
Scotland Office 465–6w

World Economic Forum
76–7w

World Summit on Sustainable Development
1022w

World Tourism Organisation
567–8w

World War I
Capital punishment 16–7

World War II
Chemical weapons 69–70w
Genocide 195w

Worthing and Southlands Hospitals NHS Trust
Cancer 1049w

Wray, Mr James
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Asbestos, Scotland (19.03.02) 60wh
Questions
Aircraft carriers 558w
Armed forces, British overseas territories 551w
Armed forces, Training 66–7w
British overseas territories 315w, 386w
Burma 811–2w

Wray, Mr James—continued
Chemical weapons, Baltic sea 70w
Chemical weapons, World War II 69–70w
Developing countries, HIV infection 863–4w
Diabetes, Health education 776–7w
Diabetes, Manpower 777w
Diabetes, Research 777w
Diabetes, Screening 777–8w
Diabetes, Sight impaired 777w
Epilepsy 778–9w
Foster care, National insurance credits 597w
Harrier aircraft 558w
Immobilisation of vehicles 956w
Licensing laws 904–5w
Parking offences, Fines 956–7w
Pensioners, Income support 152
Police, Northern Ireland 537w
Poverty, Scotland 176w
Shipbuilding 457w
Social security benefits, Mental patients 422–3w

Wright, Mr Anthony D
Debates etc.
Hunting (18.03.02) 103–5, 115
Questions
Terrorism, Republic of Ireland 338w

Wright, David
Debates etc.
Education (21.03.02) 483–4
Questions
Business questions 438
Constituencies, Shropshire 842w
Floods, Shropshire 135w
Freight 658w
Income support, Telford 429w
Iraq, Air force 56w
Pensioners, Income support 153w
Princess Royal Hospital Telford, Accident and emergency departments 441w
Railways, Freight 658w
Schools, Admissions 897–902w
Winter fuel payments, Telford 991w

Wright, Tony
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Parliamentary questions (21.03.02) 137–41wh, 137–82wh, 157wh, 160wh, 172wh, 178wh, 180wh
Questions
International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance 865w
Open government, Cabinet Office 821w
Open government, Dept for International Development 882w
Witnesses 160

Written questions
Administrative delays 39w, 134–5w, 165w, 711w, 751–4w, 1004w
Dept of Health 173–4w, 442w, 751–4w
Ministry of Defence 550w
Treasury 214w

Wyatt, Derek
Questions
Digital broadcasting 548
Double glazing, Small businesses 704w
Foster care, Vetting 306w
Railways, Kent 657w, 703w
Schools, Playing fields 632w
Stillman, Ian 1–2w, 51–2w, 124w, 510w, 692w

Wyatt, Derek—continued
Wembley Stadium, Finance 572–3w

Yarls Wood Detention Centre
281w, 590–1w
Bedfordshire Police 480w
Civil disorder 1064w
Inquiries 93w
Insurance 281w, 479–80w
Manpower 889w

Yellow card scheme
Mental health services 1044–5w

Yeo, Mr Tim
Questions
Digital broadcasting 547–8
Electronic publishing, Legal deposit 576w
New Millennium Experience, Shareholders 576w
Queen Elizabeth II, Anniversaries 597w
Wembley Park Station, Repairs and maintenance 674w

Yeoman warders
Medals 43w

Young, Sir George
Debates etc.
Members' interests (26.03.02) 708–9, 715–6
Questions
Business questions 439

Young offenders
Bail 403w
Criminal proceedings 402–3w
Police custody 414w, 622–3w

Young people
Employment 803w
Health 1047w
Institutional care 170w
Magazine press 1047w
Voting rights 557–8

Younger-Ross, Richard
Debates etc.
Easter adjournment debate intervention (26.03.02) 729, 733–4
Roads (26.03.02) 778–81
Questions
Hospital beds 917w
Information technology, Scotland Office 463–4w

Yugoslavia
810w
Overseas aid 872–3w
Peace keeping operations 60w

Yusufeli dam
80–1w

Zambia
Overseas aid 873w

Zimbabwe
510w
Diplomatic relations 611–2w
Elections 202w
International assistance 869w
Ministerial statements (21.03.02) 446–56
Overseas aid 868–9w
Overseas residence 611w, 996–8w
Politics and government 302